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Introduction

Although many different varieties of English have been spoken for several centuries, it is only surprisingly recently that the field of study that has become to be known as World Englishes has been established. A key figure in the field is Braj Kachru. His debate with the British linguist Randolph Quirk drew the boundaries between two distinct positions. Quirk’s (1985) position was that a single standardized form of English, based on British English, should be the model for all non-native learners of English. Kachru (1985) took the opposite view and argued that there were many varieties of English, all of which were linguistically equal. In his 1985 paper, Kachru classified Englishes using the now famous “three circles” model. These were concentric circles and he called them the inner, outer and expanding circles. The inner circle countries were those in which English was traditionally the first language of the majority of the speakers. These countries included Great Britain, the United States and Australia. The outer circle countries were those in which English played an official or institutional role and were, typically, postcolonial nations; Nigeria, Kenya, India, Singapore and the Philippines provide examples. The expanding circle countries were those in which English was generally used only as a foreign language which played no institutional or official role within the country; countries such as China and Japan were examples of expanding circle countries.

Kachru’s position on the plurality of Englishes led to the establishment of the World Englishes field of discipline. However, it is probably true to say that, whereas the majority of linguists and applied linguists would agree that there are many linguistically equal varieties of English, the notion that the “best” model for learners of English remains an inner circle variety remains common, not least among the learners themselves. In this chapter, I shall review current developments and debates in the field and conclude with some tentative predictions for the future.

Historical perspectives

Traditionally, it has been common to classify English using the following terms: English as a native language (ENL), English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign
language (EFL). By this classification, ENL is spoken in countries such as Britain and the USA; ESL is spoken where English plays an important intranational role, typically in postcolonial countries such as Singapore and Nigeria; and EFL is spoken only in classrooms in those countries where English has no functional use outside the classroom.

While Kachru’s three circles model, described above, may appear similar to this ENL/ESL/EFL classification, there are two important differences. First, Kachru’s model allows for the existence of many varieties of English and, second, it argues that they are all equally valid for their own contexts. The ENL, ESL and EFL distinction suggests, on the other hand, that there are really only ENL varieties and that these are inherently superior to other varieties. As Kachru (1976) argued some 10 years before presenting his three circles classification:

The strength of the English language is in presenting the Americanness in its American variety, and the Englishness in its British variety. Let us therefore appreciate and encourage the Third World varieties of English too. The individuality of the Third World varieties, such as the Indianness of its Indian variety, is contributing to the linguistic mosaic which the speakers of the English language have created in the English speaking world.

(Kachru 1976: 236)

In the same year, Smith argued for the classification of English as an international auxiliary language (Smith 1976). By this he did not mean that there was a single standard variety of English which could be used by all, but rather that each country which used English would give it its own flavour and character. Other scholars who suggested models of World Englishes include Gorlach, Stevens and McArthur, and these are well summarized in a paper by McArthur (1998). It is Kachru’s three circles model, however, that has proved the most useful, although it has received some criticism (see Jenkins 2003).

Critical issues

One criticism – and this is often aimed at the field of World Englishes as a whole – is that the field is too dependent upon national boundaries. The different Englishes are geographically and nationally determined. In response to this, Kachru points out that English indeed “did travel with the colonisers into regions which had physical realities, with living people, who had names and social, cultural and linguistic realities. The colonies provided locations in which the Raj established its control and implanted the English language” (Kachru 2005: 213). It will be useful at this point to consider the ways in which different varieties of postcolonial English have developed in their transplanted settings. Kachru himself identified three phases through which “non-native institutionalised varieties of English seem to pass” (Kachru 1992: 56). The first phase is where the local variety of English is not recognized by the local community, who prefer an imported, native inner circle variety. The second phase occurs when both the imported inner circle variety and the local variety exist side by side, but the inner circle variety remains the preferred model, especially for formal occasions. The third phase is when the local variety
becomes recognized as the standard and is socially accepted. It is important to point out that these three phases can be seen with inner circle varieties as well as outer circles ones. For example, Australian English was first accepted by the Australian Broadcasting Commission only in the 1950s (Delbridge 1999), and the Macquarie Dictionary, the dictionary of Australian English, was first published only in the early 1980s.

