

## Lesson 3 Embrace Diversity, Broaden Your Horizons

### English or Englishes?

How would you react if you saw an English sign reading "Robot Ahead" on the road while driving in South Africa? You would probably look around the front of your car for a robot that looks like a human. You would be confused momentarily, but laugh when you learned that the term "robot" also means "traffic light" in South Africa. For visitors from other countries, the unique usage of this word might cause confusion and misunderstanding, but it also highlights the diversity of World Englishes, the different varieties of the English language used around the world.

### English as a Global Language

English has become a widely used "lingua franca" due to its extensive usage and adoption in many countries, allowing individuals who speak different native languages to communicate and understand each other. About 1.75 billion people around the world use English as a useful means of communication, due to the high demand of English in critical fields such as science, technology, business, and entertainment. Moreover, in the digital era, people are exposed to a vast amount of online information and resources in English on a daily basis. These factors have consistently contributed to the widespread use and global influence of the English language.

As English ability grows in different nations, various English varieties have emerged worldwide, including Singaporean English, Korean English, Indian English, and others. Previously, British English and American English were considered the standard models. However, it is important to note that American English was initially seen as a regional variation rather than a standard form. As a result, we now refer to the different varieties of English as "Englishes," not simply "English."

## English Evolves to Fit Local Realities

When a language is adopted in a specific region or community, it is natural for it to undergo changes or modifications as the local people utilize the language to more accurately reflect their daily realities and cultural contexts. Linguistic change takes place across various aspects of language, including grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and everyday expressions. The change is particularly noticeable in vocabulary. English vocabulary has been modified and new expressions have been created within the different varieties of English.

In Indian English, the term "prepone" was coined to mean "to reschedule" as the opposite of "postpone." For instance, if a meeting scheduled for Thursday is moved to Wednesday, it is considered "preponed." Hong Kong English speakers shout "add oil" to show encouragement or support, a direct translation from a Chinese expression, which originally meant to inject more gasoline into an engine. In the Philippines, there are many houses with "dirty kitchens," which are not actually "dirty" kitchens. Instead, they refer to kitchens outside the home, where most of the cooking takes place to avoid trapping heat and smell inside the house in a hot climate. This evolution allows language to better match up with the everyday experiences and cultural contexts of the communities that utilize it.

## Foreign Languages Enrich English

As these English expressions are widely used locally and gain exposure in other countries, they contribute to the expansion and diversification of the English vocabulary. Moreover, English dictionaries have incorporated words borrowed from foreign languages. Some of the most popular English words borrowed from foreign languages include established terms such as tsunami, emoji, and origami in Japanese. Hygge in Danish and kiosk in Turkish have also gained worldwide currency among English speakers.

Recently, as the Korean wave has spread globally, words related to Korean culture such as kimchi, hanbok, kimbab, and hallyu have been added to English dictionaries. More and more Korean words including oppa, noona, mukbang, daebak, and so forth are being added to English dictionaries, resulting in a richer English vocabulary. As words and expressions related to Korean culture are included in English dictionaries, English vocabulary is becoming more diversified and the understanding of Korean culture around the world is deepened, accordingly.

## Be Open Towards World Englishes

Using English expressions that incorporate the cultures of different countries, we are creating opportunities to broaden our understanding of and respect for other cultures. In this respect, English speakers around the world need to be open to other English speakers. Embracing the diversity of English, we can build a more inclusive community of English speakers where everyone's voice is heard without prejudice or stereotypes. English does not solely belong to native speakers, but instead it is a language for anyone who uses it.

## Further Reading

### Living Dictionary

In 1828, an American lawyer and author Noah Webster published "An American Dictionary of the English Language" with a goal of providing America with its own version of the English language. Most dictionaries in Webster's day dictated how English words should be used rather than documenting the way people actually used English in daily life. In his dictionary, Webster broke this convention and sought to describe the way Americans spoke. When he included informal words in his dictionary, critics accused him of polluting the English language. However, Webster argued that these words captured American variations of English, distinguishing American English from British English.

With the rise of English as the world's lingua franca, there has been a movement to register English variations all over the world, for example, with the creation of the Oxford Handbook of World Englishes. Now, it is essential for English dictionaries to recognize and document words and phrases that reflect the identities and experiences of the multicultural populations who use English.