English as a World Language (p. 42)
Simplified Version

Most of us communicate with other people every day. We talk to people face to face, on the telephone or through the Internet. Most of this communication is done in our own language. When we communicate with people who do not speak our own language we usually speak English. In all parts of the world there are countries where English is an official language. About 350 million people speak English as their mother tongue. But English is also spoken by many people who learn it as a second language. We believe that 1.2-1.5 billion people speak English.

English is the language we usually use when we speak to people who do not know Norwegian. When two people speak to each other in a language which is not their mother tongue, we say they make use of a lingua franca. As there are so many people in the world who learn English as a second language, English is the world's most important lingua franca.

The English language was spread throughout the world through the British colonies. For 400 years the British had colonies all around the world. When Britain was ruled by Queen Victoria, in the 1800s, 25% of the world's population and 25% of the land belonged to the British Empire. In the 1900s England lost its position as a leading power, but the USA became the new superpower. And therefore the English language kept its international importance.

Today we listen to, read, write and speak English all the time. In most jobs you need to know some English, most of the information on the Internet is in English and for university students most books are in English. English is the most important language for trade, politics and culture.

Checkpoints

1. How many people speak English as their mother tongue?
2. What is a lingua franca?
3. How was the English language spread?
4. How much land belonged to Britain when Queen Victoria ruled the country?
5. Which country became the world's superpower when Britain lost its position?
6. Why do we need to know English today?