

ARTICLES

Changing Communicative Needs, Revised Assessment Objectives: Testing English as an International Language¹

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Postmodern globalization requires that students strive for competence in a repertoire of English varieties as they shuttle between multilingual communities. From this perspective, the current debate becomes irrelevant regarding whether local varieties or dominant varieties (British/American) be used in international proficiency tests. Because it is unwise to define proficiency based on a single variety and because it is impossible to teach or measure proficiency in many varieties simultaneously, we have to consider revising the dominant paradigms of assessment. The changing pedagogical priorities suggest that we have to move away from a reliance on discrete-item tests on formal grammatical competence and develop instruments that are sensitive to performance and pragmatics. In effect, assessment would focus on strategies of negotiation, situated performance, communicative repertoire, and language awareness.

Recent debates about assessment of English as an international language have revolved around two important questions: Whose *norms* should we apply? How do we define *proficiency* in the English language? The answers have been dominated by positions belonging to two well-entrenched scholarly camps: that of the Standard English perspective (Davies, 2002) and that of the World Englishes perspec-

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tive (Lowenberg, 2002). Standard English proponents argue that the norm for testing center on one of the dominant varieties—standardized British or American English.² World Englishes proponents contest the relevance of these exogenous norms for postcolonial communities with institutionalized varieties of their own, and they argue that correctness should take into account local norms. As for proficiency, Standard English proponents measure it in terms of the native speaker, defined as the monolingual speaker from the homogeneous inner-circle speech communities that have traditionally claimed ownership over the language. For World Englishes proponents, proficiency means the ability to engage in meaningful social and institutional functions in multilingual communities according to local conventions. Although scholars of both camps have engaged in this debate with considerable shrillness, they have been unaware that the ground has been shifting under their feet. They now find themselves in a new geopolitical context with different communicative needs. What I call *postmodern globalization* rules the previous arguments irrelevant and calls for a complex orientation that moves the discourse on assessing English to a different level. I outline here the new orientation to norms and proficiency that inform assessment. It becomes clear that we have to reconsider the dominant paradigms of testing based on single varieties of English, grammaticality judgments, and a display of formal competence. This is a call to creatively devise new instruments that address our emerging communicative needs.

CHANGING COMMUNICATIVE NEEDS

Debates on testing of English as an international language have been shaped by the discourse on colonization and postcolonial orientations to English (e.g., Davies, 2002; Pakir, 2005). To examine whether these discourses are still relevant, we have to consider the changes in the communicative order.

Colonization was influenced by what Stuart Hall (1997) called *modernist globalization*. In this form of geopolitical relationship, communities related to each other in a hierarchical and unilateral fashion. The dominant communities assumed the superiority of their cultural and social systems, even that of their language, and attempted to spread their influence at the cost of local traditions. However, the new social and technological forces unleashed by this form of globalization have generated a new relationship between communities. Dias-

²Some have labeled this position the *International English perspective* (Davies, Hamp-Lyons, & Kemp, 2003). But this is a misnomer. Making a case for standard British or American English as the norm for testing cannot be treated as being international in any meaningful sense of the term. Besides, the school of lingua franca English (Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2004) holds a position at variance with the International English perspective. It is therefore important to distinguish these two perspectives.

pora groups; the Internet; transnational production and economic relationships; and the compression of time and space through travel, media, and communication account for what Hall called *postmodern globalization*. This social context is marked by traits that are different from those of previous social formations (Canagarajah, 2006):

1. The interaction between communities is multilateral—that is, international involvement at diverse levels is needed in today’s economic and production enterprises.
2. National boundaries have become porous—people, goods, and ideas flow easily between borders.
3. Languages, communities, and cultures have become hybrid, shaped by this fluid flow of social and economic relationships.

English enables, and is in turn shaped by, these *transcultural flows* (to use Appadurai’s 1996 terminology). To understand the radical implications for English, we need to reexamine the assumptions of the World Englishes model introduced by Kachru (1986). This model raises disturbing questions for assessment practices: It brought into crisis our previous assumptions on the nature of English language. Kachru’s three concentric circles chart the functional differences of English varieties—with the countries traditionally enjoying ownership of English treated as the *inner circle*; with the postcolonial communities that use English as a second language, for intranational purposes, labeled the *outer* or *extended circle*; and with all the other communities increasingly using English as a foreign language, primarily for international purposes, labeled the *expanding circle* and positioned further in the periphery. More important, the model established the legitimacy of the new varieties of English in the outer circle, affirming their norms and usage. The model thus pluralized the English language. We are now unable to treat English as a homogeneous language characterized by a uniform norm or grammatical system.

