



Communication Culture

By Helena Kaufman, The Afro News Vancouver

ENGLISH TO COMMUNICATE CULTURE AND COMMERCE

ON ARRIVAL TO CANADA as European immigrants, English was pretty much my parents' 7th language and close to that for my sister. Having learned some of the language beforehand, she was our decoder of language and culture. My brother and I lagged behind, with varying fluency, in a few languages.

We adjusted. We understood then that English mastery would help us fit in and progress in our new lives locally. Now, we all accept that facility in English is a stepping stone to many global opportunities too.

Most immigrants and travelers, accept that knowledge of additional languages is vital. History has witnessed entire countries surviving and thriving by acquiring more modes of communication. Perhaps the value of adaptation came as militaries marched across their land or the desire to conduct trade with neighbouring economies. Perhaps it is a wise language choice of emerging regions whose developing identity is strengthened by the neutral communication tool of English that gives no one language or ethnic group undue advantage in the new state of affairs.

Much has changed since our arrival from Europe. Many other parts of the world have sent their best and brightest as well as their struggling. The country's motif is changing. Faster and faster, it seems.

English has the power to unite us as we communicate the values, language and customs we all hope to retain, somehow in our new situations in Canada just as it has done elsewhere.

Why English?

Global capitalization has spread the language, whether mastered from birth or acquired. Tourism and mass consumerism furthers the impact and it plays a useful linguistic role in politics and media, world wide.

While regions create their own 'version' to communicate with each other and their business partners and neighbours, English is still used to cross frontiers.

Consider that workers, contractors and global project owners coming from diverse countries use functional English, more or less understood, as the one constant. No matter the location or the turnover on a project, they all plug into

that one neutral, goal unifying, communication channel.

World trade has led to a World English.

Is it Easy?

No. English can be as hard to improve for natural speakers or to acquire as a foreign language for the same reason many find it fascinating.

The widespread language is regionally 'customized'. This means that North Americans are not speaking the same language as Malaysians, Venezuelans or even the Irish, English or French. Often called 'the mongrel language' it is a mix of bits of vocabulary and spellings from many versions of English from wildly different geographic and historic sources. Yet, eventually, its very importing of words and ideas from so many sources allows us all to see ourselves in it!

Entertaining Ideas...

Have you noticed how much music in this world conveys its messages of love, protest, hope and humour in English?

Picture flags waving in unison at world events to the beat of K'naan, a Somali born Canadian rapper, musician and poet singing.

Move in your mind's eye to another blend of ethnicities in the body and vocal soul of South American Shakira. Her star power and Africa's rich talents and lush setting, represented the world beyond Europe and the USA, yet it the message was sung in mostly English because of its universal reach.

VIP: Read, write, practice, build your vocabulary. With its million words and global access, English fluency skills are worth investing your time and effort into for cultural or commercial outreach.

Helena works with new Canadians and established professionals, entrepreneurs and service providers to define their message so that it makes them money and helps them get the results they want. <http://helenakaufman.com> Twitter, Face Book or invite her on LinkedIn @HelenaKaufman