

Project Week Spring Semester 21 – English Around the World

How did English become the most spoken language around the world? What are the characteristics of different varieties of English? What traditions, myths, music, movies, places, and events have shaped the English language? These are just a few of the questions our group investigated during this year's spring semester project week.

English Around the World began with a photo tour of the United Kingdom, Ireland, the USA, Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and India. Each of these countries boasts unique landmarks, scenery, cultural items, and activities. Through these images we were able to reminisce about the many places we have visited as well as identify interesting topics we would like to learn more about. From this starting point, the students created their personal focus for the project.

Vocabulary and pronunciation in various English-speaking countries was another element of our exploration. Learning to recognize the characteristics of American English vs British English as well as comparing special words and expressions in New Zealand, Australia, Scotland, Ireland, and India was both challenging and fun! If you are wondering about the expression "brekky at Maccas," this is how Australians invite you for "breakfast at McDonald's." "A bonnie wee lassie" is what a Scot calls a small, pretty girl. Finally, there is no need to worry when an Indian tells you he is "passing out" – no one is fainting because it actually means he is graduating from school.

A highlight of this week was certainly the Zoom interviews with native speakers from different English-speaking countries. Oxfordshire, England, where we spoke with three students attending Radley College, a traditional boys' boarding school, was our first virtual stop of the week. Next, we interviewed a 17-year-old student in New Jersey, USA, where we learned about life in a typical high school, including things like team sports, clubs, and even prom. In Sydney, Australia, we discussed the effects of last year's devastating bushfires, what it is like to attend university during the pandemic, and the Aboriginals. Our final interview took place with a young woman in Bangalore, India who said, "English is an important language in India. Because of the many different Indian languages, English is the one that unites our country."

After reflecting on the different interviews, especially the ways these firsthand accounts changed our ideas about the role of English in the world today, our students had the following to say:

We now have more insight into the lives in the different countries than we had before. Reading or listening to the news can only inform about factual or statistical information. Through the interviews, we saw the respective countries through the eye of a local person and therefore, we have a deeper understanding of all the different cultures. – Sofie, Nara, Zoe, Vidhuscha

We interviewed Casey from the USA, and the most interesting fact was that she had some slang words which we also use in Switzerland. We think it's because a lot of teenagers use an app called TikTok. The slang words she used were "sus" which means suspect/ suspicious and "cap" which means that's a lie or that's not true. It is also really interesting that the corona situation became better since Joe Biden is President. – Eva, Livia, Melina

Australia was in the spotlight during our project week. We explored her national character through folk music using the song "Waltzing Matilda", the Aussie's unofficial national anthem. In addition, a look at a sad period of the nation's history with the ballad "Took the Children Away" and the movie *Rabbit-proof Fence* helped us to learn about the Stolen Generation and the continuing struggles of the aboriginal people.

Not only history but also numerous current events were examined during our project. Our students researched and presented news stories and headlines from eight different English-speaking countries. For example, did you know that McDonald's employees in the US are fighting for an increase in their minimum wage or that in the effort to support equal rights, South African women could soon be able to practice polygamy? Through this inspection of the latest happenings, our students expanded their knowledge of important issues in the English-speaking world.

Finally, the groups presented their personal focus topics on Friday. We learned a traditional Maori Haka from New Zealand, explored mythical characters in Ireland, and examined the biggest movie industry in the world - it is not Hollywood, but Bollywood! The history of American music as well as traditional dishes and drinks from several English-speaking countries rounded off our memorable week.

