

2

Why English? The historical context



‘Why is English the global language, and not some other?’ There are two answers to the question: one is geographical-historical; the other is socio-cultural. The geo-historical answer shows how English reached a position of pre-eminence, and this is presented below. The socio-cultural answer explains why it remains so, and this is presented in chapters 3 and 4. The combination of these two strands has brought into existence a language which consists of many varieties, each distinctive in its use of sounds, grammar, and vocabulary, and the implications of this are presented in chapter 5.

The historical account traces the movement of English around the world, beginning with the pioneering voyages to the Americas, Asia, and the Antipodes. It was an expansion which continued with the nineteenth-century colonial developments in Africa and the South Pacific, and which took a significant further step when it was adopted in the mid twentieth century as an official or semi-official language by many newly independent states. English is now represented in every continent, and in islands of the three major oceans – Atlantic (St Helena), Indian (Seychelles) and Pacific (in many islands, such as Fiji and Hawaii). It is this spread of representation which makes the application of the label ‘global language’ a reality.

The socio-cultural explanation looks at the way people all over the world, in many walks of life, have come to depend on English

for their economic and social well-being. The language has penetrated deeply into the international domains of political life, business, safety, communication, entertainment, the media and education. The convenience of having a lingua franca available to serve global human relations and needs has come to be appreciated by millions. Several domains, as we shall see, have come to be totally dependent on it – the computer software industry being a prime example. A language's future seems assured when so many organizations come to have a vested interest in it.

Origins

How far back do we have to go in order to find the origins of global English? In a sense, the language has always been on the move. As soon as it arrived in England from northern Europe, in the fifth century, it began to spread around the British Isles. It entered parts of Wales, Cornwall, Cumbria and southern Scotland, traditionally the strongholds of the Celtic languages. After the Norman invasion of 1066, many nobles from England fled north to Scotland, where they were made welcome, and eventually the language (in a distinctive Scots variety) spread throughout the Scottish lowlands. From the twelfth century, Anglo-Norman knights were sent across the Irish Sea, and Ireland gradually fell under English rule.¹

But, compared with later events, these were movements on a very local scale – within the British Isles. The first significant step in the progress of English towards its status as a global language did not take place for another 300 years, towards the end of the sixteenth century. At that time, the number of mother-tongue English speakers in the world is thought to have been between 5 and 7 million, almost all of them living in the British Isles. Between the end of the reign of Elizabeth I (1603) and the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth II (1952), this figure increased almost fiftyfold, to some 250 million, the vast majority living outside the British

¹ For a fuller account of these early movements, see Crystal (1995a: Part 1). See this source also for fuller accounts of the regions described throughout this chapter.

Isles. Most of these people were, and continue to be, Americans, and it is in sixteenth-century North America that we first find a fresh dimension being added to the history of the language.

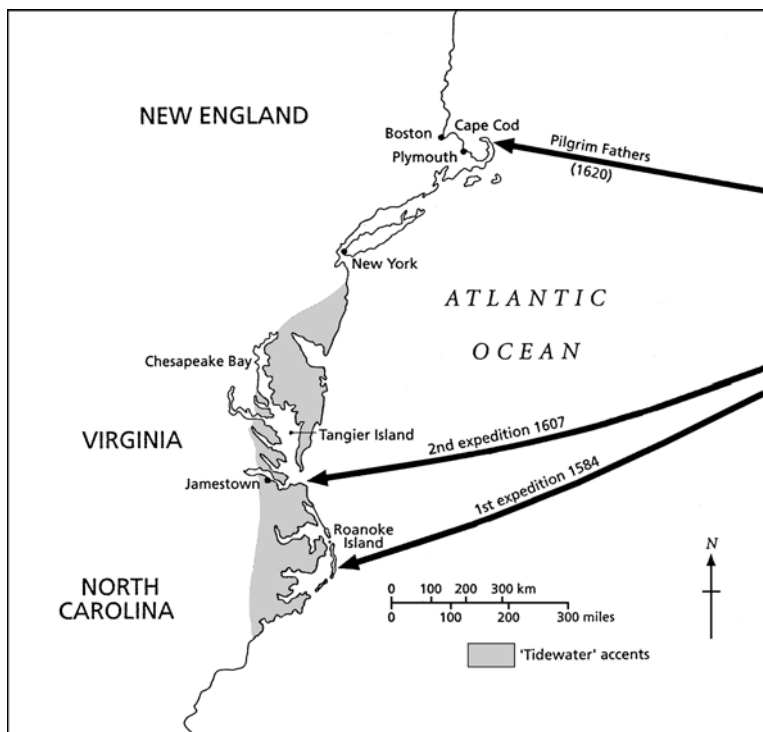
America

The first expedition from England to the New World was commissioned by Walter Raleigh in 1584, and proved to be a failure. A group of explorers landed near Roanoke Island, in what is now North Carolina, and established a small settlement. Conflict with the native people followed, and it proved necessary for a ship to return to England for help and supplies. By the time these arrived, in 1590, none of the original group of settlers could be found. The mystery of their disappearance has never been solved.

The first permanent English settlement dates from 1607, when an expedition arrived in Chesapeake Bay. The colonists called their settlement Jamestown (after James I) and the area Virginia (after the 'Virgin Queen', Elizabeth). Further settlements quickly followed along the coast, and also on the nearby islands, such as Bermuda. Then, in November 1620, the first group of Puritans, thirty-five members of the English Separatist Church, arrived on the *Mayflower* in the company of sixty-seven other settlers. Prevented by storms from reaching Virginia, they landed at Cape Cod Bay, and established a settlement at what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts.

The group was extremely mixed, ranging in age from young children to people in their 50s, and with diverse regional, social, and occupational backgrounds. What the 'Pilgrim Fathers' (as they were later called) had in common was their search for a land where they could found a new religious kingdom, free from persecution and 'purified' from the church practices they had experienced in England. It was a successful settlement, and by 1640 about 25,000 immigrants had come to the area.

The two settlements – one in Virginia, to the south, the other to the north, in present-day New England – had different linguistic backgrounds. Although the southern colony brought settlers from several parts of England, many of them came from England's 'West Country' – such counties as Somerset and



Early English-speaking settlement areas in America

Gloucestershire – and brought with them its characteristic accent, with its ‘Zummerzet’ voicing of *s* sounds, and the *r* strongly pronounced after vowels. Echoes of this accent can still be heard in the speech of communities living in some of the isolated valleys and islands in the area, such as Tangier Island in Chesapeake Bay. These ‘Tidewater’ accents, as they are called, have changed somewhat over the past 300 years, but not as rapidly (because of the relative isolation of the speakers) as elsewhere in the country.

By contrast, many of the Plymouth colonists came from counties in the east of England – in particular, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Essex, Kent and London, with some from the Midlands, and a few from further afield. These eastern accents were rather different – notably, lacking an *r* after vowels – and they proved to be the dominant influence in this area. The tendency ‘not to

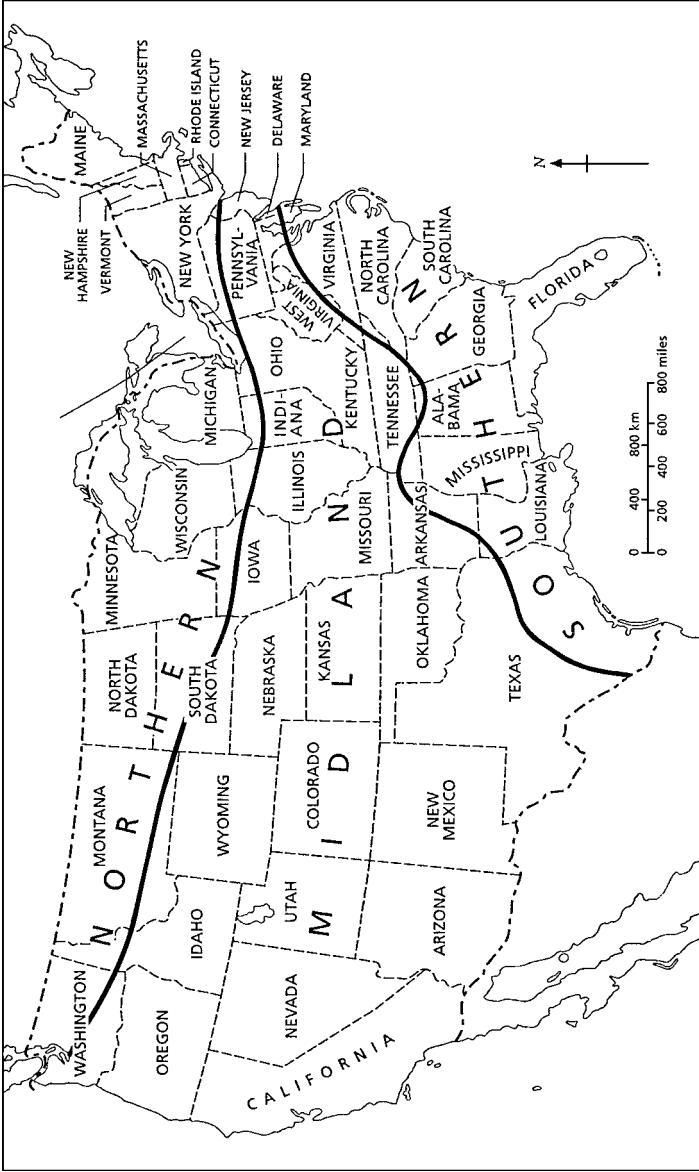
pronounce the *r*' is still a feature of the speech of people from New England.

The later population movements across America largely preserved the dialect distinctions which arose out of these early patterns of settlement. The New England people moved west into the region of the Great Lakes; the southerners moved along the Gulf Coast and into Texas; and the midlanders spread throughout the whole of the vast, mid-western area, across the Mississippi and ultimately into California.² The dialect picture was never a neat one, because of widespread north–south movements within the country, and the continuing inflow of immigrants from different parts of the world. There are many mixed dialect areas, and pockets of unexpected dialect forms. But the main divisions of north, midland, and south are still found throughout America today.