**Current contributions**

**Postcolonial Englishes**

In attempting to come up with a theoretical framework for the development of post-colonial Englishes, Schneider has developed a “Dynamic Model” (Schneider 2007). He argues that “evolving World Englishes typically proceed through five characteristic stages” (Schneider 2010: 381). These stages are:

1. the foundation stage when English is brought to a new territory;
2. the exonormative stabilization stage when the “politically dominant mother country determines the norms of linguistic behaviour”;
3. the nativization stage when the new variety of English is forged, “shaped strongly by phonological and structural transfer – though conservative speakers resent such innovative usage”;
4. the endonormative stabilization stage when the new variety starts to become codified and accepted socially;
5. the differentiation stage when, in “a stable young nation, internal social group identities become more important and get reflected in increasing dialectal differences” (Schneider 2010: 381).

There is, of course, some dispute over which stage a particular variety of English has reached. As an example, I think it can be argued that India has reached the differentiation stage, as Indian English is characterized by a multitude of varieties. The following examples come from Kirkpatrick (2007: 85–6).

The first is a rickshaw driver touting for business:

Hellow sir! Some rickshaw, some bazaar market, some two rupees, some go and come back. Some silk, some sari, some Ganges. I rickshaw driver.

(Mehotra 2000: 49)

The second example is of what is known as “butler English”:

Happy that British time that very happy madam. Now no (laughter) . . . on that time very nice. British time. Money is controlled time. Now rice is at a 1kilo – 2.50. That time get 1 rupee 8 kilo. British time . . . lot of money that is all cheaper. Take eh ones any clothes take 10 rupees you get 1 shirt 1 pant. Now 1 shirt 1 pant you take 100 rupees – no.

(Hosali 2005: 36)
The third example is taken from a teenage journal:

Two rival groups are out to have fun . . . you know generally indulge in dhamal and pass time. So, what do they do? Pick on a bechaara bakra who has entered college.

(D’souza 2001: 152; italics in original)

The next two examples come from literary texts:

She bent her head to receive her mother-in-law’s blessing. “Sat Sri Akal.”
“Sat Sri Akal,” replied Sabhrai lightly touching Champak’s shoulder.
“Sat Sri Akal,” said Sher Singh.
“Live in plenty, live a long age,” replied Sabhrai taking her son’s hand and kissing it.
“Sleep well.”

(From I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, by Kushwant Singh, cited in Kachru 1991: 301)

The second literary example comes from an academic textbook:

Years ago, a slender sapling from a foreign field was grafted by “pale hands” on the mighty and many-branched Indian banyan tree. It has kept growing vigorously and now an organic part of its parent tree, it has spread its own probing roots into the brown soil below. Its young leaves rustle energetically in the strong winds that blow from the western horizon, but the sunshine that warms it and the rains that cool it are from Indian skies, and it continues to draw its vital sap from “this earth, this realm, this India”.

(Naik and Narayan 2004: 253)

These examples from different varieties of Indian English show how local varieties of English become acculturated by local cultures and take on local flavours. The grammar is distinctive – each example has its own distinctive grammatical features – and the vocabulary reflects local cultures through the use of words, many of which are borrowed from local languages, illustrating the hybridity and code-mixing that is so characteristic of World Englishes. For example, in the third example, “dhamal” is a word of Sanskrit origin which now means “dance”, and “bechaara bakra” is Hindi for “poor goat”. The “Sat Sri Akal” of the fourth example is a formulaic Sikh greeting or farewell, meaning “God is truth”. The final example may appear flowery or ornate to speakers of other varieties of English, but its use of extended metaphor gives it an undeniably Indian flavour.

