

The future of global English

A new book from the British Council speculates on a future where English may not dominate world business.

1 How many languages do you speak? How well do you speak them? Compare your answer with a partner.

2 Decide on the correct option to complete the statements below. Then check your answers by scanning the article.

- (a) In 2050, the country with the world's largest economy will be: *China / USA*
 (b) A peak in the numbers of people learning English is predicted to occur around: *2010 / 2020*
 (c) Non-native speakers of English now outnumber native speakers: *2 to 1 / 3 to 1*

The business of learning English

English is the language of global commerce, of finance, of international law. But for how long? A new British Council book, *English Next*, by linguist David Graddol, suggests that the long-term future of English is far from certain. If money makes the world go around, then forecasts place China as the world's dominant economy by 2050, ahead of the US. Some analysts suggest that, as India and Brazil gain more economic strength, Britain's international influence will decline. Will the English language decline too? Already, its days of dominance as the main language on the Internet are numbered.

English Next is full of facts and figures, and speculation as to future trends. In a multilingual future, workers will be able to speak more than two foreign languages, making them attractive to global organisations looking to recruit from a mobile workforce. Some companies have already adopted English as their official language. The current competitive advantage of speaking English will slowly disappear as more and more people speak the language. A peak in learning

English is predicted around 2010, after which the number of learners will decline. After all, more countries are educating their children in English. When this generation reaches adulthood, some believe it will signal the start of a decline in the ELT business. It seems the number of overseas students coming to study English in the UK is already falling.

Still, the need for international communication continues. According to another famous linguist, David Crystal, non-native speakers of English now outnumber native speakers by three to one. Non UK companies have long spent money improving their employees' language skills. Nowadays, they are also investing in cultural awareness training – which can cost between £1,000 and £2,200 for a one-day training course. Speaking the language of your business partner enables you to build rapport with clients, and helps avoid cultural problems and losing that all-important deal. However, for far too long, UK companies have assumed that 'someone out there will speak English'. Will that hold true as the 21st century progresses?

3 Read the whole article. Is there anything you find surprising or interesting?

4 Match a word in the first box to a word in the second box to create collocations from the article.

competitive	mobile	future
international	global	economic

communication	trends	commerce
advantage	strength	workforce

5 Discuss the following questions in small groups. Be ready to report back your ideas to the class.

- When you meet clients from other countries, which language do you speak: your own, your clients', English or another language? Does the language spoken influence the outcome of the meeting?
- Will your company continue to invest in language and / or cultural awareness training? Would you like to receive more training (eg, in other languages)? How would this be useful for you?
- Does your company have a policy of 'speaking English'? Is this a good idea? Why / why not?
- Will English be overtaken as the language of business?