During the seventeenth century, new shiploads of immigrants brought an increasing variety of linguistic backgrounds into the country. Pennsylvania, for example, came to be settled mainly by Quakers whose origins were mostly in the Midlands and the north of England. People speaking very different kinds of English thus found themselves living alongside each other, as the 'middle' Atlantic areas (New York, in particular) became the focus of settlement. As a result, the sharp divisions between regional dialects gradually began to blur.

Then, in the eighteenth century, there was a vast wave of immigration from northern Ireland. The Irish had been migrating to America from around 1600, but the main movements took place during the 1720s, when around 50,000 Irish and Scots-Irish immigrants arrived. By the time independence was declared (1776), it is thought that one in seven of the colonial population was Scots-Irish. Many stayed along the coast, especially in the area of Philadelphia, but most moved inland through the mountains in search of land. They were seen as frontier people, with an accent which at the time was described as 'broad'. The opening up of the south and west was largely due to the pioneering spirit of this group of settlers.

² For US dialects see Williamson and Burke (1971). The displacement of the Amerindian populations, and the tragic consequences for them of European immigration, are described in Crystal (2000: 72).



Major dialect areas in the USA: Northern, Midland, Southern

By the time of the first census, in 1790, the population of the country was around 4 million, most of whom lived along the Atlantic coast. A century later, after the opening up of the west, the population numbered over 50 million, spread throughout the continent. The accent which emerged can now be heard all over the so-called Sunbelt (from Virginia to southern California), and is the accent most commonly associated with present-day American speech.

It was not only England which influenced the directions that the English language was to take in America, and later the USA. The Spanish had occupied large parts of the west and south-west. The French were present in the northern territories, around the St Lawrence River, and throughout the middle regions (French Louisiana) as far as the Gulf of Mexico. The Dutch were in New York (originally New Amsterdam) and the surrounding area. Large numbers of Germans began to arrive at the end of the seventeenth century, settling mainly in Pennsylvania and its hinterland. In addition, there were increasing numbers of Africans entering the south, as a result of the slave trade, and this dramatically increased in the eighteenth century: a population of little more than 2,500 black slaves in 1700 had become about 100,000 by 1775, far out-numbering the southern whites.

The nineteenth century saw a massive increase in American immigration, as people fled the results of revolution, poverty, and famine in Europe. Large numbers of Irish came following the potato famine in Ireland in the 1840s. Germans and Italians came, escaping the consequences of the failed 1848 revolutions. And, as the century wore on, there were increasing numbers of Central European Jews, especially fleeing from the pogroms of the 1880s. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, immigrants were entering the USA at an average of three-quarters of a million a year. In 1900, the population was just over 75 million. This total had doubled by 1950.

Within one or two generations of arrival, most of these immigrant families had come to speak English, through a natural process of assimilation. Grandparents and grandchildren found themselves living in very different linguistic worlds. The result was a massive growth in mother-tongue use of English.

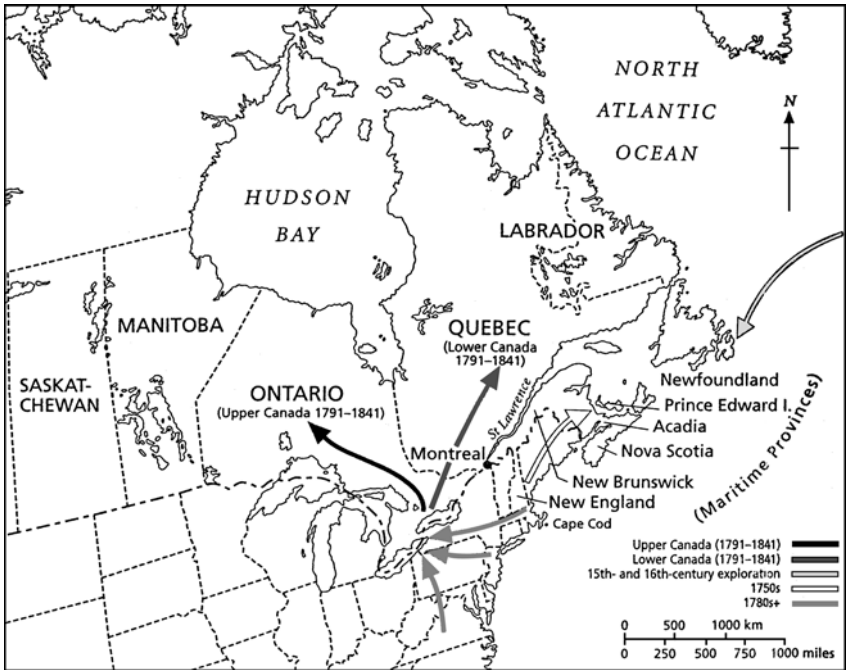
According to the 1990 census, the number of people (over five years of age) who spoke only English at home had grown to over 198 million – 86 per cent of the population. This figure increased to 215 million in the 2000 census (though representing a fall to 82 per cent of the population). This is almost four times as many mother-tongue speakers as any other nation.

Some commentators have suggested that the English language was a major factor in maintaining American unity throughout this period of remarkable cultural diversification – a ‘glue’ which brought people together and a medium which gave them common access to opportunity.³ At the same time, some minority groups began to be concerned about the preservation of their cultural and linguistic heritage, within a society which was becoming increasingly monolingual. The seeds of a conflict between the need for intelligibility and the need for identity were beginning to grow – a conflict which, by the later decades of the twentieth century, had fuelled the movement in support of English as the official language of the USA (see chapter 5).

Canada

Meanwhile, the English language was making progress further north. The first English-language contact with Canada was as early as 1497, when John Cabot is thought to have reached Newfoundland; but English migration along the Atlantic coast did not develop until a century later, when the farming, fishing, and fur-trading industries attracted English-speaking settlers. There was ongoing conflict with the French, whose presence dated from the explorations of Jacques Cartier in the 1520s; but this came to an end when the French claims were gradually surrendered during the eighteenth century, following their defeat in Queen Anne’s War (1702–13) and the French and Indian War (1754–63). During the 1750s thousands of French settlers were deported from Acadia (modern Nova Scotia), and were replaced by settlers from New England. The numbers were then further increased by many coming directly from England, Ireland, and Scotland

³ For a discussion of the issues, see Herriman and Burnaby (1996: chapter 6), and also chapter 5 below.

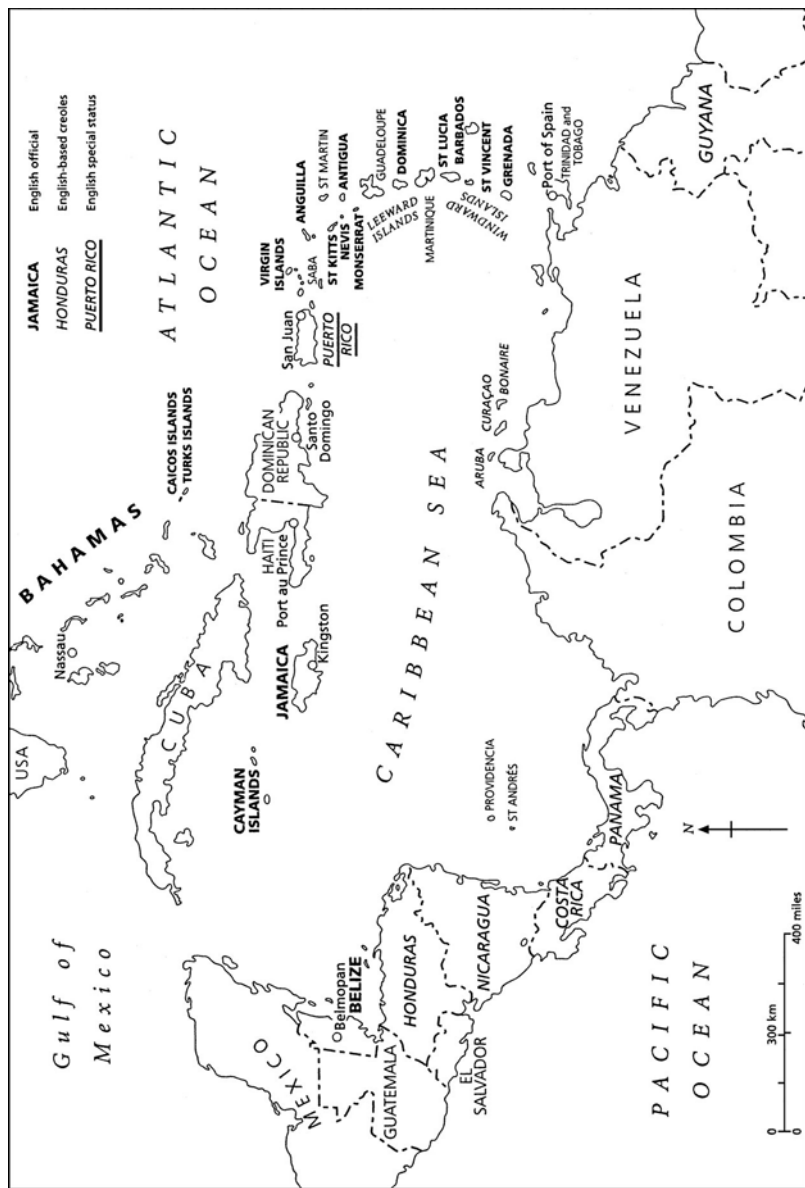


The movement of English into Canada

(whose earlier interest in the country is reflected in the name *Nova Scotia* ‘New Scotland’).