However, the conditions featuring postmodern globalization call into question some of the assumptions behind the Kachruvian model (Kachru, 1986):

1. The model legitimizes each variety in the outer circle in terms of its national identity. Thus, Indian English is valid for India, Nigerian English for Nigeria, and Singaporean English for Singapore, and so on. However, these varieties of English have started to leak outside their national borders in postmodern globalization. Indian English is relevant not just for Indians anymore. Personnel from the outsourced companies in Madras or Bangalore use their variety of English when they conduct business with people from other countries. More important, British or American nationals cannot be satisfied with their prestigious varieties anymore. Americans now have to transact many important types of domestic and personal

business with companies outside their border. Indian English is now necessary for Americans. They should at least have receptive skills in World Englishes to transact business with outsourced companies.

2. On the other hand, speakers in the expanding circle do not use English solely for extracommunity relations. For countries such as China, Vietnam, Philippines, and Brazil, English performs many important functions within borders. What about the importance of international news, popular culture, and advanced education in these countries? There have been reports in scholarly literature on how hip-hop music in English is appropriated and re-created in a range of communities—Belgium, Japan, Holland—for local consumption (Mitchell, 2001; Pennycook, 2003). These considerations call into question the ESL/EFL (English as a second language—English as a foreign language) distinction and demand that we take account of the increasing currency of English in expanding-circle countries.

3. More important, we are learning that expanding-circle communities are developing new norms as they use English for lingua franca communication. We cannot treat them strictly as *norm dependent*, as Kachru (1986) labeled them. Multilingual speakers do not seem to defer to inner-circle norms when they communicate with each other in English (Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2004).

4. If there is still a grudging acceptance in the Kachruvian model (Kachru, 1986) that the inner-circle countries enjoy ownership over English—that is, although Kachru labeled the other two circles *norm developing* and *norm dependent*, he called the inner circle *norm providing*—the spread of English questions this assumption. The oft-cited statistics by Graddol (1999) and Crystal (1997) have shown that speakers outside the inner circle have grown in number. In terms of the currency and usage of the language, there is clearer evidence that English is used more in multinational contexts by multilingual speakers than it is in homogeneous contexts of monolingual speakers (Graddol, 1999). These considerations raise questions about the periphery status of the outer and expanding circles in the Kachruvian model. The latter communities are quite central to the character and currency of English today.

These developments demand a reconceptualization of the relationship between the diverse varieties of English. It is not necessary to announce the death of the native speaker and usher in the dominance of the periphery in theorizations of English language. We have to at least move closer to the position that English is a heterogeneous language with multiple norms and diverse grammars. We have to start working with Crystal's notion of English (2004) as "a family of languages" (p. 49) or McArthur's egalitarian model (1987) where the different varieties relate to each other on a single level (and not on three hierarchies, as in Kachru's model, 1986).

IMPLICATIONS FOR NORMS AND PROFICIENCY

In a context where we have to constantly shuttle between different varieties and communities, proficiency becomes complex. To be really proficient in English today, one has to be multidialectal. This does not mean that one needs production skills in all the varieties of English. One needs the capacity to negotiate diverse varieties to facilitate communication. The passive competence to understand new varieties is part of this multidialectal competence. Therefore, we have to move from the “either–or” orientation in the testing debate to a “both and more” perspective. Let me spell out what proficiency in English entails in the postmodern context of communication:

1. Although I am in sympathy with the need to assess outer-circle speakers according to endogenous norms, this is not enough. They must be ready to engage with inner-circle and expanding-circle communities in order to accomplish important communicative and socioeconomic functions.

2. Proficiency in communicating with inner-circle communities is not enough for outer-circle and expanding-circle communities, because much of the communication in English happens among multilingual speakers in nonnative–nonnative interactions. Researchers on English as a lingua franca point out that when speakers in the outer and expanding circles speak to each other, they are able to negotiate their differences in their own terms and accomplish their communicative needs effectively without deferring to inner-circle norms (Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2004). Standard American or British English does not have any relevance to many communicative activities of millions of multilingual speakers outside the inner circle.

3. Proficiency means, then, the ability to shuttle between different varieties of English and different speech communities. In this sense, the argument becomes irrelevant whether local standards or inner-circle standards matter. We need both and more—that is, the ability to negotiate the varieties in other outer- and expanding-circle communities as well.

