

1 Language in cultural context

Chapter 1 The English language

Objectives

By the end of this chapter you will be able to

- understand why the English language became a global language
- understand why there are so many varieties of English
- plan and write a part 1 written task 1
- plan and conduct a part 1 further oral activity.

In this book you will approach the English language as anthropologists. You may think of anthropologists as people who study little-known cultures, deep in the jungle, writing observations in a journal or making recordings of an obscure language; but anthropology is the study of all human cultures, including English-speaking cultures. As students of the English language, you should consider yourselves students of the **Anglophone world**, a vast network of diverse cultures of English speakers which is alive and buzzing around us today, from the street corners of Singapore to the cornfields of Iowa.

You will not have to look hard to find evidence to learn about these cultures. All you have to do is look at film posters, text messages, advertisements or websites. These are all carriers of cultural information, and for the sake of our study we will call these pieces of evidence 'texts'. You may think of texts as books, but you will be using a much broader definition of the term. Texts are the covers of magazines, the graffiti found on billboards, the poetry read in cafés, or the speeches of politicians. They are manuals, private letters and even Tweets. Texts are little mirrors that reflect cultural values. You should approach them with the same care and scrutiny that an anthropologist would use.

Your study of Anglophone cultures is going to take you around the world. While you may often think of English-speaking countries as places such as the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA) or Australia, you will also explore countries like Nigeria, South Africa and the Caribbean. You will have to learn more about these places in order to understand the meaning of the texts in this coursebook. Your goal will not be to make generalisations about Anglophone cultures (such as how the British are good at hiding their emotions – the famous British 'stiff upper lip') but to learn to appreciate how **culture** and **context** help shape the meaning of texts.

In this chapter you will find out how culture and context help shape the meaning of texts and tell us more about the Anglophone world. In Unit 1.1 you will explore the reasons why English has become the language of global communication. You will also see, in Unit 1.2, how different varieties of English reflect people's social, regional and historical background. At the end of the chapter you will find two assessment sections, with a sample part 1 written task and a sample part 1 further oral activity.

Key terms



Anglophone world refers to the places in the world where English is spoken.

Text is any written work or transcribed piece of speech. For the sake of our studies, we will think of texts as clues that lead to a better understanding of one of the many Anglophone cultures, and these clues can range from e-mails to poems and from advertisements and posters to books.

Culture can have two different meanings:

- 1 It describes the values, goals, convictions and attitudes that people share in a society. Parts 1 and 2 of the IB English language and literature course are particularly interested in this aspect of culture.
- 2 It refers to the fine arts and a society's appreciation of the arts. Parts 3 and 4 of the course are particularly concerned with this, through a study of literature.

Context refers to the circumstances that surround the writing and the reading of a text. Trying to understand why a text was written (the purpose) and whom it was written for (the audience) are good starting points for understanding context.

Higher level

HL

It does not always have to be your teacher who finds appropriate texts to study for part 1. Hunting for interesting texts is a challenging and worthwhile activity for you as well. You can create a classroom 'library' of texts that explores a wide range of cultures. Try to include as many different types of text as possible, from letters to brochures, and articles to advertisements.

Quick Quiz

- 1 How many people speak English as a native language?
a 200 million c 600 million
b 400 million d 1 billion
- 2 How many people speak English as an additional language?
a 300 million c 600 million
b 400 million d 1 billion
- 3 How many people are learning English today as a foreign language?
a 300 million c 600 million
b 400 million d 2 billion

'There is no retreat from English as the world language; no retreat from an English-speaking world.'

Sir Shridath Ramphal (1928–)

- Answers**
- 1 c. According to the Wolfram Alpha database 600 million people speak English as a native language.
 - 2 c and d. Between 600 million and 1 billion people speak English as an additional language, depending on the source of the information and the definition of 'additional language'.
 - 3 d. Over 2 billion people are learning English, according to Jay Walker (see the further resources suggestion on page 6).

Unit 1.1 English as a global language

The number of English language users in the world is expanding as rapidly today as it has for the past 400 years. Between 1602, when Elizabeth was queen, and 1952, when Elizabeth II became queen, the number of native speakers of English increased 50-fold, from 7 to 250 million speakers. At the height of its power it was claimed that the sun never set on the British Empire. In fact, the sun still does not set on the English-speaking world. Today there are more people who speak English as an additional language than there are native speakers of English, and English is the only language for which that is true. It is the world's number one **lingua franca**, which is to say that it is spoken by many people who do not share a native language.

Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian philosopher and writer, once said that the world is becoming a '**global village**'. He was referring to the way in which people with similar interests are reaching out and making contact with each other, forming networks through various media and a common language. English has become the common language that facilitates this process of **convergence**. In linguistics, the term *convergence* refers to the phenomenon of people coming together, making connections and accommodating for each other through their use of language.

Of all the languages in the world, why has the English language become the world's number one lingua franca? Why is English the language of the global village? We will explore three answers to these questions, focusing on the British Empire, economics and fashion.

The British Empire

Let us begin our study of the global nature of English by reading an extract (Text 1.1) from a communication phrase book from the International Maritime Organization (IMO). It demonstrates the interconnected nature of McLuhan's global village and the need for English as a lingua franca.

Text 1.1 IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases, International Maritime Organization, 2001

In order to prevent miscommunication and accidents in harbours and seas around the world, the IMO has been developing standard methods for communication since 1973. According to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping, officers of ships over a certain size are required to speak and understand Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) in English. The SMCP was designed for native and non-native speakers of English in such a way that it reduces the risk of any miscommunication. Text 1.1 is from a book used by Dutch seafarers containing many Dutch-to-English translations of maritime vocabulary and expressions, all of which have been approved by the IMO.

MAYDAY

- THIS IS TWO-ONE-ONE-TWO-THREE-NINE-SIX-EIGHT-ZERO MOTOR VESSEL "BIRTE" CALL SIGN DELTA ALPHA MIKE KILO
- POSITION SIX TWO DEGREES ONE ONE DECIMAL EIGHT MINUTES NORTH
- ZERO ZERO SEVEN DEGREES FOUR FOUR MINUTES EAST
- I AM ON FIRE AFTER EXPLOSION
- I REQUIRE FIRE FIGHTING ASSISTANCE
- SMOKE NOT TOXIC OVER

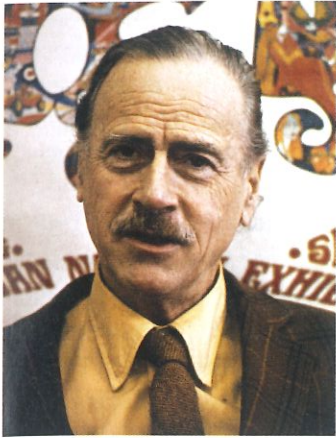


Figure 1.1 Marshall McLuhan (1911–80) popularised the term *global village*.



Figure 1.2 The Port of Hong Kong is a modern-day example of the influence of the British Empire on the language of seafaring.

Key terms

Lingua franca is a language spoken by people who do not share a native language.

Global village describes how members of a social group can be spread around the world, but be interconnected through various media.

Convergence, in linguistics, describes what happens when people come together and accommodate for each other through their use of language.

Text 1.1 could be spoken anywhere on the open seas or in any port around the world. How did English become the language of the seas? If you look at Figure 1.3, a map of the English-speaking world, you can see that many ports, from Hong Kong to Kingston, are historically connected to the UK through the British Empire. In your studies of the Anglophone world, it is important to recognise the historical significance of the British Empire. It is not difficult to see why English became the language of the shipping industry.