The next major development followed the US Declaration of Independence in 1776. Loyalist supporters of Britain (the ‘United Empire Loyalists’) found themselves unable to stay in the new United States, and most left for Canada, settling first in what is now Nova Scotia, then moving to New Brunswick and further inland. They were soon followed by many thousands (the so-called ‘late Loyalists’) who were attracted by the cheapness of land, especially in the area known as Upper Canada (above Montreal and north of the Great Lakes). Within fifty years, the population of this province had reached 100,000. Over 31 million were estimated in 2001, with two-thirds claiming English as a native or home language.

Because of its origins, Canadian English has a great deal in common with the rest of the English spoken in North America,



The Caribbean Islands, showing (a) countries where Standard English is an official language; in these areas, English-based creoles are also widely used; (b) countries where a language other than English is the official language, but an English-based creole is none the less spoken. The special standing of US English in Puerto Rico is noted separately.

and those who live outside Canada often find it difficult to hear the difference. Many British people identify a Canadian accent as American; many Americans identify it as British. Canadians themselves insist on not being identified with either group, and certainly the variety does display a number of unique features. In addition, the presence of French as a co-official language, chiefly spoken in Quebec, produces a sociolinguistic situation not found in other English-speaking countries.⁴

The Caribbean

During the early years of American settlement, the English language was also spreading in the south. A highly distinctive kind of speech was emerging in the islands of the West Indies and the southern part of the mainland, spoken by the incoming black population. This was a consequence of the importation of African slaves to work on the sugar plantations, a practice started by the Spanish as early as 1517.

From the early seventeenth century, ships from Europe travelled to the West African coast, where they exchanged cheap goods for black slaves. The slaves were shipped in barbarous conditions to the Caribbean islands and the American coast, where they were in turn exchanged for such commodities as sugar, rum, and molasses. The ships then returned to England, completing an 'Atlantic triangle' of journeys, and the process began again. The first twenty African slaves arrived in Virginia on a Dutch ship in 1619. By the time of the American Revolution (1776) their numbers had grown to half a million, and there were over 4 million by the time slavery was abolished, at the end of the US Civil War (1865).

The policy of the slave-traders was to bring people of different language backgrounds together in the ships, to make it difficult for groups to plot rebellion. The result was the growth of several pidgin forms of communication, and in particular a pidgin between the slaves and the sailors, many of whom spoke English.

⁴ For the sociolinguistic situation in contemporary Canada, see Herriman and Burnaby (1996: chapter 7).

Once arrived in the Caribbean, this pidgin English continued to act as a means of communication between the black population and the new landowners, and among the blacks themselves. Then, when their children were born, the pidgin gradually began to be used as a mother tongue, producing the first black creole speech in the region.

It is this creole English which rapidly came to be used throughout the southern plantations, and in many of the coastal towns and islands. At the same time, standard British English was becoming a prestige variety throughout the area, because of the emerging political influence of Britain. Creole forms of French, Spanish and Portuguese were also developing in and around the Caribbean, and some of these interacted with both the creole and the standard varieties of English. The Caribbean islands, and parts of the adjacent Central and South American mainland, thus came to develop a remarkably diverse range of varieties of English, reflecting their individual political and cultural histories.⁵ Moreover, West Indian speech did not stay within the Caribbean islands, but moved well outside, with large communities eventually found in Canada, the USA and Britain.

Australia and New Zealand

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the continuing process of British world exploration established the English language in the southern hemisphere. The numbers of speakers have never been very large, by comparison with those in the northern hemisphere, but the varieties of English which have emerged are just as distinctive.

Australia was visited by James Cook in 1770, and within twenty years Britain had established its first penal colony at Sydney, thus relieving the pressure on the overcrowded prisons in England. About 130,000 prisoners were transported during the fifty years after the arrival of the 'first fleet' in 1788. 'Free' settlers, as they

⁵ For a review of issues relating to African-American English, see Harrison and Trabasso (1976). For West Indian speech in Britain, see Sutcliffe (1982).

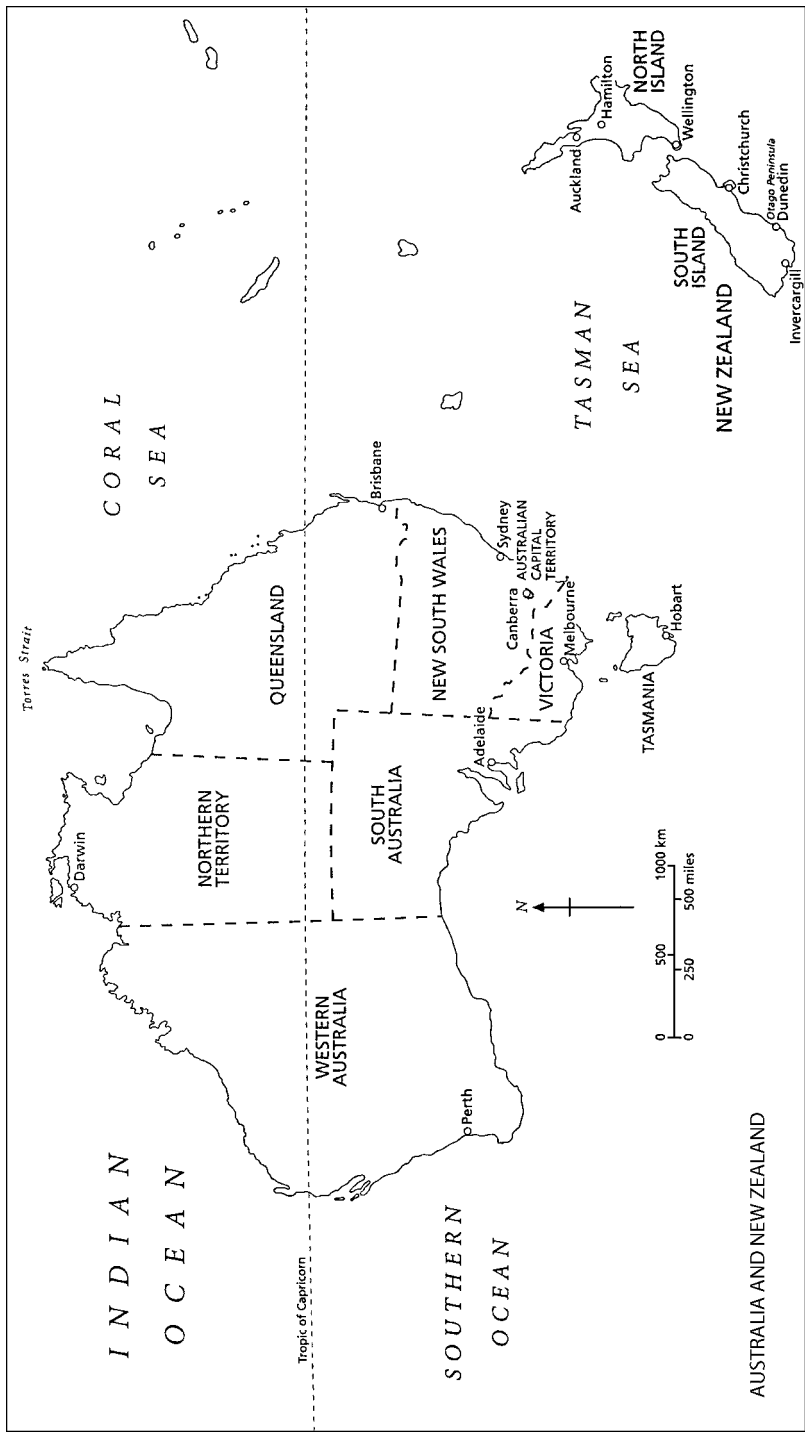
were called, also began to enter the country from the very beginning, but they did not achieve substantial numbers until the mid-nineteenth century. From then on, immigration rapidly increased. By 1850, the population of Australia was about 400,000, and by 1900 nearly 4 million. In 2002, it was nearly 19 million.

The British Isles provided the main source of settlers, and thus the main influence on the language. Many of the convicts came from London and Ireland (especially following the 1798 Irish rebellion), and features of the Cockney accent of London and the brogue of Irish English can be traced in the speech patterns heard in Australia today. On the other hand, the variety contains many expressions which have originated in Australia (including a number from Aboriginal languages), and in recent years the influence of American English and of a growing number of immigrant groups has been noticeable, so that the country now has a very mixed linguistic character.⁶

In New Zealand (whose Maori name is *Aotearoa*), the story of English started later and moved more slowly. Captain Cook charted the islands in 1769–70, and European whalers and traders began to settle there in the 1790s, expanding the developments already taking place in Australia. Christian missionary work began among the Maori from about 1814. However, the official colony was not established until 1840, following the Treaty of Waitangi between Maori chiefs and the British Crown. There was then a rapid increase in European immigration – from around 2,000 in 1840 to 25,000 by 1850, and to three-quarters of a million by 1900. As early as the turn of the century visitors to the country were making comments on the emergence of a New Zealand accent. The total population in 2002 was over 3.8 million.

Three strands of New Zealand's social history in the present century have had especial linguistic consequences. Firstly, in comparison with Australia, there has been a stronger sense of the historical relationship with Britain, and a greater sympathy for British values and institutions. Many people speak with an accent which

⁶ For the sociolinguistic situation in contemporary Australia and New Zealand, see Herriman and Burnaby (1996: chapters 3–4), Burridge and Mulder (1998).