4. This orientation to globalization does not mean that speakers of English today have to be proficient in all the varieties under the sun. What we find from research on English as a lingua franca is the importance of negotiation skills—such as speech accommodation—for shuttling between English varieties and speech communities. Such realizations suggest the need for an important shift in assessment practices. From focusing overly on proficiency in grammar or in abstract linguistic features, we have to focus more on proficiency in pragmatics. Sociolinguistic skills of dialect differentiation, code switching, style shifting, interpersonal communication, conversation management, and discourse strategies are important for shuttling between English varieties (McKay, 2005). We have to be open to the fact that although interlocutors may use convergence strategies to facil-

itate communication, they can adopt divergence strategies to distance themselves from each other (Jenkins, 2006). In such cases, we cannot treat the breakdown in interaction as miscommunication but as a creative rhetorical act.

In effect, in our attitude to proficiency, we have to shift our emphases from language as a system to language as social practice, from grammar to pragmatics, from competence to performance. Of course, these constructs are not exclusive. However, the bias in language teaching and testing circles is still very much on the first construct in each pair. Defining language use as *performative* involves placing an emphasis on the second construct in each pair and considering how language diversity is actively negotiated in acts of communication under changing contextual conditions. In other words, it is not what we know as much as it is the versatility with which we do things with English that defines proficiency.

What implications does the aforementioned communicative scenario hold for norms? We realize that norms are relative, variable, heterogeneous, and changing. Posing the options as either “native English norms” or “new Englishes norms” is misleading. A proficient speaker of English in the postmodern world needs an awareness of both. He or she should be able to shuttle between different norms, recognizing the systematic and legitimate status of different varieties of English in this diverse family of languages. More interesting, research on English as a lingua franca has shown that there are new norms developing when multilingual people communicate with each other. The search is on for the lingua franca core (Seidlhofer, 2004). As multilingual speakers focus more on intelligibility rather than on grammatical correctness, they are developing new norms of English that are different from both the local and the metropolitan varieties.

All this leads to the view of English as a heterogeneous language with multiple norms, with each norm coming into play at different levels of social interaction. Proficiency in the world of postmodern globalization requires the ability to negotiate this variability. We might have to address the fact that there are different norms that come into play at different levels of social interaction. Although lingua franca core comes into play in multilingual contexts, the local norm may have to be used in clearly demarcated contexts of inner-circle or outer-circle usage. In extremely formal institutional contexts where inner-circle norms are conventional (such as in academic communication), one has to adopt the established norms.

This multilayering of norms does not have to be confusing as it sounds. Although pedagogy and assessment still largely focus on unitary norms, research on the everyday communication of multilingual students and adults has shown that they draw from intuitive resources and skills to negotiate diversity effectively. Students adapt to the varieties of neighboring communities for symbolic and affective reasons outside the classroom. This might be considered a convergence strategy of adopting the language variety of another group to express solidarity and facilitate intelligibility. Harris, Leung, and Rampton (2000) showed how a Bengali student

in London picked up Rastafarian English from the Jamaican communities in his neighborhood to communicate with them. Bengalis in London have probably found that Rastafarian English facilitates friendship and other social transactions with the Jamaican community. Ibrahim (1999) found that Somali students in Toronto adopted hip-hop English for certain contexts. They found Afro-Canadian identity and cultural features important in order to develop an urbane identity. Lam (2000) found that a Chinese American student who was defined as limited English proficient in the classroom negotiated diverse varieties with his Internet buddies from other countries as they successfully discussed topics in pop and teen culture. Such untutored strategies of negotiation develop in social practice as multilingual people engage with speakers of other languages in their linguistically diverse environments. According to the South Asian perspective on identity and community articulated by Khubchandani (1997), such strategies are native to periphery communities because of their multilingual history.

IMPLEMENTING ASSESSMENT

So how do we reconstruct our instruments and language models for assessing English? Let me start from the pragmatic options and then move on to imaginative possibilities.

In general, assessment has to be contextualized. Proficiency is the ability to use the English language effectively for specific purposes, functions, and discourses in specific communities. It is difficult to think in terms of a general or universal proficiency anymore. From this point of view, I can think of a place for testing according to inner-circle norms as well as local language norms for people in the outer and expanding circles.

