

ENGLISH RULES

Nouns

Name Words

bird, snake, house, sun,
air, love, Truth...

Adjectives

Picture & color Words

green, huge, tiny,
old, quick, faded,
beautiful...

Articles

Pointer Words

The, A, An

Conjunctions

Bridge words

and, but, or,
either-or,
we, I, you

Verbs

Doing Words

run, dance,
work, look, be,
build, think...

Adverbs

How, When, Where Words

silently, quickly,
happily, today,
then, here, there...

Prepositions

Position Words for things

by, with, from, in, at, on,
for, between, around...

Pronouns

Nouns: He, I, you

by Ralph Berry

'ENGLISH RULES THE WORLD. IS IT TIME TO REIN IN ITS POWER?'
(THE GUARDIAN, 27 December)

As ever in the van of progressive thinking, a writer from their stable, Michele Gazzola, hurls a pebble against a tank. The obvious response is 'No, forget it.' But there are some glaring paradoxes to disturb the smooth picture of unblemished global superiority. I need only mention Spanish, whose speakers huddle in South and Central America, and Chinese. Then there is the quality of English speakers.

English is wildly popular around the world because it is easy-to begin with. There's no problem with nouns and pronouns, and you can learn tenses in an afternoon. Compare the sweated labour that French and German demand—and still do for the natives of French colonial Africa, while India got off lightly with English. Pandit Nehru, an Inns of Court man called English 'India's window on the world', and the circulation of THE TIMES OF INDIA is ten times that of THE TIMES of London. American/English can simply be left to editors, who will treat alternative American/English spellings as misspellings and correct accordingly. The two great linguistic empires, English and American co-exist on terms of respectful amity.

But then we come to the difficult side. Writing and speaking good English is exacting, and most native speakers, certainly in England are not good at it. Frankly, the natives reckon that they own their language and are free to use it in whatever slovenly ways they wish.

Let foreigners work at improving whatever skills they have. They do, with perhaps surprising consequences.

First class English is not often seen or heard in England. Female TV presenters appear to have taken as their role model Eliza Doolittle, Mark One, especially her distinctive nasal

vowel. It follows that good English is a class indicator, which reinforces existing class structures. The best I have heard lately is Lord Sumption, late of the UK Supreme Court, who speaks beautiful English. Elderly members of the House of Lords can be pretty good too. I was taken with the speaking of Andrew Lloyd Webber, who must owe his attractive fluency to his choral work.

Then there are the foreigners in high diplomatic/political positions. Without exception they are good because they have to be, with the Nordics unfailingly excellent. They have had correct English dinned into them from early days at school. When you talk to a Swede you will understand the breadth of their understanding of English.

The world commitment to the English language rests on a basis of individual and class interest. There is no power that can 'rein in' this global fact.