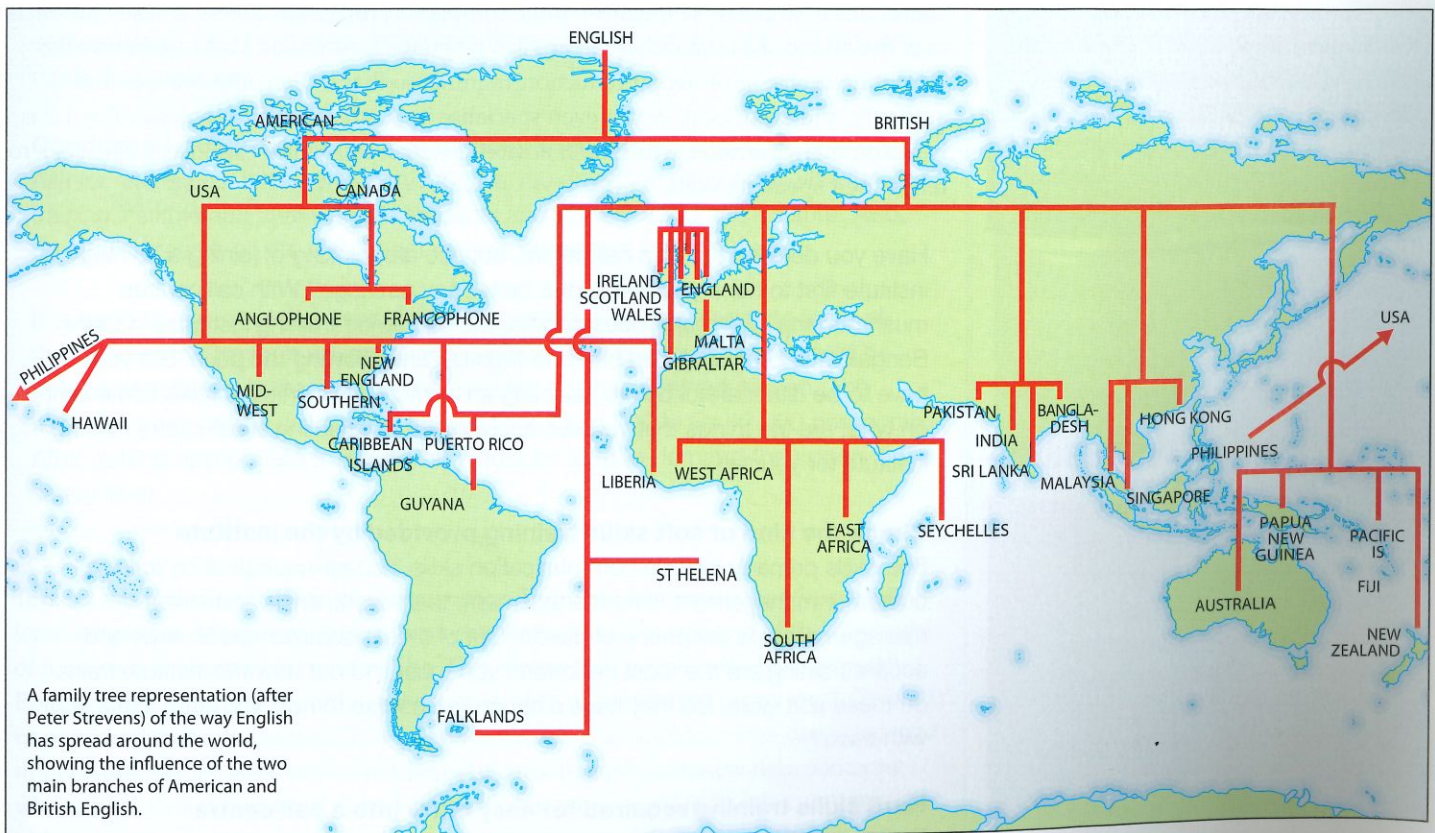


Figure 1.3 English speaking countries around the world.

discussion

- 1 How does Text 1.1 define its speaker? Where do you see evidence that this is the language of ocean-going vessels?
- 2 Although it is said that English is the language of the seas because of the British Empire, you can see that the IMO uses American English. 'International Maritime Organization' is spelled with a 'z'. Why do you think this is?

Further resources

The Story of English is a TV series from 1986 that documents the rise of the English language from its Anglo-Saxon origins to its global dominance today. It covers a range of topics, including Shakespeare's influence on the language and interesting accents from all over the world.

discussion

- 1 What do you know about the target audience for Text 1.2? Where do you find evidence in this text that indicates this?
- 2 How does the text indicate that there are direct economic benefits for call centre workers who speak English fluently without an Indian accent?

This map helps you imagine the powerful presence of the British Empire and the linguistic footprint it left on the world. You may wonder why people around the world continued to speak English even after British troops went home. In order to answer this, we must look to the economic ties of people in former British colonies such as India.