“International” tests. Although I am an outer-circle speaker, I do not mind doing the Test of English as a Foreign Language if I am planning to move to the United States for education or employment. All that I ask is that the testing agencies make clear that these tests (Test of English as a Foreign Language, Test of English for International Communication, etc.) are assessing my ability to use English in inner-circle contexts. Such testing agencies should guard against giving the impression that they are testing my comprehensive English proficiency. Educational institutions elsewhere (especially in the outer circle) should be cautious in interpreting the results of these tests as showing one’s proficiency in the language in general. The claim by some that testing on local Englishes is unnecessary because outer-circle students and educational institutions prefer international tests or language norms (Davies et al., 2003) is not a valid argument. Of course, if interacting with inner-circle communities is preferred, then tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language and Test of English for International Communication

are the way to go. Local preference for inner-circle norms should not be treated as an argument against developing tests in local English. This preference is just an acknowledgment of the context of communication one considers important for specific purposes.

Tests on local Englishes. There is a need to develop tests in English according to local norms when the objective is the need to assess one's ability to use English as a second language in the local community. The test developed for English teachers in Indonesia, reported by Brown and Lumley (1998), is a good example of the possibility of constructing these tests. The test features local situations, raters, and norms for assessing proficiency. Some scholars have argued against these tests, claiming that the grammar and norms of local varieties have not yet been codified (Davies et al., 2003). Such arguments sometimes border on considering new Englishes as an interlanguage that cannot be codified because they have only transitory and imperfect grammars. However, opinion on this point has varied. Other scholars have thought that certain varieties of English, such as Indian English and Singaporean English, have been codified to an advanced degree (Jenkins, 2006). Even if the codification of local varieties were unsatisfactory, I contest the use of this situation as an argument against developing tests based on local norms. Such pronouncements hamper the study and description of the grammar of local Englishes. We must note that these norms are not being fabricated anew; these are the norms that inform communication in everyday life in local communities. It is important for us to encourage the scholarly attempts to describe local norms—an activity that has just begun—rather than prevent such activities by closing off significant areas of testing and pedagogy for such varieties. This happens to be the effect of another argument that is slightly related—that is, that because all standards leak and because the varieties are fairly similar, it is prudent to use the existing tests based on inner-circle norms as the default position (Davies, 2002). However, given the reality of the washback effect, tests based on inner-circle norms will prevent the development of pedagogical material and methods for local varieties and will stultify the expansion of these varieties altogether.

Although such context-based tests are important, we must realize that they do not fully reflect our realizations of postmodern communication. The local is not limited to a single variety anymore, the same way that the international is not dominated by one elite variety. So, there is a relative need for at least receptive skills in inner-circle varieties in local communities. The reality of Hollywood, CNN, and MTV emphasize the need to understand inner-circle varieties in communities outside the West. Furthermore, Indians and Chinese working in outsourced companies will find it advantageous to develop competence in productive skills in inner-circle varieties. By the same token, standard British or American English is not sufficient for a person moving to the United Kingdom or the United States for higher education or employment. Students moving from Sri Lanka to New York

City for graduate studies will find that they need an awareness of Black English or Caribbean varieties for the neighborhood in which they will live; they need a sensitivity to Indian and Chinese varieties of English to understand some of their professors; they need the ability to negotiate certain regional varieties within the United States—such as Brooklynese or Texan English—depending on the people and activities with whom they hope to engage. Of course, the level of required proficiency in each variety will vary, depending on the level of engagement desired with each community. For these reasons, it is important for both kinds of tests described to include an additional level of assessment to examine one's proficiency in negotiating diverse varieties of English. The following are a battery of features to test.

Language awareness. The need to engage with multiple English varieties, even other languages, is so great in postmodern globalization that it is unwise for a speaker to develop competence in only one dialect—or language system. It is more important to develop the cognitive abilities to negotiate multiple dialects as one shuttles between communities. Scholars of English as a lingua franca put it memorably when they say that the needs of international communication today imply that we have to move from “teaching languages” to “teaching Language” (Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 227). I articulate this shift for English as an international language as moving from “teaching English” to “teaching Language.” One should be able to inductively process the underlying system in the varieties that one encounters in social interactions. One should draw on intuitive skills to develop relative communicative competence in new varieties according to one's needs. Tests should therefore examine a candidate's ability to discern the structure, pattern, and rules from the available data of a given language. Part of this language awareness is the lingua franca core. Speakers have to know that in contexts clearly marked as multilingual, certain sounds and grammatical structures that are treated as the norm in a dominant variety may not affect communication. In fact, one may have to deviate from these norms to facilitate communication (for a review of the lingua franca core features identified from research so far, see Seidlhofer, 2004).

