

**Activity**

As you read through the following reasons, consider these two points:

- ☐ Which reasons are the most relevant to the setting in which you live?
- ☐ Are the scenarios that Crystal outlines still the same as they were in 2003 when his list was published, or are you aware of any changing circumstances in relation to your own and/or other countries?

Historical reasons

Because of the legacy of British or American imperialism, the country's main institutions may carry out their proceedings in English. These include the governing body (e.g. parliament), government agencies, the civil service (at least at senior levels), the law courts, national religious bodies, the schools, and higher educational institutions, along with their related publications (textbooks, proceedings, records, etc.). [As regards historical reasons, see also the reading text in D8, where Pennycook (2010) discusses how a different outcome of the Second World War would have led to a very different global linguistic landscape.]

Internal political reasons

Whether a country has imperial antecedents or not, English may have a role in providing a neutral means of communication between its different ethnic groups as it does, for example, in India. A distinctive local variety of English may also become a symbol of national unity or emerging nationhood. The use of English in newspapers, on radio, or on television, adds a further dimension.

External economic reasons

The USA's dominant economic position acts as a magnet for international business and trade, and organisations wishing to develop international markets are thus under considerable pressure to work with English. The tourist and advertising industries are particularly English-dependent, but any multinational business will wish to establish offices in the major English-speaking countries.

Practical reasons

English is the language of international air traffic control, and is currently developing its role in international maritime, policing, and emergency services. It is the chief language of international business and academic conferences, and the leading language of international tourism.

Intellectual reasons

Most of the scientific, technological, and academic information in the world is expressed in English, and over 80 per cent of all the information stored in electronic retrieval systems is in English (but see A8 for more recent

figures). Closely related to this is the concern to have access to the philosophical, cultural, religious, and literary history of Western Europe, either directly or through the medium of an English translation. In most parts of the world, the only way most people have access to such authors as Goethe or Dante is through English. Latin performed a similar role in Western Europe for over a thousand years.

Entertainment reasons

English is the main language of popular music (particularly hip hop), and permeates popular culture and its associated advertising. It is also the main language of satellite broadcasting, home computers, and video games, as well as of such international illegal activities as pornography and drugs. [To this can be added that recently English has become the lingua franca of the performing arts (Nicoline Vanharskamp, personal communication).]

To the above points made by Crystal we could add *personal advantage/prestige* since, in many cultures, the ability to speak English is perceived as conferring higher status on the speaker.

Crystal also adds a final section 'Some wrong reasons'. These concern beliefs that English is "inherently a more logical or beautiful language than others, easier to pronounce, simpler in grammatical structure, or larger in vocabulary" (see also the reading in D6 as regards the myth that English has a larger vocabulary than other languages). As Crystal points out, "this kind of reasoning is the consequence of unthinking chauvinism or naïve linguistic thinking", and it is impossible to compare languages objectively in such ways. English, for example, may have few inflectional endings, but also has very complex syntax, and this has not prevented it from being learned and used around the world. So a third question for you to consider is:

- ❑ Why do you think beliefs about the intrinsic linguistic superiority of English persist?