INDIAN OCEAN

CORAL SEA

Tropic of Capricorn

Torres Strait

Darwin

NORTHERN TERRITORY

QUEENSLAND

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SOUTHERN OCEAN

NEW SOUTH WALES

VICTORIA

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Sydney
Canberra
Melbourne

Adelaide

TASMANIA

Hobart

TASMAN SEA

SOUTH ISLAND

NORTH ISLAND

NEW ZEALAND

Auckland
Hamilton

Wellington

Christchurch
Dunedin

Invercargill

N

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AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

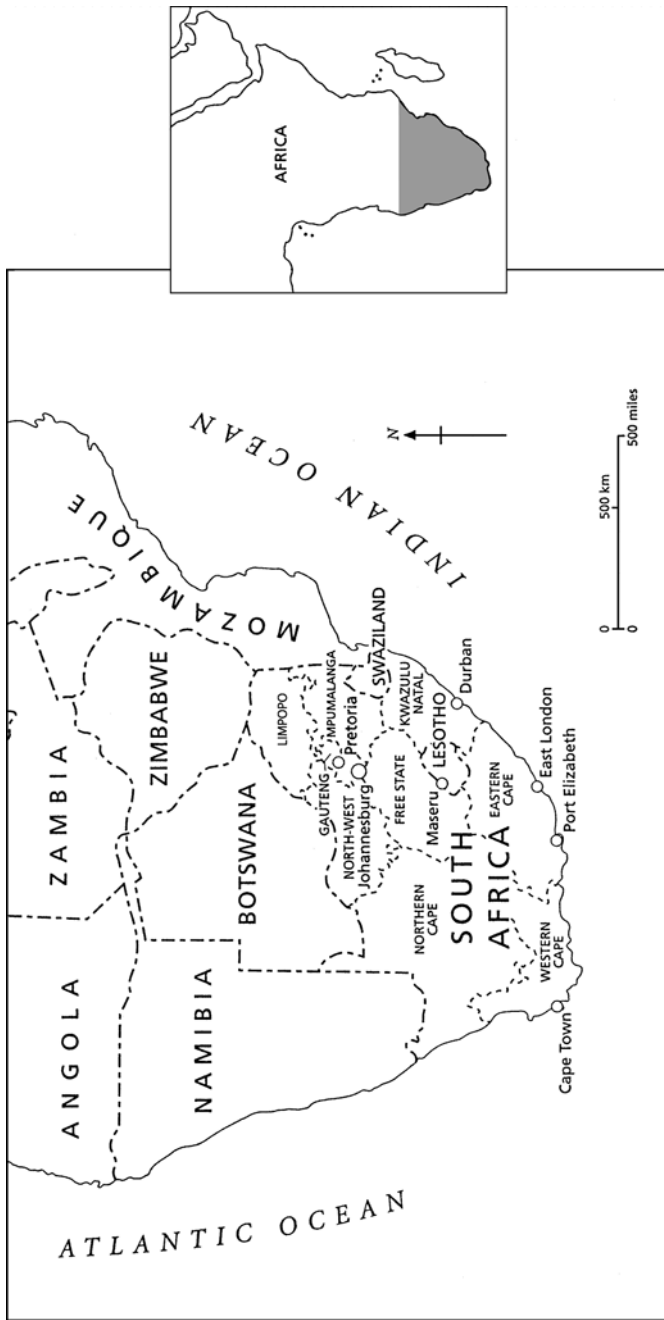
displays clear British influence. Secondly, there has been a growing sense of national identity, and in particular an emphasis on the differences between New Zealand and Australia. This has drawn attention to differences in the accents of the two countries, and motivated the use of distinctive New Zealand vocabulary. Thirdly, there has been a fresh concern to take account of the rights and needs of the Maori people, who now form over 10 per cent of the population. This has resulted in an increased use of Maori words in New Zealand English.

South Africa

Although Dutch colonists arrived in the Cape as early as 1652, British involvement in the region dates only from 1795, during the Napoleonic Wars, when an expeditionary force invaded. British control was established in 1806, and a policy of settlement began in earnest in 1820, when some 5,000 British were given land in the eastern Cape. English was made the official language of the region in 1822, and there was an attempt to anglicize the large Afrikaans-speaking population. English became the language of law, education, and most other aspects of public life. Further British settlements followed in the 1840s and 1850s, especially in Natal, and there was a massive influx of Europeans following the development of the gold and diamond areas in the Witwatersrand in the 1870s. Nearly half a million immigrants, many of them English-speaking, arrived in the country during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The English language history of the region thus has many strands. There was initially a certain amount of regional dialect variation among the different groups of British settlers, with the speech of the London area prominent in the Cape, and Midlands and northern British speech strongly represented in Natal; but in due course a more homogeneous accent emerged – an accent that shares many similarities with the accents of Australia, which was also being settled during this period.

At the same time, English was being used as a second language by the Afrikaans speakers, and many of the Dutch colonists took this variety with them on the Great Trek of 1836, as they



South Africa, and adjacent countries

moved north to escape British rule. An African variety of English also developed, spoken by the black population, who had learned the language mainly in mission schools, and which was influenced in different ways by the various language backgrounds of the speakers. In addition, English came to be used, along with Afrikaans and often other languages, by those with an ethnically mixed background ('coloureds'); and it was also adopted by the many immigrants from India, who were brought to the country from around 1860.

English has always been a minority language in South Africa, and is currently spoken as a first language only by about 3.7 million in a 2002 population of over 43.5 million. Afrikaans, which was given official status in 1925, was the first language of the majority of whites, including most of those in power, and acted as an important symbol of identity for those of Afrikaner background. It was also the first language of most of the coloured population. English was used by the remaining whites (of British background) and by increasing numbers of the (70 per cent majority) black population. There is thus a linguistic side to the political divisions which marked South African apartheid society: Afrikaans came to be perceived by the black majority as the language of authority and repression; English was perceived by the Afrikaner government as the language of protest and self-determination. Many blacks saw English as a means of achieving an international voice, and uniting themselves with other black communities.

On the other hand, the contemporary situation regarding the use of English is more complex than any simple opposition suggests. For the white authorities, too, English is important as a means of international communication, and 'upwardly mobile' Afrikaners have become increasingly bilingual, with fluent command of an English that often resembles the British-based variety. The public statements by Afrikaner politicians in recent years, seen on world television, illustrate this ability. As a result, a continuum of accents exists, ranging from those which are strongly influenced by Afrikaans to those which are very close to British Received Pronunciation. Such complexity is inevitable in a country where the overriding issue is social and political status, and where people

have striven to maintain their deeply held feelings of national and ethnic identity in the face of opposition.

The 1993 Constitution names eleven languages as official, including English and Afrikaans, in an effort to enhance the status of the country's indigenous languages. The consequences of such an ambitious multilingual policy remain to be seen, but the difficulties of administering an eleven-language formula are immense (p. 89), and it is likely that English will continue to be an important lingua franca. Enthusiasm for the language continues to grow among the black population: in 1993, for example, a series of government surveys among black parents demonstrated an overwhelming choice of English as the preferred language in which children should receive their education. And in the South African Parliament in 1994 the language continued to dominate the proceedings, with 87 per cent of all speeches being made in English.⁷

South Asia

In terms of numbers of English speakers, the Indian subcontinent has a very special position, probably outranking the combined totals of speakers in the USA and UK. This is largely due to the special position which the language has come to hold in India itself, where estimates have been undergoing radical revision in recent years. The traditional view⁸ was that somewhere between 3 and 5 per cent of the people made regular use of English, which would have yielded a total of some 30–50 million around the year 1999, when the population of India passed a billion. Since then, the estimates have crept up – nearly 20 per cent, for example, in one encyclopedia summary.⁹ But some surveys have suggested much larger totals, if a flexible notion of fluency is permitted (see p. 68), with one influential review estimating that perhaps a third of the people of India are now capable of holding a conversation

⁷ For the sociolinguistic situation in contemporary South Africa, see Herriman and Burnaby (1996: chapter 2).

⁸ A figure of 3%, for example, is a widely quoted estimate of the mid-1980s (e.g. Kachru (1986: 54)).

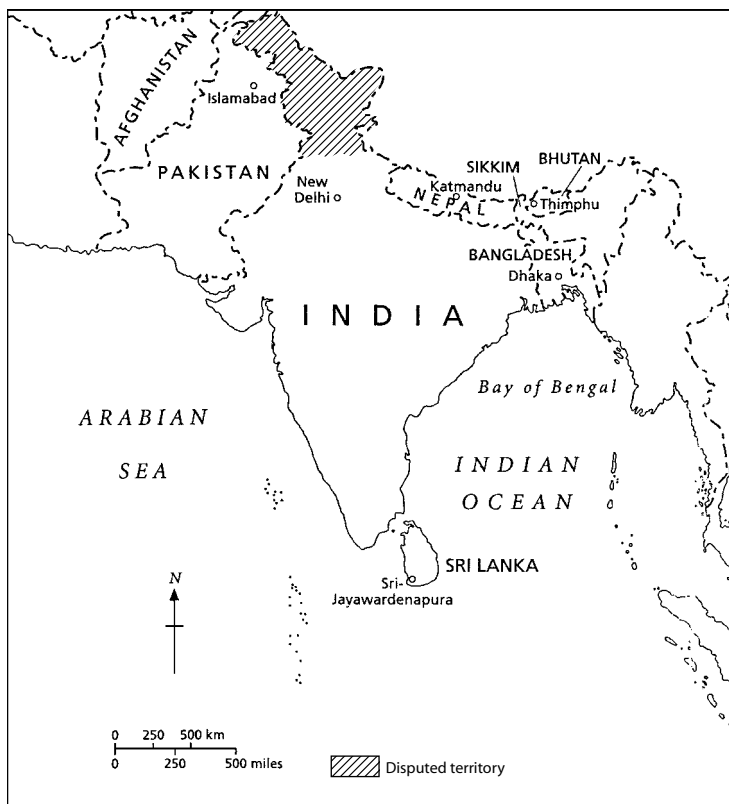
⁹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2002: 796).

in English.¹⁰ In real terms these estimates represent a range of 30 million to over 330 million (for comprehension, with a somewhat lower figure, 200 million, for speech production – which is the figure I use in Table 1 below). And we must not forget that there are also considerable numbers of English speakers elsewhere in the region, which comprises five other countries (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan). South Asia holds about a fifth of the world's population. Several varieties of English have emerged throughout the subcontinent, and they are sometimes collectively referred to as South Asian English. These varieties are less than 200 years old, but they are already among the most distinctive varieties in the English-speaking world.

