



4 x 50 minutes Documentaries

Beyond Babel

English on the World Stage

The unprecedented spread of the English language in the 20th century has for the first time in recorded history raised the possibility of a global language. With a quarter of the world now using English there is even speculation that there may, at some future point, be a universal language. Beyond Babel looks at the way in which English is being adopted and adapted around the world and how its tremendous rate of growth is driven by trade, culture, politics and technology. The series also explores the impact of this globalisation on endangered languages and the relationship of English with its other major linguistic competitors. Beyond Babel was filmed in the USA, Japan, China, India, South Africa and Europe, with contributions from a wide range of international personalities.



Programme 1 - Trade examines how the process of international trade has taken English on to the world stage.

At their corporate headquarters in Atlanta, Coca Cola executives mull over the marketing strategy for their Shanghai factories, while the staff at Virgin Atlantic in China work hard to make their passengers feel as comfortable as possible. At the Harvard Business School, a professor speculates that English has banished nationhood in favour of global branding. Around the world business has come to depend on the lingua franca of international business English and as the language grows so does its aspirational pull.

Programme 2 - Culture looks at the phenomenal appeal of English as a vehicle for artistic expression. From Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London to the CNN Studios in Atlanta, via Star TV in Hong Kong, English is asserting itself as the language of international expression. Tele-evangelist, Pat Robertson, employs the power of satellite television to spread the gospel to the world from the Christian Broadcasting Network studios; a young Indian director launches his English language film, "Bollywood Calling" at the London Film Festival and, in Tokyo, Japanese pop group, Babamania, will only perform in English. The success of the language is taking the cultural world by storm.

Programme 3 - Politics examines the role of English as the medium of international political discourse and diplomacy and its adoption for those seeking freedom and justice. From Bunker Hill to Silicon Valley, the English language shapes the political landscape of modern day America. And its revolutionary heritage is echoed in the fiercely contested language debates that still rage, whether it's between new immigrants and the political establishment or the struggles of native Americans to preserve their own severely endangered languages. In South Africa, with its eleven official languages, English has become a key element in bringing together former opponents. In India, English vies with the indigenous language, Hindi, as the language of government, while in Europe, peacekeeping forces undergo intensive language training in English.

Programme 4 - Future over 70% of the world's scientific research is now recorded in English and science accounts for the fastest growing area of the already immense English vocabulary. This programme travels from Xerox Parc in Silicon Valley to Electronics City in Bangalore, to explore the way that technological advance and English have become inextricably linked. New media and the Internet have produced a boom in English, but will this ubiquity continue? Will the development of translation machines make the need for a common language obsolete and, as more and more people grow up bi-lingual, will the monolingual English speakers be left behind?



Language versions: English and International. For broadcast and non-broadcast use worldwide