Each of these varieties are geographically determined in the sense that they are varieties of Indian English. However, as Kachru pointed out above, each of these varieties has been developed “with living people, who had names and social, cultural and linguistic realities” (Kachru 2005: 213). In other words, the geographical criterion for the delineation of World Englishes by no means restricts each nation to one variety. On the contrary, when the variety has reached Schneider’s differentiation stage, multiple varieties are
the norm, as is demonstrably the case with both British and American Englishes, for example. Thus, although there is some truth to the argument that “the classification of Englishes into circles or along national boundaries oversimplifies the sociolinguistic realities” (Saraceni 2010: 55), World Englishes certainly allow for the presence of different varieties within a nation.

The use of national boundaries to classify World Englishes has also been criticized for remaining “stuck within twentieth century frameworks of languages and nations” (Pennycook 2010: 681). Pennycook argues for a better understanding of the way different language ideologies construct English locally. We need to take into account “current understandings of translingual practices across communities, other than those defined along national criteria”.

This is particularly the case with those countries Kachru classified as the “expanding circle”, where English was traditionally seen as a foreign language. Today, however, the roles of English are increasing exponentially in many of these “expanding circle” countries. Most importantly, English is being used, not simply within the country, but also transnationally, thus serving both intra- and trans-societal functions at the same time. For example, English is the sole official working language of the ten nations of Southeast Asia which make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Some of these are postcolonial “outer circle” countries (Singapore and Malaysia, for example) and others are “expanding circle” countries (Indonesia and Cambodia, for example) (Kirkpatrick 2010).

A second phenomenon which needs to be considered is the increasing cultural hybridity of today’s world and the way language is used. English is a multilingual language, “as a language always in translation, as a language always under negotiation” (Pennycook 2010: 685). As illustrated above, code-mixing is common in World Englishes and needs to be taken into consideration in any description of World Englishes. “World Englishes are, by definition, code-mixed varieties” (McLellan 2010: 435). In short, we need to rethink current classifications of English “in an attempt to see the interconnectedness of all English use” (Pennycook 2010: 685) and see how “languages co-exist in local and national linguistic ecosystems” (McLellan 2010: 435).

Language and literatures

Many varieties of World English have been linguistically described. Typically, the distinctive phonological, lexical and grammatical features of a particular variety are listed.

There is much current debate over the causes of the distinctive syntactic features of new varieties of English. Can the differences be explained as being caused by influence from the languages that the speakers of these new varieties of English have as part of their linguistic repertoire? Alternatively, as there appear to be a number of non-standard syntactic features which are shared by speakers of different varieties of English who have different linguistic repertoires, can we argue for the presence of vernacular universals? A compilation of the syntactic features of some 46 different varieties of World Englishes is provided in the World Atlas of Morphosyntactic Variation in English, a useful summary of which is provided in Kortmann (2010). As examples of non-standard forms, speakers
of half of the 46 varieties frequently did not mark the third person “-s”. Grammatical forms commonly realized in non-standard ways include pronouns, noun phrases, verb phrases (tense and aspect and modal verbs), adverbs, negation, agreement and word order. For example, multiple negation (“I don’t/ain’t know nothing”), copula deletion (“she smart”) and subject–verb non-concord (“They was the last ones”) are regularly found (Kortmann 2010: 406). In his discussion of the most likely causes of the shared and distinctive features, Kortmann suggests that “variety type – and not geography – is of primary importance, at least when we look at large-scale patterns, profiles and coding strategies in morphosyntax”. By the term “variety type”, he means whether the variety is a vernacular of an inner circle variety or an outer circle variety or whether it is a pidgin or a creole. He continues, however, that “it is to be expected that the impact of geography is stronger in phonology, in the lexicon and in phraseology” (Kortmann 2010: 418).

Another scholar sums up the possible influences that language contact or the presence of vernacular universals exert upon the development of new varieties of English by suggesting that both motivations probably play a role. “Many linguistic changes involved both kinds of process – that is, various processes of contact-induced change and also universal tendencies of various kinds” (Thomason 2009: 349).