The origins of South Asian English lie in Britain. The first regular British contact with the subcontinent came in 1600 with the formation of the British East India Company – a group of London merchants who were granted a trading monopoly in the area by Queen Elizabeth I. The Company established its first trading station at Surat in 1612, and by the end of the century others were in existence at Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. During the eighteenth century, it overcame competition from other European nations, especially France. As the power of the Mughal emperors declined, the Company's influence grew, and in 1765 it took over the revenue management of Bengal. Following a period of financial indiscipline among Company servants, the 1784 India Act established a Board of Control responsible to the British Parliament, and in 1858, after the Indian Mutiny, the Company was abolished and its powers handed over to the Crown.

During the period of British sovereignty (the *Raj*), from 1765 until independence in 1947, English gradually became the medium of administration and education throughout the subcontinent. The language question attracted special attention during the early nineteenth century, when colonial administrators debated the kind of educational policy which should be introduced. A recognized turning-point was Lord William Bentinck's acceptance of a Minute written by Thomas Macaulay in 1835, which proposed the introduction of an English educational system in

¹⁰ A 1997 *India Today* survey reported by Kachru (2001: 411).



The countries where South Asian English is spoken

India. When the universities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras were established in 1857, English became the primary medium of instruction, thereby guaranteeing its status and steady growth during the next century.

In India, the bitter conflict between the supporters of English, Hindi, and regional languages led in the 1960s to a 'three language formula', in which English was introduced as the chief alternative to the local state language (typically Hindi in the north and a regional language in the south). It now has the status of an 'associate' official language, with Hindi the official language. It is

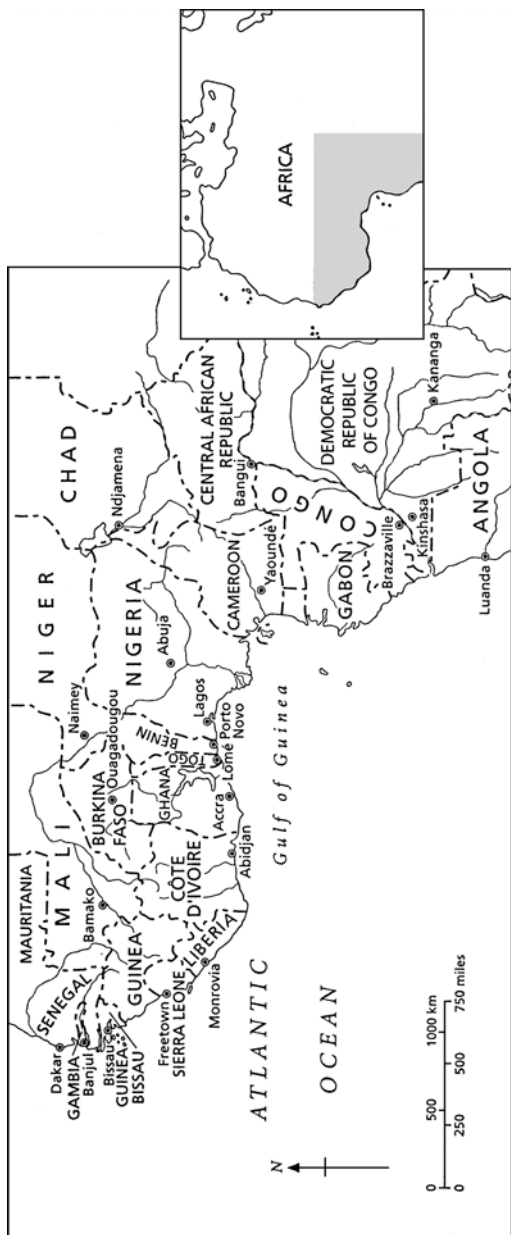
also recognized as the official language of four states (Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura) and eight Union territories.

English has, as a consequence, retained its standing within Indian society, continuing to be used within the legal system, government administration, secondary and higher education, the armed forces, the media, business, and tourism. It is a strong unifying force. In the Dravidian-speaking areas of the south, it is widely preferred to Hindi as a lingua franca. In the north, its fortunes vary from state to state, in relation to Hindi, depending on the policies of those in power. In Pakistan, it is an associated official language. It has no official status in the other countries of South Asia, but throughout the region it is universally used as the medium of international communication. Increasingly it is being perceived by young South Asians as the language of cultural modernity.

Former colonial Africa

Despite several centuries of European trade with African nations, by the end of the eighteenth century only the Dutch at the Cape had established a permanent settlement. However, by 1914 colonial ambitions on the part of Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy and Belgium had resulted in the whole continent (apart from Liberia and Ethiopia) being divided into colonial territories. After the two World Wars there was a repartitioning of the region, with the confiscation of German and Italian territories. Most of the countries created by this partition achieved independence in or after the 1960s, and the Organization of African Unity pledged itself to maintain existing boundaries.

The English began to visit West Africa from the end of the fifteenth century, and soon after we find sporadic references to the use of the language as a lingua franca in some coastal settlements. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the increase in commerce and anti-slave-trade activities had brought English to the whole West African coast. With hundreds of local languages to contend with, a particular feature of the region was the rise of several English-based pidgins and creoles, used alongside the



The countries of West Africa

standard varieties of colonial officials, missionaries, soldiers, and traders.

British varieties developed especially in five countries, each of which now gives English official status. There was also one American influence in the region.

- **Sierra Leone** In the 1780s, philanthropists in Britain bought land to establish a settlement for freed slaves, the first groups arriving from England, Nova Scotia and Jamaica. The settlement became a Crown Colony in 1808, and was then used as a base for anti-slave-trading squadrons, whose operations eventually brought some 60,000 ‘recaptives’ to the country. The chief form of communication was an English-based creole, Krio, and this rapidly spread along the West African coast. The hinterland was declared a British protectorate in 1896; and the country received its independence in 1961. Its population had grown to over 5.4 million by 2002, most of whom can use Krio.
- **Ghana** (formerly **Gold Coast**) Following a successful British expedition against the Ashanti to protect trading interests, the southern Gold Coast was declared a Crown Colony in 1874. The modern state was created in 1957 by the union of this colony and the adjacent British Togoland trust territory, which had been mandated to Britain after World War I. Ghana achieved independence in 1957. Its population was nearly 19 million in 2002, about 1.5 million of whom use English as a second language.
- **Gambia** English trading along the Gambia River dates from the early seventeenth century. A period of conflict with France was followed in 1816 by the establishment of Bathurst (modern Banjul) as a British base for anti-slaver activities. The capital became a Crown Colony in 1843, the country an independent member of the Commonwealth in 1965 and a republic in 1970. It had a population of 1.4 million in 2002. Krio is widely used as a lingua franca.
- **Nigeria** After a period of early nineteenth-century British exploration of the interior, a British colony was founded at Lagos in 1861. This amalgamated with other southern and northern territories to form a single country in 1914, and it received

independence in 1960. It is one of the most multilingual countries in Africa, with some 500 languages identified in the mid-1990s. Its population in 2002 was over 126 million. About half use pidgin or creole English as a second language.

- **Cameroon** Explored by the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and British, this region became a German protectorate in 1884, and was divided between France and Britain in 1919. After some uncertainty, the two areas merged as a single country in 1972, with both French and English remaining as official languages. It is also a highly multilingual region, with a 2002 population of nearly 16 million. It is thus a country in which contact languages have flourished, notably Cameroon Pidgin, spoken by about half the population.
- **Liberia** Africa's oldest republic was founded in 1822 through the activities of the American Colonization Society, which wished to establish a homeland for former slaves. Within fifty years it received some 13,000 black Americans, as well as some 6,000 slaves recaptured at sea. The settlement became a republic in 1847, and adopted a constitution based on that of the USA. It managed to retain its independence despite pressure from European countries during the nineteenth-century 'scramble for Africa'. Its population in 2002 was some 3.2 million, most of whom use pidgin English as a second language (but there are also a number of first-language speakers). Links with US African-American English are still very evident.

Although English ships had visited East Africa from the end of the sixteenth century, systematic interest began only in the 1850s, with the expeditions to the interior of such British explorers as Richard Burton, David Livingstone and John Speke. The Imperial British East Africa Company was founded in 1888, and soon afterwards a system of colonial protectorates became established, while other European nations (Germany, France, and Italy) vied with Britain for territorial control.

Several modern states, each with a history of association with Britain, gave English official status when they gained independence, and British English has thus played a major role in the development of these states, being widely used in government,

the courts, schools, the media, and other public domains. It has also been adopted elsewhere in the region as a medium of international communication, such as in Rwanda, Ethiopia and Somalia.

- **Botswana** Under British protection from 1885, the southern part of the country became part of Cape Colony in 1895, the northern part becoming Bechuanaland. It received its independence in 1966. Population in 2002 was 1.5 million. English is the official language.
- **Kenya** A British colony from 1920, this country became independent in 1963, following a decade of unrest (the Mau Mau rebellion). English was then made the official language, with Swahili made a national language in 1974. English none the less retains an important role in the country, which had some 31 million people in 2002.
- **Lesotho** Under British protection as Basutoland from 1869, it became independent in 1960. Its population was nearly 2.2 million in 2002. English is the official language.
- **Malawi** (formerly **Nyasaland**) The area became a British colony in 1907, and received its independence in 1964. Its population was 10.5 million in 2002. English is an official language along with Chewa.
- **Namibia** A German protectorate from 1884, it was mandated to South Africa – by the League of Nations in 1920 – who later annexed it (as South-West Africa). The United Nations assumed direct responsibility in 1966, and the country became known as Namibia, receiving full independence in 1990. Its population in 2002 was 1.8 million. English is the official language.
- **Tanzania** (formerly **Zanzibar** and **Tanganyika**) Zanzibar became a British protectorate in 1890, and Britain received a mandate for Tanganyika in 1919. The first East African country to gain independence (1961), its population was over 36 million in 2002. English was a joint official language with Swahili until 1967, then lost its status as a national language; but it remains an important medium of communication.
- **Uganda** The Uganda kingdoms were united as a British protectorate between 1893 and 1903, and the country received its

independence in 1962. Its population was over 24 million in 2002. English is the sole official language, but Swahili is also widely used as a *lingua franca*.

