The spread of English during the colonial period

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The anglophone world today

Dark blue regions: English as first language
Light blue regions: English as second language
A New and Accurate Map of the World (1627) by the English cartographer John Speed
The colonial world in the late 18th century
The colonial world in the late 19th century
Spread of English in colonial period

Routes taken during the spread of English from the British Isles in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries by the English, Scottish and Irish.
Two halves of the anglophone world

Anglophone Northern Hemisphere
Settled from c. 1600 onwards

Anglophone Southern Hemisphere
Settled from c. 1800 onwards
Some major differences

The northern hemisphere was settled first (after 1600) while the southern hemisphere was settled much later (after 1800). This means that forms of English there are closer to English in south-east England today, e.g. in not having syllable-final /-r/ in words like car or card.

Other major differences between the two hemispheres involve the pronunciation of vowels, e.g. the short front vowels (as in bad, bed, bid) have a raised pronunciation whereas the long vowels and diphthongs (as in tape, time, toy, taught) tend to be lowered and/or retracted.
Main blocks of the anglophone world
'New Englishes'
Second language varieties of English

The main New Englishes regions of South-East Asia

Map showing regions in Africa and Asia where New Englishes are spoken.
Several factors are responsible for the types of English which have arisen outside Europe during the colonial period, roughly from the early 17th to the late 19th century. Early settlers went to the New World, first to the Caribbean then to eastern Canada and the later United States (to form the original 13 colonies). Some people left the British Isles of their own free will, some were forcibly deported, some served as indentured labourers.

At the new locations, settlers sometimes mixed with indigenous peoples, with other settlers or with slaves from Africa. This mixture had an effect on the forms of English which arose at the new locations.
The Caribbean Sea with its islands
Main periods in the history of the Caribbean

• Pre-Columbian Period
  (before 1492)

• The Spanish Period
  (after 1492)

• British Involvement
  (from the early 1600s onwards)
Source and destination of slave transportation
The Trade Triangle

Caribbean goods produced by slaves
1) Tobacco
2) Cane Sugar
3) Cotton (later southern USA)
The first Caribbean islands to be settled by the British were St Kitts (1623/4) in the north-east and Barbados (1627) in the south-east corner of the Caribbean Basin. When this island filled up, English-speakers left for other locations, especially for Jamaica after it was taken by the British in 1660.

Initially, the Caribbean was populated by whites, during the so-called ‘Homestead Phase’, later by blacks taken from West Africa as slaves and transported across the Atlantic along the infamous Middle Passage.

Many other smaller islands were populated by English-speakers and many changed hands between the colonial maritime powers, namely England, France, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands. Most of these islands gain their independence in the mid 20th century.

In the late 17th century a number of Caribbean slaves were transported to the south-east of the United States to work on the large cotton plantations. Later slaves were transported directly. The system of slavery lasted until the end of the American Civil War (1860-65).
Anglophone locations in the Caribbean

The Caribbean
(names of main anglophone pidgins are shown in red)

Anglophone settlement after mid 17th century

Barbados, first English settlers arrive in 1620s
Emigration to the United States

During the 18th century upwards of a quarter of a million Scots and Ulster Scots emigrated to the east of America. They settled in states along the coast from Pennsylvania down to South Carolina. Many of them also settled in the Appalachian mountains and the speech of this region shows many traces of Scots input to this day.

Later in the 19th century many millions fled Ireland as a result of famine (e.g. the Great Famine of 1845-8). These largely Catholic emigrants settled in the cities of the north-eastern United States, such as New York and Boston. Because they were considerably later than the Scots their speech did not have a comparable effect on American English, though locally there are traces of this Irish English input.
East Coast of United States (roughly from Pennsylvania down to South Carolina). Destination of many Ulster Scots emigrants in the 18th century (up to 250,000).
Note the concentration of dialect differences in the eastern United States which is due to the diverse nature of early emigration to this area.

Main dialect regions of the United States

- General American
- Mid-West
- Northern
- New England
- New York
- Ocracoke
- Midland (possible region)
- Gullah
- Southern (with original African American English)
- Lower South
- Chicano English
- Ozark Plateau
The Southern Hemisphere

The anglophone southern hemisphere consists primarily of South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. These are countries where ‘settler English’ continues.

Irish input to South Africa was minimal but quite significant in Australia where many Irish were deported in the early days of the country as a penal colony (in the later few decades of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries). Later there was normal emigration to Australia and to New Zealand where mass emigration began after the treaty of Waitangi between the British and the local Maori in 1840.
The early anglophone settlement of South Africa
The transportation of speakers from India to Natal

Shift of population from India to South Africa (Natal) due to shortage of labour after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834. Transportation took place between 1860 and 1911, mainly of speakers of Bhojpuri. Their descendants are speakers of South African Indian English.
Transportation to Australia / New Zealand

Settlement of Australia from 1788 onwards, first with convicts later with regular emigrants. New Zealand is settled somewhat later (mid 19th century).
Both Australia (1788 - ) and New Zealand (1840 - ) had mostly English input with some Scottish and considerable Irish input (between 25% and 30% of the original settlers). However, their speech was not continued at either location, probably because of the dominance of English speech models, given that both countries were colonies of Britain. Today Australian and New Zealand English sound like southern British English.
Literature on Varieties of English
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Edited by Raymond Hickey

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World Englishes
The Study of New Linguistic Varieties
Rajend Mesthrie and Rakesh M. Bhatt

Oxford Guide to World English
TOM McARTHUR