Scholars are also investigating the distinctive pragmatic features and cultural conceptualizations of a particular variety. In a recent study of Persian English, Sharifian points out that “different varieties of English express and embody the cultural conceptualizations of their speakers” (Sharifian 2010: 454; the term “Persian” is used by Sharifian). An example of a key Persian cultural concept is “tarof”, defined as “the active, ritualised realization of differential perceptions of superiority and inferiority in interaction” (Beeman 1986: 196, cited in Sharifian 2010: 447). Sharifian says that this cultural concept is realized in conversations in the form of “ostensible invitations, repeated rejection of offers, insisting on making offers, hesitation in making requests, giving frequent compliments, hesitation in making complaints, etc.” (Sharifian 2010: 446). This key cultural value will be realized in Persian English. He argues that speakers of World Englishes need to be sensitive to the existence of these different cultural conceptualizations in order to avoid misunderstanding. This sensitivity to cultural difference is of particular importance for speakers of inner circle varieties of English, who may not be familiar with the different ways in which English is currently being used across the world.

These cultural differences are also reflected in the literatures of these “new” Englishes. In an oft-quoted comment, the Indian author Raja Rao wrote in 1963, “English is not really an alien language to us . . . our method of expression has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American” (cited in Crystal 1997: 135). The Indian novelist, Anita Desai, has found English “flexible, elastic, resilient, capable of taking on whatever tones, rhythms and colours I choose” (Desai 1996: 222). These positive views of the adaptability and adoptability of English are echoed by the Pakistani novelist Sidhwa, who uses English as a Pakistani vernacular: “English . . . is no longer the monopoly of the British. We the excolonised have subjugated the language, beaten it on its head and made it ours” (Sidhwa 1996: 231) and “We have to stretch the language to adapt it to alien thoughts and values which have no precedent of expression
in English, subject the language to a pressure that distorts, or, if you like, enlarges its scope and changes its shape” (Sidhwa 1996: 240).

Similar views have been expressed by African novelists writing in English. Wole Soyinka, the Nobel laureate in 1986, has said that “when we borrow an alien language . . . we must stretch it, impact and compact it, fragment and reassemble it” (cited in Schmied 1991: 126). Chinua Achebe argues that the African writer should aim at “fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his personal experience” (cited in Jenkins 2003: 171).

Here are two examples of African writers capturing the nuances and rhetorical tropes of local languages while writing in English. The first passage is from the novel The Voice by the Nigerian novelist Gabriel Okara, and is taken from Bokamba (1982):

When Okolo came to know himself, he was lying on the floor on a cold cold floor lying. He opened his eyes to see nothing but nothing he saw, nothing he saw, for the darkness was evil darkness and the outside night was black black night.

(Bokamba 1982: 93)

Here the local use of repetition in Nigerian languages for emphasis and effect is evident, as is a distinctive use of word order. The second example comes from the novel, Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English, written by the Nigerian activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, and published in 1985 (Saro-Wiwa 1985). Saro-Wiwa was executed by the Nigerian government in 1996. Again, the use of repetition is evident, as is the use of a discourse marker, “na”, borrowed from the local Ogoni languages. “Grammar” here refers to government orders.

Before, before, the grammar was not plenty and everybody was happy. But now grammar began to be plenty and people were not happy. As grammar plenty na so trouble plenty. And, as trouble plenty, na so plenty people were dying.

(Saro-Wiwa 1985: 3)

The decision to write in an acculturated variety of English is not, however, without serious opponents. The Sri Lankan poet Lakdasa Wikramasinha saw it as a form of treason:

I have come to realise that I am writing the language of the most despicable and loathsome people on earth: I have no wish to extend its life and range, enrich its totality. To write in English is a form of cultural treason. I have had for the future to think of a way of circumventing this treason. I propose to do this by making my writing entirely immoralist and destructive.