Sociolinguistic sensitivity. One's awareness of dialect differences, identity considerations, contextual constraints, and cultural sensitivity is important as one shuttles between diverse communities in the postmodern world. McKay (2005) argued that this sensitivity should recognize different pragmatic norms for different contexts of communication. As an outer-circle speaker, I have to recognize that there are well-established pragmatic conventions for English communication in inner-circle communities that are different from mine; however, in my outer-circle community, I should feel free to adopt the pragmatic strategies from the local languages and cultures that now shape English; yet, in lingua franca communication with nonnative speakers, I might have to draw from the negotiation strategies that

are not specific to culture or community in order to interact with speakers with no common communicative convention. Such strategies are described next.

Negotiation skills. This dimension cannot be truly examined in the traditional format of individually answered written tests. We have to devise interactive and collaborative formats for testing one's proficiency in strategies of language negotiation in context-bound situations of ongoing communication. Such a proficiency might involve a range of practices that are well known in sociolinguistic circles. People with such negotiation skills use code switching to move in and out of another person's language. They can even make superficial displays of single foreign items without advanced proficiency in that language, in what Rampton (1995) called *crossing*. They use speech accommodation to inch toward each other as they modify their differences (Giles, 1984). They use interpersonal strategies such as repair, rephrasing, clarification, gestures, topic change, and other consensus-oriented and mutually supportive practices (Firth, 1996; Gumperz, 1982). Attitudinal resources can help. One needs patience, tolerance, and humility to negotiate differences (Higgins, 2003). A lack of these attitudes may prevent even those with the same language from communicating with each other.

A realistic assessment of one's ability to communicate in English in a single community today involves a range of proficiencies. If we can think of a "general" proficiency test at all, we should move toward a multitask, multirater, and multicandidate test. The multiple tasks would help assess the candidate's skills in different communicative activities. The multiple raters would help assess the candidate according to a range of holistic and discrete-item criteria. The multiple candidates would create a communicative interaction where language use has to be negotiated. Such a format would also involve a spoken component with the possibility of face-to-face interactions between examiners and candidates.

Although my intention has been to outline the aforementioned considerations from my primary area of expertise in sociolinguistics and let testing specialists develop the instruments that address emerging communicative and pedagogical realizations, I now risk the description of an idealized testing format in what follows.

AN EXAMPLE: THE FIRST CERTIFICATE OF ENGLISH

I wish to consider how the speaking test of the revised First Certificate of English examination (Saville & Hargreaves, 1999) can be modified to answer the admittedly immodest proposals discussed here. The First Certificate of English is fashioned to test proficiency in a range of communicative skills, which fall into two categories: language competence (grammatical, discourse, and pragmatic skills) and strategic competence (defined as negotiation skills and nonverbal skills). The

range of skills tested is a welcome corrective to the abstractness of the traditional discrete-item tests, although strategic competence should be broadened to include the sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills that I list earlier—that is, those especially practiced in multilingual communication such as crossing, speech accommodation, and code alternation.

Furthermore, the First Certificate of English test consists of two raters and two candidates. Of the raters, one engages in managing the conversation and providing a global assessment of the interaction, whereas the other serves to objectively rate the candidate's performance according to specific linguistic criteria. This pairing of raters provides the possibility of a holistic grading on communicative competence and a detailed rating on grammar-related aspects. The possibility of having someone assess the interaction holistically allows the test to evaluate the candidate on intelligibility and fluency that can transcend grammatical or phonological correctness. Intelligibility includes not only an acceptable pronunciation to communicate one's words but also the discourse strategies to convey one's ideas. Furthermore, the holistic rater can be sensitive to the fact that a divergence strategy of accentuating linguistic differences or making mistakes should receive points because it is a well-orchestrated communicative act for a specific rhetorical purpose. To test negotiation skills effectively, I modify this arrangement slightly and insist that the raters come from different English-speaking communities—for example, one from the candidate's own community and the other from an inner-circle community. This enables the raters to examine whether the candidate is able to negotiate the different varieties that they use.