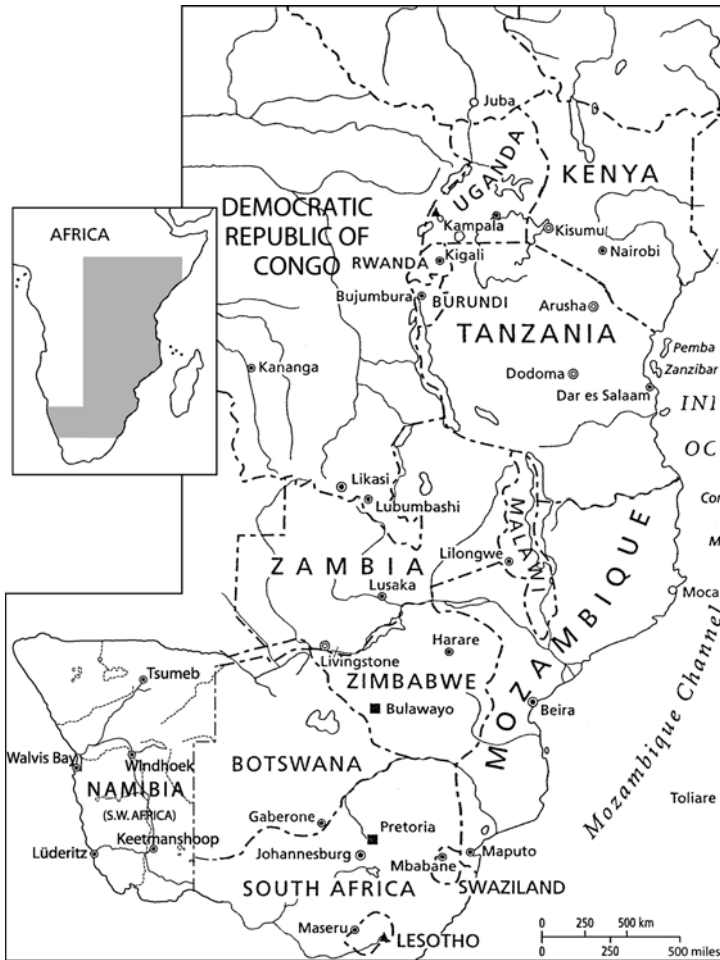
- **Zambia** (formerly **Northern Rhodesia**) At first administered by the British South Africa Company, the country became a British protectorate in 1924, and received its independence in 1964. Its population was over 11 million in 2002. English is the official language.
- **Zimbabwe** (formerly **Southern Rhodesia**) Also administered by the British South Africa Company, it became a British colony in 1923. Opposition to independence under African rule led to a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by the white-dominated government in 1965. Power was eventually transferred to the African majority, and the country achieved its independence in 1980. Its population was around 11 million in 2002. English is the official language.

The kinds of English which developed in East Africa were very different from those found in West Africa. Large numbers of British emigrants settled in the area, producing a class of expatriates and African-born whites (farmers, doctors, university lecturers, etc.) which never emerged in the environmentally less hospitable West African territories. A British model was introduced early on into schools, reinforcing the exposure to British English brought by the many missionary groups around the turn of the century. The result was a range of mother-tongue English varieties which have more in common with what is heard in South Africa or Australia than in Nigeria or Ghana.¹¹

South-east Asia and the South Pacific

The territories in and to the west of the South Pacific display an interesting mixture of American and British English. The main American presence emerged after the Spanish-American War of 1898, from which the USA received the island of Guam

¹¹ For the sociolinguistic situation in contemporary West and East Africa, see Bamgbose (2000).



The countries of East and Southern Africa

(and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean) and sovereignty over the Philippines. Hawaii was annexed at that time also, after a period of increasing US influence. In the 1940s, the US invasion of Japanese-held Pacific islands was followed after World War II by several areas being made the responsibility of the USA as United Nations Trust Territories. The Philippines became independent in 1946, but the influence of American English remains strong. And

as this country has by far the largest population of the English-speaking states in the region (about 80 million in 2002), it makes a significant contribution to world totals.

British influence began through the voyages of English sailors at the end of the eighteenth century, notably the journeys of Captain Cook in the 1770s. The London Missionary Society sent its workers to the islands of the South Pacific fifty years later. In South-east Asia, the development of a British colonial empire grew from the work of Stamford Raffles, an administrator in the British East India Company. Centres were established in several locations, notably Penang (1786), Singapore (1819) and Malacca (1824). Within a few months, the population of Singapore had grown to over 5,000, and by the time the Federated Malay States were brought together as a Crown Colony (1867), English had come to be established throughout the region as the medium of law and administration, and was being increasingly used in other contexts. A famous example is the English-language daily newspaper, *The Straits Times*, which began publication in 1845.

English inevitably and rapidly became the language of power in the British territories of South-east Asia. Hong Kong island was ceded to Britain in 1842 by the Treaty of Nanking, at the end of the first Opium War, and Kowloon was added to it in 1860; the New Territories, which form the largest part of the colony, were leased from China in 1898 for ninety-nine years. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, several territories in the region became British protectorates, the administration of some being later taken over by Australia and New Zealand. Territories with English as part of their heritage, which have become independent in recent decades, include American Samoa, Palau (Belau), Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, North Mariana Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

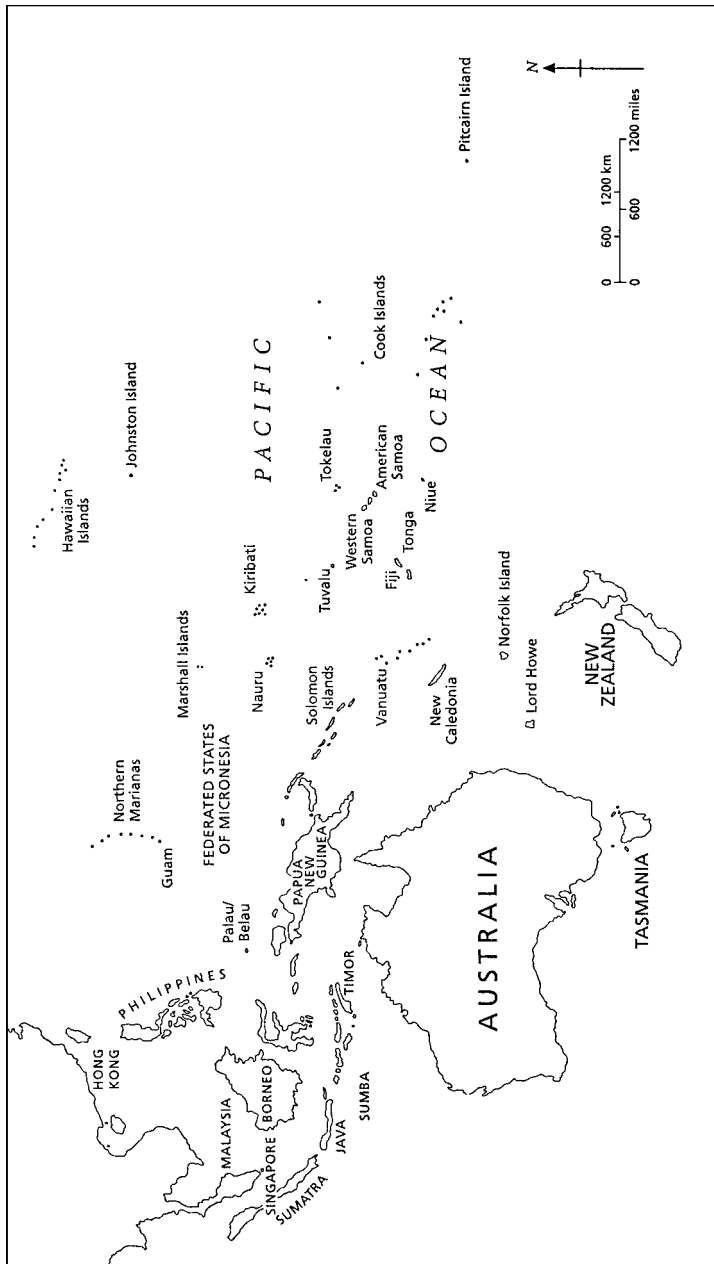
The introduction of a British educational system exposed learners to a standard British English model very early on. English-medium schools began in Penang (now Malaysia's leading port) in 1816, with senior teaching staff routinely brought in from Britain. Although at the outset these schools were attended by only a tiny percentage of the population, numbers increased during the

nineteenth century as waves of Chinese and Indian immigrants entered the area. English rapidly became the language of professional advancement and the chief literary language. Soon after the turn of the century, higher education through the medium of English was also introduced. The language thus became a prestige lingua franca among those who had received an English education and who had thereby entered professional society.

Despite the common colonial history of the region, a single variety of 'South-east Asian English' has not emerged. The political histories of Singapore and Malaysia, especially since independence, have been too divergent for this to happen; and the sociolinguistic situations in Hong Kong and Papua New Guinea are unique.¹²

- **Singapore** In the 1950s a bilingual educational system was introduced in Singapore, with English used as a unifying medium alongside Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. However, English remained the language of government and the legal system, and retained its importance in education and the media. Its use has also been steadily increasing among the general population. In a 1975 survey, only 27 per cent of people over age forty claimed to understand English, whereas among fifteen- to twenty-year-olds, the proportion was over 87 per cent. There is also evidence of quite widespread use in family settings, and a new local variety, known as Singlish, has evolved (p. 174). The country had a population of around 4.3 million in 2002.
- **Malaysia** The situation is very different in Malaysia where, following independence (1957), Bahasa Malaysia was adopted as the national language, and the role of English accordingly became more restricted. Malay-medium education was introduced, with English an obligatory subject but increasingly being seen as of value for international rather than intra-national purposes – more a foreign language than a second language.

