

“Globish” and the open-sourcing of English

Globish is a much simplified form of English used, especially in business, where neither party is a native speaker of English. Globish is how a Venezuelan talks to a Chinese, or a Turk to an Algerian.

Unlike “Spanglish”, for instance, it is not a meld of English and something else. And unlike Esperanto, Globish arose naturally.

Its rise would seem to illustrate the saying that Britain and the United States are two countries separated by a common language. Jean-Paul Nerrière, the former IBM executive credited with coining the term “Globish”, noticed that at his company’s international conferences, Americans and Britons would tend to be paralysed by the endless minor differences between their two brands of English. Meanwhile, people from other parts of the world would plunge ahead into conversation with one another, heedless of their bad grammar and limited vocabulary.

I’m not sure I buy this. Somehow the idea of an American at a conference hesitating to chat up a British contact for fear the latter would say something like “different to” seems unlikely. On the other hand, anyone who has ever travelled

outside his or her linguistic comfort zone has probably found how helpful just a few words in a common language can be.

British language maven Robert McCrum has called Globish “the worldwide dialect of the third millennium”. A blogger riffing on Mr McCrum compared Globish to “open source” software – available for anyone to adapt to his own uses.

Nerrière’s book, “Don’t Speak English, Parlez Globish”, was a bestseller in France. His codification of Globish has a vocabulary of just 1,500 words – only a fraction of the 615,000 or so of the Oxford English Dictionary.

Globish, Iman Kurdi wrote in the Arab News, “is based on short sentences, simple grammar, repetition and the avoidance of complex syntax. It is ugly, clumsy and certainly painful to the ears of native English speakers, but,” he continued, “it is also democratic and accessible... It is something to get you by.”

So, if you can’t learn English, try Globish. It isn’t pretty. But it works.

Adapted from an article by Ruth Walker- June 30, 2010

Read the text and find the words that mean:

1. mix, mixture
2. (*infinitive form*) to move (into something); to suddenly start (doing something)
3. not giving attention to; not being worried about
4. (*infinitive form*) - (*here*) to believe that something is true
5. a person with good knowledge or understanding of a subject
6. (*infinitive form*) to use somebody’s words as a starting point

2 Read the text again and answer these questions.

1. What is Globish? Who is it especially used by?
2. How does it differ from Spanglish and Esperanto?
3. Who was the term Globish coined by? What do you think the term stands for?
4. What gave him the idea of Globish?
5. What book did he write? What odd word is included in the title?
6. How many words does his codification of Globish include? How many words are there in English?
7. How has Robert McCrum described Globish?
8. What did a blogger compare Globish to? Why?
9. What are the main features of Globish? How may it sound to an English native speaker?
10. What is positive about Globish?

3 Class discussion.

- Do you think that learning Globish would be useful? If so, for whom?
- What do you think of the following comment?
 “Globish reminds me of another failed project called “Basic English” which failed because native English speakers could not remember which words not to use. So it’s time to move forward and adopt a neutral non-national language, taught universally in schools worldwide. As a native speaker, I would prefer Esperanto.”
- “Nerrière says that Globish is correct English. I agree with Nerrière that Globish with 1500 words is not “perfect”, in the sense that you lose nuances. Some grammatical constructions are clumsy. For example, Nerrière suggests, “the son of my brother”, instead of “nephew”. However, “the son of my brother” is correct English.” How do you think you would express the concept? Would you say “the son of my brother” or “nephew”?
- Do you think that Globish is good enough for you, or do you want to speak more correctly?
- Don’t you think that in some social contexts a more correct English is necessary?