The test involves multiple tasks: an extended monologue by the candidate, a dialogue with the other paired candidate, a dialogue with a rater, and a conversation that involves all three. This arrangement enables the testers to assess the candidate's ability to perform in different language skills. A student who can deliver prepared monologues on a given subject may not necessarily be adept in conversational skills or other genres of talk. Furthermore, the subject of the tasks can be limited to a specific topic in order to make the test discourse specific. Students can be given specific topics related to their areas of academic interest or specialization for language production. It would also be interesting if we could pair students from two different language communities to examine their ability to negotiate their own dialectal differences in conversation. Such tasks would enable the raters to assess the candidate's proficiency in communicating in different situations and negotiating diversity. The different communicative activities would convey to the students that proficiency is context bound, and it would help implement our realization that there is nothing called a "general" or "universal" proficiency anymore.

Things can get messy when so many variables are included in such a multitask, multirater, and multicandidate assessment. To begin with, Norton (2005) recently argued—specifically in relation to the Cambridge Speaking Tests—that the pair-

ing of the candidates can elicit different language data and different levels of performance. There are interpersonal dynamics between two paired candidates that can have implications for their performance. Furthermore, interrater reliability becomes complicated in such tests, especially when the raters are assessing different language skills. Chalhoub-Deville and Wigglesworth (2005) have recently done an experiment to empirically show that raters from the inner-circle communities are remarkably similar in their grading of students from outer- and expanding-circle communities. Matters can get complicated when raters come from outside the inner-circle communities; however, Saville and Hargreaves (1999) described an elaborate system of examiner coordination sessions, monitoring visits, and practice tests to ensure standardization of assessment in the First Certificate of English test. It is important to note that objectivity and accuracy in measurement should be weighed against other important principles of testing. The multiple tasks provide a balanced measurement of the candidate's language proficiency. In other words, the tasks help develop a composite and rounded profile of the candidate's abilities, analogous to portfolio assessment. This fulfills another sense of fairness for the students—if not in terms of the people who judge them, at least in terms of the performance on which they are judged. Furthermore, we have to keep in mind that success in communication is interactionally achieved in each existential situation. Communication that works out well in one context with a specific set of interlocutors may not be as successful in a different context. In fact, the raters must contribute as actively to this negotiation of communication as the candidates do. Therefore, all parties have to keep in mind that performance in such tests is only an approximation of the candidate's performance in other situations. The subjectivity of assessment and performance in such tests should be acknowledged, not filtered out.

CONCLUSION

We need to develop instruments with imagination and creativity to assess proficiency in the complex communicative needs of English as a lingua franca. These instruments should be performance based; they should feature social negotiation; and they should demonstrate pragmatic competence. We need tests that are interactive, collaborative, and performative. Discrete-item tests, particularly on grammar and vocabulary, have limited utility in contexts of assessment regarding English as an international language. It is difficult to make grammaticality judgments even according to inner-circle norms (for examples of items that elicit different answers of correctness in British and American English, see Lowenberg, 2002). There is more variability in grammaticality judgments in the expanding world of English as an international language. Imposing correctness according to the examiner's perspective sends the wrong message to candidates. It imposes a sense of

correctness according to norms outside one's community and is therefore irrelevant to one's contexts of communication. Thus, it reifies exonormative standards and stultifies language change and diversity.

Mine is a humble argument for multidialectal testing in English. Other scholars have made a radical proposal for multilingual testing (Shohamy, 2006). They rightly assumed that English has to coexist with other languages in one's communicative acts in today's world. This is a general situation affecting many other languages in the multilingual world today. Tests in my own local language of Tamil would assess an artificial notion of proficiency if they were to leave out the ways that Tamil is mixed with English in one's communicative competence. The situation is even more pressing for a global language such as English. English features a staggering extent of diversity within itself as a language; in addition, it interacts with other languages of the world to such an extent that a test of "pure English" based on a dominant community's norms would be of limited usefulness. There is no place for universal proficiency in English-language testing anymore. Proficiency can be addressed meaningfully in only specific contexts and communities of communication in relation to the repertoire of codes, discourses, and genres that are conventional for that context.

The new paradigms of assessment are not only for multilingual speakers—they are also important to "native" speakers. Scholars in American college composition are already asking if a proficiency in standard American English is adequate for the multiliterate needs of postmodern citizens (Horner & Trimbur, 2002). Proficiency in Standard English cannot help American or British students engage in the transnational needs and relationships that they encounter today. They, too, need the facility to negotiate diverse varieties of English. Debates in English-language testing should not be conducted with the condescending attitude that we scholars are just trying to be kind to those nonnative speakers outside the inner circle. We need to be aware that all speakers of English are affected by the recent geopolitical changes, compelling us to rethink the meaning of norms and proficiency in English for everyone.

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