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# A-level ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 2 Language diversity and change

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**Texts for Section B**

## Text A

**Text A** is an extract from an online article about English as a world language. It was published by the *Independent* in 2002.

News > Science

# Linguicide: the death of language

A language dies every two weeks. It's a crime, says John Sutherland. And he knows who's guilty.

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Languages are possibly the most complicated structures the human mind has ever invented but, tragically, our species' most impressive creations are dying. According to the British linguist David Crystal, an indigenous language currently disappears every two weeks.

There's no mystery about the root cause. Take a holiday anywhere in the world. Your airline pilot will, as you listen to the safety instructions (in English), be communicating with ground control in English. Signs in the airport, whatever country you're in, will be duplicated in one of the world's top 20 languages – most likely English. You'll see Coca-Cola logos. MTV will be playing on the screens. Muzak will be crooning out Anglo-American lyrics as you walk through the concourse to baggage reclaim. At the hotel, the desk clerk will speak your language, as will, probably, the bellhop<sup>1</sup>. Go into any internet café and the keyboard code that will get you best results is what you are reading now: English – the lingua franca of our times.

How did this happen? How did a dialect, spoken by a backward, semi-literate tribe in the south-eastern corner of a small island in the North Sea spread across the globe? Should we feel guilty that our way of speaking is obliterating so many other tongues? Is it not a more sinister kind of colonialism than that which we practised a hundred years ago? Once we just took their raw materials. Now we invade their minds, by changing the primary tool by which they think: 'their' language.

The ethics of language superpower is tricky for 'native English speakers', like most readers of this newspaper. We may get dubious bronze medals in the Winter Olympics; we may have lost an empire and not found a role. But, by God, we are the proud possessors of the big language: the top language in the linguistic premier league. It feels great to be great again.

Or are we? Is 'English' a misnomer? Would it not be more accurate to rename what we speak 'American'? Are we, if we're honest, linguistic colonisers or merely among the more privileged of the colonised? Closest, that is, to the real power, but not the wielders of it. It's not invasion, but follow-my-leader. American is, currently, the dominant English dialect.

<sup>1</sup> bellhop: a person employed in a hotel to carry guests' bags (US English)

## Text B

**Text B** is from the introduction to the book *That's the Way it Crumbles: The American Conquest of the English Language* by Matthew Engel. The book was published in 2017.

Now, as we approach 2020, the American words the British invited into their homes are in danger of taking over. And it has become possible to imagine a time – 2120 would be a plausible and arithmetically neat guesstimate – when American English absorbs the British version completely. The child will have eaten its mother, but only because the mother insisted. This book is an attempt, feeble though it might be, to try to ensure that prediction does not come true.

Much of what follows is the story of how the cultural relationship between Britain and America has turned upside down over the centuries, how that has affected the British vocabulary and created Britain's current self-imposed verbal enslavement.

It is also a *cri de cœur*, a call to arms, a **wake-up call**. Forgive that last cliché, but it has all the hallmarks of a classic Americanism.

In the chapters that follow there will be references to hundreds of other words and phrases, many of them now totally integrated into the community and accepted as upstanding members of society, their American origins forgotten. There can be no question of deporting them. Who would sign the order? Go far enough back, and everyone in Britain has foreign blood.

What matters here is context. The United States has now become the chief source of new vocabulary because its technological and cultural dominance has become overwhelming. The technology alone would not be enough; it is the cultural sway that really matters. The consequences of this are felt across the world, not just in Britain, and not just in countries where English is the primary language.

It has become entirely imaginable that our descendants will inherit a world that is essentially American.

In the crisis of intellectual climate change, Britain is the equivalent of the coastal plains and islets most likely to be swamped by rising sea levels, because here the American inundation is already well under way. It is not that no one cares; I have evidence that they do. But no one has worked out what to do about it.

At the start of 2017 there were thought to be about 7,000 extant languages in the world, from Aari (Ethiopia) to Zuni (New Mexico). At least 220 have been wiped out in the past fifty years; some researchers suggest that in the next century almost half the survivors will go, which would mean one language vanishing – when its last speaker dies – every ten days. One, just one, of those 7,000 is now assuming the role of global language. It is English, but a form of English, and that form is primarily American.

This developing linguistic monoculture clearly has many pluses for communication. But it is also a catastrophe for the delicate cultural ecology of our planet.

**END OF TEXTS**

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