Economic factors

Economic factors have also determined the success of the English language around the world. This can be seen best within the borders of India where over a hundred dialects are spoken. The English language, however, is one of the few languages that connect people from all corners of this vast country. In India today there are many economic advantages of learning English. Not only have Indians learned English to overcome linguistic barriers within their own country, but economically India has become very outward looking and many Indians have learned English to compete in the world market. Figure 1.4 shows the line of work taken up by many Indians in call centres. Text 1.2 shows how many Indians are looking for training to improve their accents and increase their employment opportunities in these offices that communicate with the USA and the UK regularly. Keep in mind that this text was written 63 years after the British left India.

Text 1.2 Call centre training

The text can best be understood in the context of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), a phenomenon that has taken hold around the world for several decades. Large companies from the West have outsourced their customer care and telesales departments to India. Consequently, many Indians have shown an aptitude for learning the required communication skills. As Indians handle complaints, run credit checks and sell products over the phone, a command of the English language is essential. Many agencies offer 'accent neutralising' or 'accent reduction' training, so that Indian employees sound authentic and even 'local'. Some even specialise in Scottish or Welsh accents. Text 1.2 is based on many websites which offer advice to Indian call centre employees who seek to refine their speaking skills.

Have you decided to join a call centre, but you are thinking of joining a training institute first to hone your skills for a better pay package? With call centres mushrooming in all major cities in India, the call centre training institutes in Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad and Mumbai are following the pace. But you have to be ultra careful before selecting an institute. This article throws some light on what are the things that you can analyse before selecting a call centre training institute for yourself.

Check the kind of soft skills training provided by the institute

Soft skills primarily include communication skills, accent-neutralisation training, customer management, time management, team work, crisis and stress management and telephone etiquette. Out of these, communication skills and accent training are the most important; you must find out how the institute trains on these soft skills. Do they have a structured course to help you learn these skills with ease?

Hard skills training required for easy entry into a call centre

To support your soft skills, you need to learn some other things like working on the computer and applications like MS Word, MS Excel and MS PowerPoint.

You would need to learn how to use all the basic tools that are used in the call centre such as VoIP telephone equipment, the desktop computer and customer care management, applications, etc. If you want to get into a technical call centre, then preliminary training on that product or service must be given. You must also learn the terminology used in a call centre.

Find out if the instructors are experienced and qualified

Insist on meeting a few trainers and instructors in the call centre training institute to get an idea about their teaching style. Don't hesitate to ask about the qualifications and experience of the trainers. You may also ask for one trial session, wherein you can attend an actual class at the institute.

Supporting infrastructure and equipment of the call centre training institute

Visit the institute and see if it has the required space, seating capacity, computer systems and other resources to accommodate each student comfortably. Also, find out about the level of personal attention given to each student.

Formal certification for your successful course completion

Find out if the institute provides a formal certification of training or not. This will help you while presenting your qualifications and documents in the interview.

100% quality placement – Is it the truth or just a gimmick?

Does the institute offer guaranteed, reputable placements, as it claims? With the never-ending demand of trained call centre agents, these institutes have become like training/recruitment providers for call centres. Ask the institute about all the call centres where they have placed their candidates in the past and check if they are reputed companies.

Conduct a background check to be absolutely sure

Ask for references. If they are unable to give you any good references, visit the training institute and chat with the students and trainers about the institute. Also, do a quick search on the web to get reviews about that institute if any.

It is good to join a training institute before getting a call centre job to learn all the tricks of the trade. It will make you a trained candidate and you would be able to negotiate a better salary as compared to an un-trained person. The salary for beginners in call centres ranges from Rs. 8 000 to Rs. 12 000 per month. After getting appropriate training, you would be able to demand the upper salary level.

Text 1.2 raises the issue of **language currency**. There are many reasons why people learn languages. Mastering English can bring rewards and at one end of the spectrum of reasons is **instrumental motivation**. This means that people who have learned English can accomplish something through it, such as preventing an accident (Text 1.1) or providing customer service (Text 1.2). What is more, a candidate who can speak and understand English well may have a better chance in a job interview than someone whose English is not as good. It may mean a contract is awarded to one company rather than another. In short, English opens doors.



TOK

In this chapter you have approached Texts 1.1 and 1.2 as a detective would approach a crime scene or an anthropologist would approach an unfamiliar culture. You have had to be entirely objective when studying the language of the texts. But is it possible to be completely objective? How do we avoid **cultural bias** when looking at texts? You may have found it hard to comment on Text 1.2 without making assumptions about the importance of money in Indian society. Is it possible to discuss any text without passing judgement on its cultural values?



