**English as a world language**

Today when English is one of the major languages in the world, its difficult to realize that this is a recent thing – that in Shakespeare’s time only a few million people spoke English and it was not thought to be important by Europe and was unknown to the rest of the world. The exporting of English began in the 17th century, with the first settlements in North America. English has become the world language because of its establishment as a mother tongue outside England, all over the world.

People who speak English fall into three groups:

1. Those who have learned it as their native language
2. Those who have learned it as a second language in a society that is bilingual
3. Those who are forced to use it for practical purposes – administrative, professional or educational.

Mother tongue speakers have now reached around 300 million, a further 300 million use it as a second language, 100 million use it fluently as a foreign language. The number of those who can speak English is these days 1000 million.

English is used as an official or semi-official language in 60 countries and has a prominent place in 20 ones. It is the main language of books, newspapers, airports and air-traffic control, business, academic conferences, science, medicine, sports, pop music and advertising. 75 per cent of the world’s mail and 60 per cent of the world’s telephone calls are in English. Of all electronic information, 80 per cent is stored in English. English radio programs are received by 50 million people in 120 countries. 50 children and 80 million students study English as a foreign language.