

The Internet is turning Red



(Hamburg, April 23, 2009) The English language has dominated the Internet since it began, and until recently has had very little competition for its number one position. With China now rising to become one of the fastest growing world powers, and experiencing the highest rate of Internet user growth ever seen, is this the decade we will see the Internet turn red?

bab.la has recently completed a research project aiming to show the gap between spoken languages and languages used on the Internet. Not surprisingly, the research confirms that Chinese is the most widely spoken language in the world. Despite this, it currently lags dramatically behind English on the Internet and is only the second-most used language on this all-important global resource. English is “spoken” on the web by around 450 million people, but Internet user growth in the English-speaking world is slowing. In contrast, the CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Centre) announced that the number of Chinese Internet users increased by 42% in 2008 to a total of 298 million, and has surpassed the USA with its approximately 225 million users for the first time. This high rate of growth is expected to have a significant impact on the Internet in the near future, but exactly how long will it take for these new users to start making a dent in the “English-ness” of the web? According to Erin Gallagher, part of the research team from bab.la, this may be sooner than we thought. “Based on the current levels of growth, we expect to see Chinese overtake English on the web within the next 2-3 years” says Ms Gallagher.

Research from bab.la shows that Chinese is not the only language with the potential to overtake English on the web. India, Bangladesh and Indonesia all have the populations and user growth figures to impact web language statistics. In fact, many now see India as the “new China”, with even more potential for growth and development over the next generation. The bab.la World Languages Map shows that Hindustani is in fact the next most-commonly spoken language after Chinese in Asia, giving further weight to this argument. Hindustani (the term for the associated dialects of Hindi and Urdu) is spoken by more than 900 million people, and yet it currently has a very small Internet presence. India’s widespread potential for infrastructural development and rising purchasing power will positively affect the Internet penetration as it has done in China. Ms Gallagher believes India is in fact a “sleeping giant in the world of languages” and that it has the potential to be as big as China in terms of users and language presence on the net.

The first two decades of the World Wide Web have been the “English years”, the next decade will be Chinese. What is clear is that English is losing its stronghold, and a more worldwide, more accessible, more red web is on the way.

The bab.la World Languages Map can be accessed at <http://en.bab.la/news/world-languages.html>

About bab.la

bab.la (<http://bab.la/>) is an interactive language portal offering bilingual dictionaries, vocabulary lessons, language games, and topical quizzes all free. Currently available in 13 different languages (English, Chinese, German, Spanish, French, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian and Turkish), the site operates on a wiki-style model, allowing users to contribute content and feedback.

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