

Epreuve écrite

Examen de fin d'études secondaires 2005

Section: A₂ BCDEF

Branche: Anglais

Nom et prénom du candidat

What of the Future of English?

Because of the complexity and messy humanness of the process of language evolution, linguists don't make predictions about what words will be in or out next year, but they can make a number of generalizations. For starters there are some words that are particularly resistant to change. Some very fundamental terms such as 'man,' 'woman,' or 'child' have roots that go way back, and are under little pressure for change. Every child learns these terms early and accurately so our descendants will be using very similar-sounding words centuries or millennia from now.

Another broad prediction is that English will be spoken by increasing numbers of people for the foreseeable future. "The future of a language is closely bound up with the influence and prestige of its speakers," says Professor David Crystal, a leading international expert in linguistics. He suggests that English, being the language of the most powerful state on Earth, has a rosy future. "The role of English has developed to such an extent that it is difficult to see how it can be dislodged." However, as Professor Crystal goes on to caution, people must once have thought that about Latin.

One of the more bizarre potential future scenarios for the English language is that all English speakers, wherever they are in the world, will need to be bilingual in English. That is, they will speak their own local English, and also another English which David Crystal calls "World Standard Spoken English." Bilingualism will be necessary because a language separated by geography or culture – even if it is the same language – will evolve in different directions until it becomes a series of mutually unintelligible regional dialects. North American English will be very different from British English, which will differ from Australian, South African, Indian and Caribbean English. These 'new Englishes' will diverge over time in the same way that different languages have always evolved from common roots. At the same time, the theory goes, a World Standard Spoken English will be maintained so that all speakers of English can communicate effectively with each other,

But making predictions about the future of English is particularly difficult, because it stands at a threshold (= *Schwelle, seuil*) beyond which we cannot see. The threshold is both demographic and technical. In terms of demography, David Crystal predicts that in just a few years there will be more speakers of English as a second language than native born English speakers, at which point the language will "become open to the winds of linguistic change in totally unpredictable ways." English is fast becoming a truly global language and what that means nobody can predict with confidence.

Technologically, the very nature of communication is changing on a daily basis and we are only at the beginning of a revolution. The internet, email and text messaging are tremendously fertile fields for the growth of new words and concepts and because this type of technology changes so quickly it is very difficult to see where it will take the language. On the one hand, communication technology exerts pressure for language evolution, but on the other, it puts everyone in touch with everyone else, breaking down the barriers of distance and culture, which traditionally fuel language change. What will be the outcome?

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In yet another twist David Crystal describes the possible impact of instant translation technology. Perhaps in a few years we will be using mobile phones that will translate all languages instantaneously. As a result there will no longer be a need for a World Standard English and people will be free to speak in whatever language they choose.
(adapted from an article by Stuart Waters)

Comprehension (30)

Answer the following (in your own words as far as possible):

1. What two broad predictions can be made about the future of English? (8)
2. What is a more bizarre prediction regarding the future of English? Why does the author call it 'bizarre?' (8)
3. What does the author mean by "the threshold is both demographic and technical? Be specific. (10)
4. What effect may instantaneous translation have on the future of English? (4)

Essay (30)

Write a structured essay on the following topic:

"English - the global language"

How do you explain the success of English as *the* language of communication around the world? Aren't there any disadvantages to English being the world language?

(250-350 words)

Indicate the number of words used.