Key terms

Cultural bias is not being objective, but judging something from another culture with reference to what is usual in your own culture.

Language currency refers to the value of a language. Many people find English valuable, both financially and intellectually, as it helps them find a better job or acquire more knowledge. It has a high language currency.

Instrumental motivation explains how people often learn languages in order to accomplish something.

Part 1 – Language in cultural context

'If you want to take full advantage of the Internet there is only one way to do it: learn English.'

Michael Specter (1955–)



Figure 1.4 Many Indians learn English in order to work in call centres. They deal with phone calls from all over the Anglophone world, regarding everything from insurance queries to customer service.

Key terms



Integrative motivation refers to learning a language in order to become an integrated member of a particular society.

Bilingualism is the phenomenon of people using two or more languages regularly.

Further resources



Find the short film *Jay Walker on the world's English mania* on the Internet at www.ted.com/talks/jay_walker_on_the_world_s_english_mania.html

Jay Walker talks about the mania for learning English at the beginning of the 21st century and illustrates his talk with some fascinating images of stadiums full of Chinese people learning English. He explains how English is seen as a ticket to a better future in a lot of countries around the world.

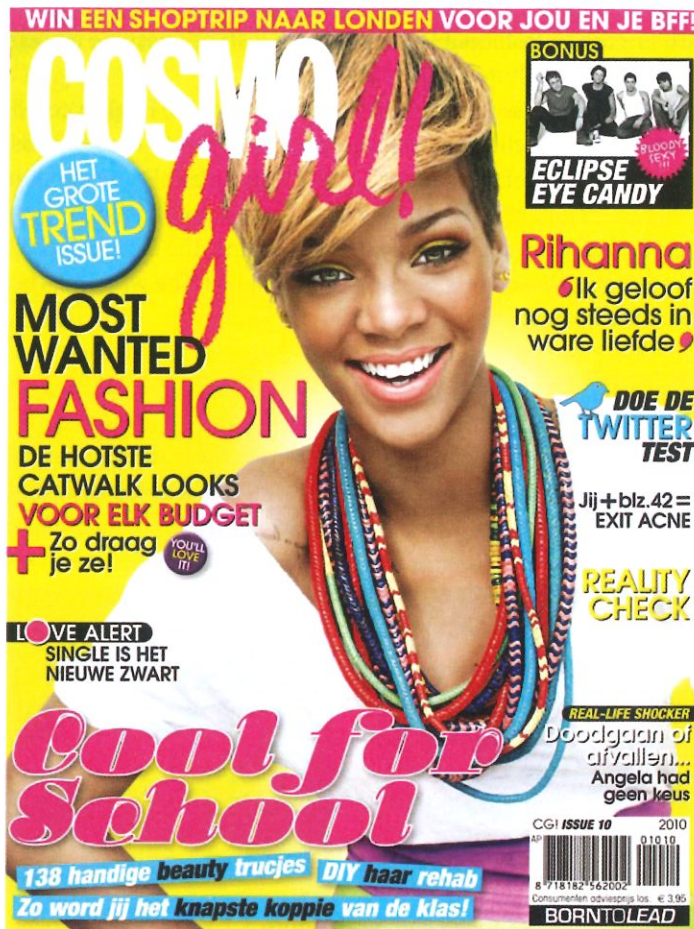
At the other end of the spectrum of why people learn languages is **integrative motivation**, which refers to learning a language in order to integrate and become a member of a society. Compare the possible reasons for learning English as opposed to Finnish. If you are learning Finnish, most likely your interests lie in living among the 5 million Finnish speakers in Finland and Sweden. Perhaps you are married to a Finnish person and you want to communicate with your in-laws or colleagues about local events and culture. The language is very bound to its culture. English, on the other hand, especially in a global context, is becoming less bound to one particular culture, which is the result of its high currency and status as a lingua franca.

In India, proficiency in the English language can indicate how 'upwardly mobile' a person is. There is a varying degree of **bilingualism** in India, meaning that people regularly use multiple languages, including English, for different purposes. There is also evidence that Indian people are making the English language their own. Studies by V.S. Dubey and David Crystal show that English words used in Indian matrimonial adverts (where people advertise for a prospective partner), for example, can have their own special meaning. In the context of the adverts, a phrase such as *clean-shaven* actually means 'Punjabi, but not bearded' and *respectable* means 'wealthy'. In short, Indians have given new meanings to English words.