(cited in Canagarajah 1994: 375)

Wikramasinha’s fellow Sri Lankan poet, Yasmine Gooneratne, also expresses great unease about writing in English:
There is still deep-seated resentment in countries such as India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, perhaps in Africa too, but certainly in regions that possess an ancient and written literature, and a creative literary tradition of their own – against English, which was the principal tool used by their nineteenth century rulers in the process of their deracination. (cited in Bailey 1996: 40)

This resentment was certainly also felt by some African writers. As long ago as 1959, the Congress of Negro Writers and Artists promoted the cause of African languages, arguing for the adoption of a pan-African language and against the adoption of European languages. English, in particular, was seen as being the cause of cultural alienation and “psychological amputation” (Schmied 1991: 119). Ki-Swahili was chosen as the pan-African language to be promoted, but with little success. Indeed, Achebe later argued that, if sub-Saharan African had a pan-African language, that language was English. This promotion of English was described by the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o as “the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues” (cited in Jenkins 2003: 176). Over 40 years after the 1959 Congress, at the 2000 conference on African Languages and Literatures, delegates published the Asmara Declaration. The ten statements of the Declaration included that “African languages must take on the duty, the responsibility, and the challenge of speaking for the continent” and “African languages are essential for the decolonization of African minds and for the African Renaissance” (Cultural Survival 2010).

These statements embody noble aims, but English in its many different African varieties remains resilient and, indeed, the common language of parental choice for their children’s education. Importantly, there is a strong feeling that English can be “Africanised” and adapted to reflect local cultures. “English today is as much an African language as it is a British or American one” (Desai 1993: 10; see also Chapter 7).

Developments in the “expanding circle”

In the same way that new varieties of English and literatures in English have developed in India and Africa, so, following Schneider’s “Dynamic Model”, have new varieties of English and literatures developed in the postcolonial countries of Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore. In this section, however, the roles of English in countries of East and Southeast Asia which Kachru classified as being in the “expanding circle” will be considered. It is as well at the outset to stress that Kachru never intended his circles classification to be hard and fast. In 1985 he wrote:

The outer and expanding circles cannot be viewed as clearly demarcated from each other; they have several shared characteristics, and the status of English in the language policies of such countries changes from time to time. What is an ESL region at one time may become an EFL region at another time, and vice versa. (cited in Kachru 2005: 214)
This is why the study of English in East and Southeast Asia is of such interest. The increased roles of English in countries such as China, Korea, Japan and in the “expanding circle” countries of the ASEAN, where the roles of English have increased dramatically over the past 20 years or so, are examples of Kachru’s insight that the roles of English are dynamic and shifting. With the exception of Indonesia, the perceived importance of English for modernization and internationalization has now seen English become a compulsory subject in the primary school curriculum (Kirkpatrick 2010), most often being introduced at primary three, as is the case in China, for example. It is also the case that more and more university-level courses – especially at the postgraduate level – are being taught through English. Students can even study “indigenous” knowledge through English. Traditional Chinese medicine, for example, is offered in English by several mainland Chinese universities. Thus, as English becomes the international lingua franca, the use of English for international communication obviously increases. As mentioned earlier, it is the sole working language of the ASEAN. It is therefore now no more than a truism to say that the number of non-native speakers of English vastly outnumbers the number of native speakers. Indeed it has been pointed out that the number of learners of English in China alone may now exceed the total number of native speakers of it (Xu 2010a). At the same time, Chinese English is developing, complete with distinctive phonological, syntactic and lexical forms, and its own pragmatic norms and cultural conceptualizations (Xu 2010a). A nice example of the transfer of a pragmatic norm from Chinese to English is that, when Chinese people meet each other for the first time, rather than talking about the weather as might be the case in England, they talk about each other’s home towns. Xu has termed this “ancestral hometown discourse” (Xu 2010b: 294). Thus, when meeting a Chinese person for the first time, it would be culturally adept to ask questions about that person’s home town.

