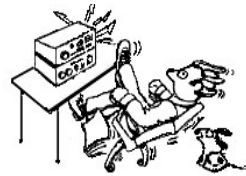


The Elmer's Corner



Title: **How can I work a Ham in another country where English is a foreign language?
Are all Hams required to speak and identify their stations in English?**

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I received these questions from a Ham new to HF who was wondering how he could communicate with foreign Hams when English is not their native language. He had heard that international law required Hams in all countries to speak and identify their stations in English. Is this true?

Direct Answer:

It is a fact that English has become the international language of Amateur Radio by convention, but there are no international or domestic laws that require Hams, in any country, to speak English on the air, or to identify their stations in English.

Who Governs Amateur Radio? (short form)

Amateur Radio is governed by International Law just as is any broadcasting entity, such as short wave broadcasting and domestic radio and television. However, each country is allowed flexibility in applying those laws, so long as the implementation of the law does not contravene International Law.

The international governing body is the **International Telecommunications Union (ITU)** headquarter in Geneva, Switzerland (www.itu.int/en/Pages/default.aspx) which is a part of the United Nations. The working group of the ITU dedicated to establishing and coordinating radio telecommunications, including satellite communications, is the Radiocommunication Sector (ITU-R) (www.itu.int/ITU-R/index.asp?category=information&rlink=rhome&lang=en).

The ITU-R is the reason we have coordinated, worldwide Shortwave, VHF and UHF bands. It's the reason you can make contact with Hams world wide on 20 meters, for example. The frequency allocation for Hams worldwide on 20m is the same, although the application of privileges within the band are coordinated by each country, so long as they do not contravene ITU-R guidelines. Although all bands have the same coordinated frequencies, the actual frequencies available to Hams differs by ITU Region. In some parts of the world (ITU Region 2 for instance) the entire 40 meter band is available from 7.000mhz through 7.350mhz. However other regions limit access up to 7.200mhz, to accommodate commercial shortwave broadcasters. International band plans can be found at this link (www.iaru.org/bandplans.html).

ITU-R International Guidelines for Amateur Radio:

International Guidelines for amateur radio operation, as defined at the World Radio Communications Conference of 2007 (WRC-07) can be found at this link (<http://life.itu.int/radioclub/rr/fr.htm>). A table of contents can be found on the left side of the page. Clicking on an article downloads a small PDF file. The subpart governing station identification is Article 19 (ART 19).

Provisions of Article 19:

There are no provisions in ART 19 stating that Amateur Radio Stations must communicate or identify in English, or any other language. Simply stated, stations are to identify in a manner and mode that can be easily understood. There are no provision for the language used in actual communications.

Why is English the International Language of Amateur Radio?

Many standards in technology are a reflection of what is most dominant, as apposed to what is best from a technical or social viewpoint.

English was simply the first widely used language in early radio communications. French was not far behind nor was Spanish. English won out simply because there were more Hams using English than any other language. Even Morse Code (CW) is based in the English alphabet, which in itself was derived from an ancient Semitic language, Greek and Roman.

So, on today's Amateur Radio bands, Regardless of mode, you will hear most DX operators using and identifying in English, simply because more Hams internationally use English by convention. In fact, if you monitor a Russian Ham, for instance, working a Ham in Italy, the conversation will most probably occur in English, as it is the common language between both operators.

The second most used language is Spanish. You will hear many more conversations, regardless of mode, in Spanish than any other language except English. Except for some variations, the Spanish alphabet was also derived from the same base source as English, so even in Morse Code, conversations can be easily carried out in Spanish.

In Conclusion:

We in the predominately English speaking world have become spoiled in Amateur Radio. Most of the DX stations we contact, regardless of mode, use English to communicate. It is said that Broken English has become the international language. More people in the world speak English in some form than any other language.

Hams in other countries don't have to learn English to enjoy successful amateur radio contacts and indeed many Hams know just enough English to trade call signs and signal reports before ending the contact. But those Hams who want to achieve the most from Amateur Radio take great care in learning English, and I for one am personally grateful for that!

You too can add to the excitement of international communications by learning just a few words and phrases in another language, say Spanish or French for example. Speaking to a foreign Ham in his own language can lead to a lasting friendship or at least a memorial contact. Imagine the surprise when you come back to a Ham in Spanish! No matter how badly you botch the language, the other Ham will be grateful that you even tried.

Hola mi amigo. Su informe es de 59. Mi nombre es Gene. Mi QTH es Texas. Over.

Questions? You can contact me via w5ddw@arrl.net. See you on the bands!