

Programming Languages and the English Language

Throughout the history of computing there has been an overwhelming trend to use the English language as the basis in the design of computer programming languages. There is a simple reason for this as almost half of all programming languages were designed in English speaking countries, with well over a quarter of all languages coming from the United States. This trend is not just with programming languages either as computer BIOS (basic input output system) is almost always in English as well. A programming language is an artificial language that is used to write computer programs that in turn control the behavior of a computer. A programming language will have its own syntax and semantics along with a group of keywords and code libraries that define its structure and behavior. These keywords are normally based on the English language, and this is especially the case with the most dominant and popular programming languages on the market. What this means is that the English language has been used to code most of the computer programs on Earth, even when the programs made are not being run in English speaking countries. {mosgoogle center} There are many programming languages that don't use English words as their base, but these are normally much less popular worldwide than the ones that do. There are Dutch programming languages, French programming languages, Russian, Spanish and even Icelandic ones as well as many others. It is hard to imagine any of these becoming popular internationally and all are probably destined to a future confined within the borders of their own country. There are also some more esoteric programming languages out there that are not based on any natural language at all, but most of these are only used for theoretical purposes. The Internet also has a very strong English bias with about 80% of all web content being written and stored in English. While there is some controversy about this figure, even those that dispute it still place English content well above 60%. This is a huge figure when you realise that English is not even the most dominant language spoken in the world. It is in fact the second most widely spoken tongue with Mandarin being the first. The same reasons that have made English the most dominant language online have also made it the most dominant in the context of programming. Historical reasons are important as mentioned above, computers and the Internet originated from English speaking nations. English is also a popular second language for people from non English speaking countries, and because of this more people have at least a moderate understanding of it than say Mandarin or French. There are probably some very deep consequences in having a particular language being so dominant within programming worldwide. Language shapes our perception of the world and filters reality accordingly, and this manipulation is taking place within computer programs on a very abstract level that affects all computer users.