This extraordinary increase in the number of multilinguals who speak English as an additional language (EAL), not only within their own countries, but also internationally, raises interesting questions about the ownership of English, and which English should be adopted as the classroom model or standard (Rubdy and Saraceni 2006). It has traditionally been assumed that the “native speaker” of a language naturally makes the most appropriate teacher of it. While this position has been cogently challenged by many scholars over many years (e.g. Braine 1999, Llurda 2005), the belief that the native speaker is the best teacher remains remarkably resilient. However, World Englishes and the development of English as a multilingual language strongly suggest that context should be the overarching determinant of which model of English to teach. So, for example, a Singaporean who speaks standard Singaporean English and is suitably qualified would appear to be the most appropriate English teacher for Singaporean students. Moreover, as the major role of English is as an international lingua franca, then the teacher needs to be able to impart intercultural competence. In the past, the cultural knowledge needed for a learner of English was seen to be a “native-speaking” culture such as British or American. Today, however, this is not necessarily the case. Indeed, in contexts such as the ASEAN, it may be that the learner of English needs intercultural competence in the cultures of ASEAN, as it is with people from ASEAN countries that the learner is most
likely be using English. This new “Asian” role of English has been termed not simply postimperial, but “post-anglophone” (Clayton 2006: 246). In his description of this “post-anglophone” role of English in Cambodia, Clayton (2006) cites Cambodian government officials as saying:

We need to know English so that we can defend our interests. You know, ASEAN is not a kissy-kissy brotherhood. These countries are fiercely protective, and a strong knowledge of English will help us protect Cambodian interests.
You know, when we use English, we don’t think about the United States or England. We only think about the need to communicate.

(Clayton 2006: 230–3)

In the same vein, a study of the topics that English speakers from Asia talk about in English revealed that, not surprisingly, the great majority concerned Asian cultures and Asian-centred subject matter. This led the authors to suggest that this “post-anglophone” period also represented a “post-anglocultural” period (Kirkpatrick et al. in press). English is being used by multilingual Asians to discuss Asia-centric issues. In these contexts, the native-speaker teacher would appear to be at a significant disadvantage as an English teacher. Rather, a suitably trained multilingual person with knowledge of Asian varieties of English and Asian cultures would be more appropriate.

Future directions

The development of World Englishes and the use of English as an international lingua franca represent a significant shift in the numbers of English speakers from Kachru’s inner circle countries to those in the outer and expanding circles. There are now many different varieties of English and many of these also transmit literatures in English. This, as we have seen, is not without its problems. In his essay “In Defence of Foreignness”, the Chinese novelist Ha Jin (2010) quotes Salman Rushdie on this “struggle” with English:

Those of us who use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free.

(Ha Jin 2010: 468)

The idea that English can be used to gain freedom means that it must truly be able to represent the cultures and express the meanings required by the writer. Ha Jin himself concludes his essay by arguing that writers need to expand the frontiers of English.

Indeed, the frontiers of English verge on foreign territories, and therefore we cannot help but sound foreign to native ears, but the frontiers are the only proper places where we can claim our existence and make our contributions to the language.

(Ha Jin 2010: 469)
That English has extended beyond the frontiers of its inner circle heritage is beyond dispute. We now have a multitude of different varieties of English. We have Asian and African literatures in English. We have English being used interculturally and internationally, in what Pennycook has described as “transcultural flows” though the medium of “translingua franca English” (Pennycook 2010: 685). We have hybridity and the use of English in computer-mediated and electronic media. We would expect that the complexity and plurality of Englishes will continue into the foreseeable future. But a question people commonly ask is: will we able to understand each other with so many different varieties and uses of English? The answer is simple – yes, if we want other people to understand us and no, if we do not want other people to understand us. As Smith has pointed out, “Our speech or writing in English needs to be intelligible only to those with whom we wish to communicate in English” (Smith 1992: 75). To this I would add that multilingual users of English who operate regularly in international settings tend to be extremely adept communicators in English, often more so than some speakers of inner circle varieties of English.

References
Teaching, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


Further reading


This is an in-depth collection of essays which provide an account of the genesis and development of varieties of English in postcolonial settings.


This is a seminal collection of papers edited by one of the founders of the field which helped establish World Englishes as an intellectual discipline.
This Routledge handbook offers a comprehensive and accessible survey of selected varieties of English, together with a discussion and review of the recent developments and debates in the field.

This is a lively, reader-friendly introduction to the field which offers a description of selected varieties of Englishes around the world, accompanied by useful audio examples and linked to an accessible website.