¹² For the sociolinguistic situation in South-east Asia, see: for Hong Kong, Li (1999), Evans and Green (2001); for Malaysia, Said and Siew (2000); for the Philippines, Bautista (1997); for Singapore, Gopinathan, Pakir, Kam and Saravanan (1998).



The location of territories in South-east Asia and the South Pacific

However, the traditional prestige attached to English still exists, for many speakers. The country had a population of over 22 million in 2002.

- **Hong Kong** English has always had a limited use in the territory, associated with government or military administration, law, business, and the media. Chinese (Cantonese) is the mother-tongue of over 98 per cent of the population (over 7 million in 2002). However, in recent years there has been a major increase in educational provision, with estimates suggesting that over a quarter of the population have some competence in English. English and Chinese have joint official status, but Chinese predominates in most speech situations, often with a great deal of language mixing. There is uncertainty surrounding the future role of English, following the 1997 transfer of power, though patterns of language use so far have shown little change.
- **Papua New Guinea** British sailors visited the territory as early as 1793, and Britain and Germany annexed areas in 1884. British New Guinea was transferred to Australia in 1904 as the Territory of Papua; German New Guinea was mandated to Australia in 1921. The two areas merged after World War 2, and became independent in 1975. There was a population of nearly 5 million in 2002. About half the people speak Tok Pisin, an English-based pidgin, as a second language (and some have it as a mother tongue). It has a nation-wide presence, widely seen in advertisements and the press, and heard on radio and television. Many major works have been translated into Tok Pisin, including Shakespeare and the Bible.

A world view

The present-day world status of English is primarily the result of two factors: the expansion of British colonial power, which peaked towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the emergence of the United States as the leading economic power of the twentieth century. It is the latter factor which continues to explain the world position of the English language today (much to the discomfiture of some in Britain who find the loss of historical linguistic

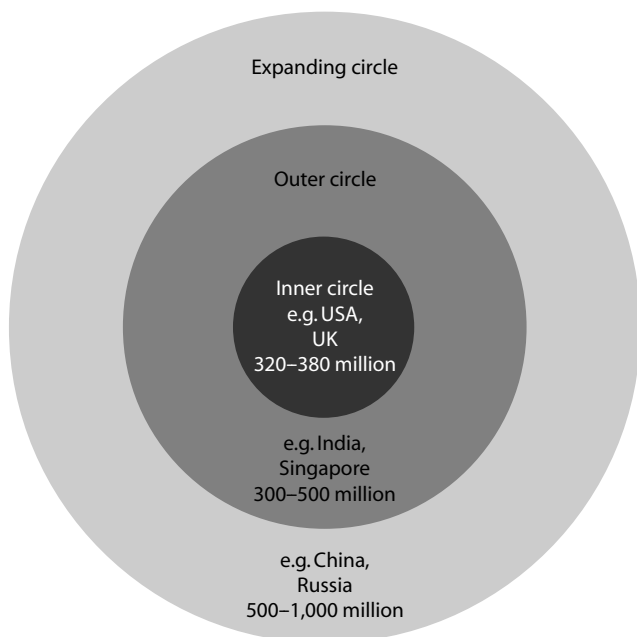
pre-eminence unpalatable). The USA has nearly 70 per cent of all English mother-tongue speakers in the world (excluding creole varieties). Such dominance, with its political/economic underpinnings, currently gives America a controlling interest in the way the language is likely to develop.

How then may we summarize this complex situation? The US linguist Braj Kachru has suggested that we think of the spread of English around the world as three concentric circles, representing different ways in which the language has been acquired and is currently used.¹³ Although not all countries fit neatly into this model, it has been widely regarded as a helpful approach.

- The *inner circle* refers to the traditional bases of English, where it is the primary language: it includes the USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
- The *outer* or *extended circle* involves the earlier phases of the spread of English in non-native settings, where the language has become part of a country's chief institutions, and plays an important 'second language' role in a multilingual setting: it includes Singapore, India, Malawi and over fifty other territories.
- The *expanding* or *extending circle* involves those nations which recognize the importance of English as an international language, though they do not have a history of colonization by members of the inner circle, nor have they given English any special administrative status. It includes China, Japan, Greece, Poland and (as the name of this circle suggests) a steadily increasing number of other states. In these areas, English is taught as a foreign language. (The term 'expanding' reflects its origins in the 1980s: today, with English recognized virtually everywhere, a tense change to *expanded circle* would better reflect the contemporary scene.)

There are some seventy-five territories in which English has held or continues to hold a special place, as a member of either the inner or the outer circles. These are given in a single alphabetical list

¹³ For example, in Kachru (1988: 5).



The three 'circles' of English

below (Table 1), along with an estimate of the number of speakers. The national population figures are estimates for 2001. L1 stands for people who have a variety of English as a first language, or mother tongue. L2 stands for people who have learned a variety of English as a second language, in addition to their mother tongue. Where I have been unable to find any relevant data, the figure for L1 or L2 is missing.

Lists of this kind contain all kinds of hidden assumptions, and they have to be carefully interpreted. In particular, we should note the following points:

- There is no single source of statistical information on language totals, so estimates have to be taken from a variety of sources. In the first instance, I used the latest editions of the *UNESCO statistical yearbook*, *The Encyclopaedia Britannica yearbook*, and *Ethnologue: languages of the world*, and whatever census data I

Table 1 *Speakers of English in territories where the language has had special relevance*

<i>Territory</i>	<i>Population (2001)</i>	<i>Usage estimate</i>
American Samoa	67,000	L1 2,000 L2 65,000
Antigua & Barbuda (c)	68,000	L1 66,000 L2 2,000
Aruba	70,000	L1 9,000 L2 35,000
Australia	18,972,000	L1 14,987,000 L2 3,500,000
Bahamas (c)	298,000	L1 260,000 L2 28,000
Bangladesh	131,270,000	L2 3,500,000
Barbados (c)	275,000	L1 262,000 L2 13,000
Belize (c)	256,000	L1 190,000 L2 56,000
Bermuda	63,000	L1 63,000
Botswana	1,586,000	L2 630,000
British Virgin Islands (c)	20,800	L1 20,000
Brunei	344,000	L1 10,000 L2 134,000
Cameroon (c)	15,900,000	L2 7,700,000
Canada	31,600,000	L1 20,000,000 L2 7,000,000
Cayman Islands (c)	36,000	L1 36,000
Cook Islands	21,000	L1 1,000 L2 3,000
Dominica (c)	70,000	L1 3,000 L2 60,000
Fiji	850,000	L1 6,000 L2 170,000
Gambia (c)	1,411,000	L2 40,000
Ghana (c)	19,894,000	L2 1,400,000
Gibraltar	31,000	L1 28,000 L2 2,000
Grenada (c)	100,000	L1 100,000

Table 1 (*cont.*)

<i>Territory</i>	<i>Population (2001)</i>	<i>Usage estimate</i>	
Guam	160,000	L1	58,000
		L2	100,000
Guyana (c)	700,000	L1	650,000
		L2	30,000
Hong Kong	7,210,000	L1	150,000
		L2	2,200,000
India	1,029,991,000	L1	350,000
		L2	200,000,000
Ireland	3,850,000	L1	3,750,000
		L2	100,000
Jamaica (c)	2,665,000	L1	2,600,000
		L2	50,000
Kenya	30,766,000	L2	2,700,000
Kiribati	94,000	L2	23,000
Lesotho	2,177,000	L2	500,000
Liberia (c)	3,226,000	L1	600,000
		L2	2,500,000
Malawi	10,548,000	L2	540,000
Malaysia	22,230,000	L1	380,000
		L2	7,000,000
Malta	395,000	L1	13,000
		L2	95,000
Marshall Islands	70,000	L2	60,000
Mauritius	1,190,000	L1	2,000
		L2	200,000
Micronesia	135,000	L1	4,000
		L2	60,000
Montserrat (c)	4,000	L1	4,000
Nambia	1,800,000	L1	14,000
		L2	300,000
Nauru	12,000	L1	900
		L2	10,700
Nepal	25,300,000	L2	7,000,000
New Zealand	3,864,000	L1	3,700,000
		L2	150,000

(*cont.*)

Table 1 (*cont.*)

<i>Territory</i>	<i>Population (2001)</i>	<i>Usage estimate</i>
Nigeria (c)	126,636,000	L2 60,000,000
Northern Marianas (c)	75,000	L1 5,000
		L2 65,000
Pakistan	145,000,000	L2 17,000,000
Palau	19,000	L1 500
		L2 18,000
Papua New Guinea (c)	5,000,000	L1 150,000
		L2 3,000,000
Philippines	83,000,000	L1 20,000
		L2 40,000,000
Puerto Rico	3,937,000	L1 100,000
		L2 1,840,000
Rwanda	7,313,000	L2 20,000
St Kitts & Nevis (c)	43,000	L1 43,000
St Lucia (c)	158,000	L1 31,000
		L2 40,000
St Vincent & Grenadines (c)	116,000	L1 114,000
Samoa	180,000	L1 1,000
		L2 93,000
Seychelles	80,000	L1 3,000
		L2 30,000
Sierra Leone (c)	5,427,000	L1 500,000
		L2 4,400,000
Singapore	4,300,000	L1 350,000
		L2 2,000,000
Solomon Islands (c)	480,000	L1 10,000
		L2 165,000
South Africa	43,586,000	L1 3,700,000
		L2 11,000,000
Sri Lanka	19,400,000	L1 10,000
		L2 1,900,000
Suriname (c)	434,000	L1 260,000
		L2 150,000
Swaziland	1,104,000	L2 50,000
Tanzania	36,232,000	L2 4,000,000
Tonga	104,000	L2 30,000

Table 1 (*cont.*)

<i>Territory</i>	<i>Population (2001)</i>	<i>Usage estimate</i>	
Trinidad & Tobago (c)	1,170,000	L1	1,145,000
Tuvalu	11,000	L2	800
Uganda	23,986,000	L2	2,500,000
United Kingdom	59,648,000	L1	58,190,000
		L2	1,500,000
UK Islands (Channel Is, Man)	228,000	L1	227,000
United States	278,059,000	L1	215,424,000
		L2	25,600,000
US Virgin Islands (c)	122,000	L1	98,000
		L2	15,000
Vanuatu (c)	193,000	L1	60,000
		L2	120,000
Zambia	9,770,000	L1	110,000
		L2	1,800,000
Zimbabwe	11,365,000	L1	250,000
		L2	5,300,000
Other dependencies	35,000	L1	20,000
		L2	15,000
Total	2,236,730,800	L1	329,140,800
		L2	430,614,500

The category 'Other dependencies' consists of territories administered by Australia (Norfolk I., Christmas I., Cocos Is), New Zealand (Niue, Tokelau) and the UK (Anguilla, Falkland Is, Pitcairn I., Turks & Caicos Is).

could find. In a (regrettably) few cases, a sociolinguistic study of an area has provided an estimate.