In this discussion on why Indians learn English you will have discovered that language is an expression of identity. Why people learn English says a lot about who they are. In order to understand why English has become the cross-cultural language of the world, we need to recognise how people identify with Anglophone cultures. There is something fashionable about these cultures which attracts people to learn the language.

Fashion

Anglophone culture is spread around the world today through influential media such as MTV and the BBC. For many people, the English language has become associated with blue jeans, MP3 players and celebrities like David Beckham. Text 1.3 shows how the English language has seeped into the Dutch language. Both teenagers and adults find it fashionable to use English words in their daily speech. This is testimony to the influence of popular Anglophone cultures.

Text 1.3 *Cosmo Girl* (Dutch edition), August 2009

'There is no more reason for language to change than there is for automobiles to add fins one year and remove them the next, for jackets to have three buttons one year and two the next.'

Paul Postal (1936–)

discussion

- 1 With reference to Text 1.3, can you see how the English language has been integrated into the Dutch language?
- 2 A word like *hotste* contains the Dutch suffix *-ste*, which is a superlative, attached to the English root *hot*. The Dutch word *hotste* can be translated into English by the word *hottest*. Can you find more examples?
- 3 Why do you think teenage girls borrow English words to express themselves in Dutch?
- 4 Do you think, from this example, that the English language is invading or corrupting the Dutch language?

Text 1.3 draws our attention to a phenomenon known as **language borrowing**, where one culture imports words from another language. The Dutch are not the first to import English words into their language. The Japanese say *karisamas* (Christmas), and the French say *le weekend* (the weekend). We call these words **loanwords**, and they are the result of different cultures coming into contact with each other. In fact, as the British came into contact with many cultures during the expansion of the British Empire, they too borrowed words from other languages. The word *jazz* came from West African languages while *sofa* is from Arabic and *boomerang* from the Aboriginal people of Australia. These are just a few of the great many words that English has picked up as it has come into contact with other cultures.

Why do people borrow words from other languages? There are several reasons. A language may prove insufficient to describe certain ideas or sentiments. A concept may be foreign by nature, such as Christmas for the Japanese. Last but not least, words are borrowed from other languages for reasons of fashion. Although the Dutch have many sufficient words to describe the latest trends, English proves more fashionable. We see this to such an extent in Text 1.3 that a native speaker of English can read almost the entire cover.

In this unit, you have so far explored several reasons why English has become the world's number one lingua franca. The growth of the British Empire around the world accounted for the initial spread of the English language. After the decline of the British Empire, however, English remained an important world language for reasons of economics and fashion. You explored one case of English in India in Text 1.2, but there

Key terms

Language borrowing describes the act of importing words into one language from another culture's language.

Loanwords are the words that one culture borrows and incorporates from another language.

Part 1 – Language in cultural context

Further resources



English as a Global Language by David Crystal explores the rise of English as the dominant lingua franca in the world. He looks at 'new' Englishes and the history of familiar varieties of English. This book is as an excellent starting point for anyone interested in the global nature of English.

are many similar situations of English still being used in former British colonies such as Hong Kong and South Africa. Through trade and commerce English has connected people with no common language. To this day, economic and financial reasons motivate people to learn English. A fashionable language, English has become associated with successful trends and the cultures that create them.

Having been so closely associated with the British Empire, English could have suffered as a result of the decline of the Empire and the growth of nationalism in its former colonies. Yet in spite of the connection with the British Empire and the spread of Anglophone culture, the English language has become a powerful tool. Using English, Mahatma Ghandi once united the people of India against the British. Today, Chinese businesses hire Belgian consultants to teach them English. The world has become a global village thanks to English.

Activity 1.1

Study Figures 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7. Why is English used in these three situations? Explain their contexts with reference to the reasons for using English explored in this unit.



Figure 1.5 English is often used to make a point in demonstrations and protests.



Figure 1.6 Bilingual signs like these can be found in major airports all over the world.



Figure 1.7 Kaká often displays his religious convictions on his football shirt.