

Oxford Guide to World English

Tom McArthur

Oxford: OUP

2003

Reviews

'Excellent...comprehensive...a delightful book.' - *TLS*

'astonishingly comprehensive book...packed with pleasure' - *Christopher Hirst, The Independent Magazine*

'This is a wonderfully comprehensive resource which will appeal to anyone interested in language.' - *Roy Johnson, Open University*

Long gone are the days when English as proprietarily used by educated people in the tiny triangle of southern England formed by Oxford, Cambridge and London is deemed correct and all other versions wrong. *The Oxford Guide to World English* takes as its "descriptivist" starting point that English is now spoken in every continent by over a billion people across the world, about a quarter of them native speakers. In 70 countries worldwide English is an official or semi official language and has a significant role in 20 more. And because of the Internet--the language of which is 75 per cent English--the number of English users is rising exponentially with middle classes everywhere seeking it for their children as a global resource owned by nobody and everybody. Sadly, it has also become a very powerful- almost predatory-- language which seriously threatens 'endangered' languages.

The regional varieties and their evolution make a fascinating study that forms the main body of Tom McArthur's book, a spin-off from his *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (1992). In Singapore, for example, the particles "on" and "off" can be used as verbs as in "to on/off the light" and he lists 34 expressions used in Antarctic English which have "ice" as a prefix ranging from "ice year" and "ice tongue" to "icepan" and "ice pilot." Each variety of English is minutely discussed in terms of its history, grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary.

The 500 pages of *The Oxford Guide to World English* conclude by examining the ways in which English continues to change, and the role of so called "standard" English and whether or not the world now needs an international Standard version. Then there's the vexed question of English teaching. Should it be, or is it, a profession, a social service or a global industry? Macarthur quotes Indian journalist Santanu Bora writing in the Maharashtra Herald: "I am speaking a living language and writing one too. I don't hate Bob Marley's English any more than Paul McCartney's. Paul's got rain and snow in his way of speaking and Bob's got sun and sand in his speech. I have the monsoon, the mystic, religions, caste, poverty, the Queen... the list in long, in mine." *Susan Elkin*

Description

- A fascinating survey of English both as a pre-eminent world language in its standard British and American forms and as an increasingly divergent language
- Organized by region into six geo-political categories: global English; Europe; the Americas; Africa; Asia; Australasia, Oceania, and Antarctica
- Languages covered include: UK dialects such as Cockney, Brummie, Ulster Scots, Manx English; Spanglish; Creole English; Jewish English (Yinglish); Blue-eyed English; Chicano English; Maori English; Bearer English
- A typical major entry describes the language situation in a territory, points of pronunciation, grammar, borrowings and loans to English at large, and human-interest information within the text or in panels
- Panel features on certain languages include such items as sample conversations, songs, newspaper material, and shop and road signs, and there is a map for each section

The Oxford Guide to World English takes up where its 'mother book', the *Oxford Companion to the English Language*, left off. Organized by continent, there are chapters on Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australasia, Oceania, and Antarctica. Tom McArthur covers the world's many varieties of English in an interconnected way and notes the ties that bind varieties and regions that are geographically far apart, as with: West African English and African American English; Scots, Ulster Scots, the Scotch-Irish migrations to Appalachia in the US, and country and western music; and aspects of Australian, New Zealand, South African, and Falklands English as southern-hemisphere varieties.

The end result is a book that, while invaluable to the specialist, is accessible and appealing to the non-specialist, and covers a vast spread of 'Englises' from Brummie, Cockney, Estuary, and RP in the UK to

New York and New Orleans speech in the US and such other varieties as Indian English, Maori English, and West African Pidgin.

This hugely comprehensive work provides a fascinating and novel survey of English as both a pre-eminent 'standard' world language and a family of vigorously diverse regional varieties.

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