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INTERNATIONAL

A British scientist coming to Vienna for a conference on human genetics or Polish designer negotiating with prospective clients in Stockholm or Polish tourist chatting with local shopkeepers in Leeds: they all communicate successfully in "English", but which "English" is it, precisely, so that it is not the language you find in that street and shop or British television news, but rather a range of "Englishes", with enough of common features to make it viable as a means of communication.

In fact, "English" has acquired a plural form - "Englishes" - to refer to any of the varieties of English spoken around the world, such as Australian English, Canadian English, South African English, Cockney English, American English and, to put them all somewhat loosely, British English.

The international spread of English is now taken for granted, but we still acknowledge the implications of the spread, especially in terms of the "Englishes" that have resulted from it. Indeed, only conservative and strident American Englishes regard the international spread of the language.

Nevertheless, there are serious attempts to smooth out the various forms of international English. The intention is to remove the distinction between British and American spelling, the adjustment of which at the moment takes up so much of our time conscientiously.

At the moment the dictionary has reached the stage of being as flat as a pancake: all disputes over spelling will die, "color" or "colour" will still be printed as correct, however, we haven't yet reached the point where we can expect that either system will die, but we will be working with the intention.

The concept of international English is a relatively new because there is not a conventional speaker of the variety, just varieties of regional varieties happen to meet in an international town, so it will only be a slight modification to each particular regional variety, to create a number of English varieties which then meet and have decided some by force, by need, by accident or international agreement: perhaps the sense of an international community will grow stronger and the need, in a sense of growing of an international community will become more apparent.

Whatever, progress will be made.