

Is English a good global language?

1 Listening: Pros and cons

a) Read the text and then listen to the discussion on the radio show 'Culture Café'.

English has been called a global language, but is it a good one? Some people believe that a national language can never work as a global language. Others say English is a good choice because it has borrowed so many words from other languages. But why should we discuss this at all? Languages change, grow and sometimes die. Who gets to choose the global language? Do we even have a choice?



b) David doesn't think English is the best choice for a global language. Which of the following reasons does he give for his opinion? Tick the right boxes.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> English is spoken faster than other languages. | <input type="checkbox"/> Only people who have the opportunity to get an education learn to speak English. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> There are lots of strange expressions in the English language. | <input type="checkbox"/> Because there are so many dialects (Dialekte), people don't always understand each other. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> People who don't speak English as a first language are at a disadvantage. | <input type="checkbox"/> People can't talk about abstract ideas. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English is a difficult language. | <input type="checkbox"/> Words don't just have dictionary meanings. They also contain a country's history and world view. |

c) What is 'Globish'? What's good about it? What two words do you think are used to make the word 'Globish'?

d) Now think of the other side of the argument. Why is English a good global language? Make a pros and cons table. Write David's arguments under the 'Cons' and add anything else you can think of. Then write down the pros.

2 Discuss it

Do we have a choice which language becomes the global language? Why or why not? Discuss it with a partner.

OR

In the story of the Tower of Babel (Turmbau zu Babel) there was peace and understanding in the world because people from every country spoke just one language.

Would there be peace and understanding with only one language? Discuss this with a partner. You may use some of the ideas above.

3 Strange English

English can be a difficult language. Explain what is difficult about these words and expressions.

1. I can't close the door. I'm not close enough.
2. One mouse, two mice. But one house, two houses.
3. Why does a nose run but feet smell?
4. This product must be shipped by truck but that one will be sent by ship.
5. Why isn't there ham in a hamburger?

Lösungsvorschläge

Listening Text: Is English a good global language?

Host: Today on the Culture Café we're talking to David Brady, who has written the book 'English as a World Language'. Welcome to the show, David.

Guest: Thank you. Glad to be here.

Host: It seems like everybody speaks English these days. That sure makes it easier for us to travel abroad! Some people say English is the best choice for a global language, but you don't agree. Is that right?

Guest: That's right. For several reasons. English is not a language that was invented for international communication. It's spoken as a first language in about 35 countries. That means native speakers have an unfair advantage. They often use expressions that you wouldn't learn from a school book. I mean, how much does anyone really remember from their school language classes anyway? We also speak too fast. It's very difficult to remember to speak slowly when it's your native language. When somebody says they can speak our language, we expect them to be able to say and understand everything. When they don't ... well, you just don't get the full picture of what they know and what they can do. So native speakers sometimes lose respect for them, unless they've tried to learn another language themselves.

Host: So what you're saying is that a good international language needs to be simple so that everybody can understand it equally well.

Guest: Exactly. English is actually a difficult language to learn. It has the largest vocabulary of all the world languages; there are many exceptions to grammar rules, and pronunciation just isn't always that predictable. A global language needs to be something anybody can learn, even if they aren't very good at learning languages. Right now people are divided between those who have an education and can speak English and those who can't.

Host: True. But wouldn't it be difficult to communicate with a simpler language, too? I mean, with a national language like English at least there are enough words for people to talk about abstract ideas.

Guest: Yes, but there are so many dialects and new forms of English, even those different groups don't always understand each other. So which one would you choose to be the official global language?

Host: It seems like it would be American English because American politicians and businesses still have a lot of influence in the world. And Americans don't really learn other languages.

Guest: Well, that's a very good point and another reason why English isn't a good world language. National languages carry the history of a country and contain a world view. So, for example, when Americans talk about competition, they're talking about being the best. Americans learn at a young age to make everything into a competition and we always have to win. In other countries competition is just a word and it might not be so important.

Host: We only have a few minutes left, David. In your book you talk about Globish. Can you tell our listeners more about that?

Guest: Globish is a simple form of English with only 1,500 words and simple sentences ... enough English for good business communication. The idea is that English is now owned by everybody in the world and there should be no cultural meanings in the global language. English native speakers are expected to learn it, too, but it doesn't usually work that way!

Host: That's interesting. Maybe one day Globish will be the language we all have to learn.

Guest: Maybe. But I don't think English will be the global language for long. Only about one in four people speak English today and if China continues to grow, Chinese may become more important. Of course, that won't be any better than English because Chinese is also a difficult language to learn.

Host: But I guess we can't really do much about that, can we?

Guest: No, we can't. The best we can do is to try to learn the most important world languages!

1

b)

English is spoken faster than other languages.

There are lots of strange expressions in the English language.

People who don't speak English as a first language are at a disadvantage.

English is a difficult language.

Only people who have the opportunity to get an education learn to speak English.

Because there are so many dialects (Dialekte), people don't always understand each other.

People can't talk about abstract ideas.

Words don't just have dictionary meanings. They also contain a country's history and world view.

c)

Globish is a simple form of English with only 1,500 words and simple sentences. Globish is a good language because 1) it's simple, 2) everybody has to learn it and 3) there are no cultural meanings in its words.

The word 'Globish' is made of 'global' and 'English'.

d)

Cons

- native speakers have an unfair advantage
- native speakers often use expressions that you wouldn't learn from a school book
- native speakers speak too fast
- native speakers sometimes lose respect for other people because they don't understand everything
- difficult language (largest vocabulary, many exceptions to grammar rules, pronunciation isn't predictable)
- ...

Pros

- for Germans not as difficult to pronounce as French, for example
- a lot of different countries already have it as their first or second language
- grammar rules are simple compared to many other languages
- English is a language made from words and expressions in many other languages
- ...

2*Individuelle Schülerlösungen***3**

1. The same word 'close' can be verb and adjective and they have different pronunciations.
2. There are different forms of the plural for words that are spelled similarly.
3. You would expect the verb 'run' to be used with 'feet' and the verb 'smell' to be used with 'nose'.
4. You would expect the verb "ship" to be used with the noun 'ship'.
5. 'Ham' is part of the word 'hamburger' but there isn't any ham in a hamburger.