- Where no linguistic estimate is available, I used an indirect method, based on the percentage of a country's population over the age of twenty-five who have completed their secondary or further education – the assumption being that, in a country where the language has official status, and is taught in schools, this figure would suggest a reasonable level of attainment.

- The notion of ‘a variety of English’ referred to above includes standard, pidgin, and creole varieties of English. That is why, in certain countries, the usage totals in the list are much higher than would be expected if only Standard English were being considered. In Nigeria, for example, large numbers (thought to be well over 40 per cent of the population) use Nigerian Pidgin English as a second language. The linguistic justification for this approach is that these varieties are, indeed, varieties **of English** (as opposed to, say, French), and are usually related to Standard English along a continuum. On the other hand, because the ends of this continuum may not be mutually intelligible, it could be argued that we need to keep Standard English totals separate from pidgin/creole English totals: if this view is adopted, then some 7 million L1 speakers (mainly from the Caribbean) and some 80 million L2 speakers (mainly from West Africa) should be subtracted from the grand totals. Countries where this is an issue are identified by (c) in the list.
- It is also important to recall (from chapter 1) that to have a ‘special place’ can mean various things. Sometimes English is an official or joint official language of a state, its status being defined by law, as in the case of India, Ireland or Canada. Sometimes it may be the sole or dominant language for historical reasons (but without official status), as in the case of the USA or the UK. In a few instances, English has lost the formal status it once had, though it still plays an important role in the community. In many cases, its standing is less certain, coexisting with other local languages in a relationship which shifts with time and social function. But in all cases, it can be argued, the population is living in an environment in which the English language is routinely in evidence, publicly accessible in varying degrees, and part of the nation’s recent or present identity.
- Finally, we should bear in mind that the notion of a ‘special place’, as reflected in this list, is one which relates entirely to historical and political factors. This has led some linguists to argue that such a list presents a picture of the present-day world which does not wholly reflect sociolinguistic reality. In particular, it is

suggested, the distinction between ‘second language’ (L2) and ‘foreign language’ use has less contemporary relevance than it formerly had. There is much more use of English nowadays in some countries of the expanding circle, where it is ‘only’ a foreign language (as in Scandinavia and The Netherlands), than in some of the outer circle where it has traditionally held a special place. Also, to make a language official may not mean very much, in real terms. For example, English is probably represented in Rwanda and Burundi in very comparable ways, but Rwanda is in the list (and Burundi is not) only because the former has (in 1996) made a political decision to give the language special status. What the consequences are for the future use of English in that country remains to be seen. In the meantime, it should not be forgotten that there are several countries, not represented in the Table, which are making a much more important contribution to the notion of English as a global language than is reflected by any geo-historical picture (see chapters 3 and 4).

In reflecting on these totals, we should not underestimate the significance of the overall population figure, as it indicates the total number of people who are in theory routinely exposed to English in a country. The grand total of 2,236 million in 2002 is well over a third of the world’s population. But of course, only a proportion of these people actually have some command of English.

The total of 329 million represents a conservative estimate of those who have learned English as a first language (L1). The total would be increased if we knew the L1 figures for every country – especially in such areas as West Africa, where it is not known how many use a variety of English as a first language. Some reference books (such as *World almanac* and *Ethnologue*) seem to take a more inclusive stance, in this respect, citing as many as 450 million as a grand total at present. The main variable, however, is whether the various English-derived pidgins and creoles should be included under the L1 heading. If they are, a further 80 million must be added to the 329 million total – and it is this total of (approximately) 400 million which is the most commonly cited L1 total in the early 2000s.

The total of 430 million represents an estimate of those who have learned English as a second language (L2); but it does not give the whole picture. For many countries, no estimates are available. And in others (notably India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ghana, Malaysia, Philippines and Tanzania, which had a combined total of over 1,462 million people in 2002), even a small percentage increase in the number of speakers thought to have a reasonable (rather than a fluent) command of English would considerably expand the L2 grand total. It is, in any case, now well ahead of the L1 total, whether or not pidgins and creoles are included.

No account has been taken in this list of the third category of English language learners referred to above: the members of the expanding circle, who have learned English as a foreign language. Here too, estimates for the total number of these speakers vary enormously because, as with second-language speakers, everything depends on just how great a command of English is considered acceptable to count as a 'speaker of English'. A criterion of native-speaker-like fluency would clearly produce a relatively small figure; including every beginner would produce a relatively large one. A widely circulated British Council estimate – more informed than most, as it was based on reports of numbers attending courses and taking examinations, as well as on market intelligence provided by its English 2000 project – has referred to a billion (i.e. thousand million) people engaged in learning English.¹⁴ That figure needs to be interpreted cautiously, because it includes all learners, from beginners to advanced. If we take, as a criterion, a medium level of conversational competence in handling domestic subject-matter, then we might expect some three-quarters of this total to be counted as 'speakers of English as a foreign language' – say, 750 million. However, there need to be only small variations in percentage estimations in the more populous countries to produce a large effect on the figures. No-one knows the proficiency realities in China, for example.

Faced with such notable variations, in which people with particular political agendas can argue for English being stronger or weaker, a cautious temperament will use averages of the most

¹⁴ British Council (1997).

recent estimates,¹⁵ and these produce a grand total of *c.* 1,500 million speakers from all sources – approximately 750 million first- and second-language speakers, and an equivalent number of speakers of English as a foreign language. This figure permits a convenient summary, given that world population passed the 6 billion mark during late 1999. It suggests that approximately one in four of the world's population are now capable of communicating to a useful level in English.

Two comments must immediately be made about this or any similar conclusion. First, if one quarter of the world's population are able to use English, then three-quarters are not. Nor do we have to travel far into the hinterland of a country – away from the tourist spots, airports, hotels and restaurants – to encounter this reality. Populist claims about the universal spread of English thus need to be kept firmly in perspective. Second, there is evidently a major shift taking place in the centre of gravity of the language. From a time (in the 1960s) when the majority of speakers were thought to be first-language speakers, we now have a situation where there are more people speaking it as a second language, and many more speaking it as a foreign language. If we combine these two latter groups, the ratio of native to non-native is around 1:3. Moreover, the population growth in areas where English is a second language is about 2.5 times that in areas where it is a first language (see Table 2), so that this differential is steadily increasing. David Graddol suggests that the proportion of the world's population who have English as a first language will decline from over 8 per cent in 1950 to less than 5 per cent in

¹⁵ It is interesting to compare estimates for first (L1), second (L2) and foreign (F) language use over the past 40 years.

- in Quirk (1962: 6) the totals for first (L1), second (L2) and foreign (F) were 250 (L1) and 100 (L2/F);
- during the 1970s these totals rose to 300 (L1), 300 (L2) and 100 (F) (cf. McArthur (1992: 355));
- Kachru (1985: 212) has 300 (L1), 300–400 (L2) and 600–700 (F);
- *Ethnologue* (1988) and Bright (1992: II.74), using a *Time* estimate in 1986, have 403 (L1), 397 (L2) and 800 (F);
- during the 1990s the L1 and L2 estimates rise again, though with some variation. The *Columbia Encyclopedia* (1993) has 450 (L1), 400 and 850 (F). *Ethnologue* (1992), using a *World Almanac* estimate in 1991, has 450 (L1) and 350 (L2).

Table 2 *Annual growth rate in population in selected countries, 1996–2001**

	<i>Population (2001)</i>	<i>% annual growth (1996–2001)</i>
Australia	18,972,000	1.1
Canada	31,600,000	0.9
New Zealand	3,864,000	0.8
UK	59,648,000	0.4
USA	278,059,000	1.2
Average		0.88
Cameroon	15,900,000	2.6
India	1,029,991,000	1.7
Malaysia	22,229,000	2.5
Nigeria	126,636,000	2.8
Philippines	82,842,000	2.4
Average		2.4

*Population growth data from *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2002).

2050.¹⁶ The situation is without precedent for an international language. Much will depend on what happens in the countries with the largest populations, notably China, Japan, Russia, Indonesia and Brazil.

No other language has spread around the globe so extensively, but – as we have seen in chapter 1 – what is impressive is not so much the grand total but the speed with which expansion has taken place since the 1950s. In 1950, the case for English as a world language would have been no more than plausible. Fifty years on, and the case is virtually unassailable. What happened in this fifty years – a mere eye-blink in the history of a language – to cause such a massive change of stature? To answer this question, we must look at the way modern society has come to use, and depend on, the English language.

¹⁶ Graddol (1999: 61).