



World Englishes, English as an International Language and Applied Linguistics

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Abstract

The paper discusses World Englishes (WEs) in relation to English as an International Language (EIL) and Applied Linguistics. Taking into account Kachru's interesting but at the same time controversial debate about the status of English in its varieties, which are commonly called WEs and the opposing ideas presented by Quirk, it is aimed to present an overview of these discussions, together with some examples. Kachru's three concentric circles, the Interlanguage theory, Standard English and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) were paid special attention while touching upon the controversial debates on World Englishes. Moreover, following these discussions on WEs, EIL and Applied Linguistics, some answers were provided regarding the questions on teaching and teacher education, seeing that the uses of English internationally are not just related to the Expanding Circle, but also they include native speakers as well as members of the Outer Circle.

Keywords: World Englishes, Applied Linguistics, Interlanguage Theory, Standard English

1. Introduction

The rapid spread of English as a language of communication has no doubt stimulated interesting but at the same time controversial debate about the status of English in its varieties, which are commonly called World Englishes (Kachru, 1985). Kachru (1990), in his paper entitled "World Englishes and Applied linguistics" discusses,

the limitations of traditional applied linguistics perspectives on world Englishes, suggesting that these had been skewed by the ethnocentrism of inner-circle practitioners, reliance on interlanguage and error analysis frameworks, and misconceptions concerning the sociolinguistic realities of multilingual outer-circle societies (as cited in Bolton, 2004, p. 389).

According to Kachru (1985), English has been indigenized in India as well as other countries including Singapore, Nigeria, which are referred to outer circles. Throughout the process, Kachru and other scholars, especially Quirk (1990), joined the debate over these Englishes. Kachru (1985) presented arguments against Interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972) and specifically the main components of this theory: Errors, fossilization, and socio-cultural contexts.

Before outlining the arguments and presenting another view regarding World Englishes and Applied Linguistics, it will be useful to go over Kachru's (1997) three concentric circles, a definition of World Englishes and the concept of interlanguage. Regarding the meaning(s) of World Englishes, Bolton presents several interpretations such as an umbrella term covering all varieties of Englishes, new Englishes in countries such as Africa and Asia. However, the term *World Englishes* will be used, as Jenkins (2006) proposed, to cover new Englishes in Africa and Asia, which are considered as Outer Circle by Kachru.

Kachru (1997) proposed three circles (Figure-1) to divide English-using world. While doing this, he focused on the historical context of English, the status of the language and the functions in various regions. According to Kachru, the Inner Circle includes the Native English-speaking countries such as England, USA and Canada). The Outer Circle consists of the former colonies such as India, Africa and Nigeria and finally Expanding Circle includes countries such as China, Japan and Turkey, which are affected by Western and where English is becoming an important language in business, science, technology and education. Kachru's main arguments are more related to Outer Circle and against IL theory. According to IL theory, (Selinker, 1972, 1992), second language learners' competence is based on an interlanguage continuum between their first (L1) and their second (L2) language. If their output is different from Standard English (American or British), it is regarded as an error (interference of L1 mainly) and if they continue producing errors (fixing), this is known as fossilization. In 1992, Selinker reproduced his IL theory and particularly applied fossilization to World Englishes context, which renewed the challenge to the theory by scholars such as Kachru and Quirk.

2. World Englishes Debate

World Englishes and Standard English was originally hotly debated by Quirk (1985, 1990) and Kachru (1985, 1991). Quirk (1990), in his discussion of Englishes in various contexts especially in the Outer-Circle countries, suggested that these varieties of English be just interference varieties and teachers of English were advised to focus on native norms and native like performance and stressed the need to uphold one common standard in the use of English not only in the Inner Circle countries but also in others. He also pointed out that a common standard of use for written as well as spoken English was necessary to regulate the use of English in different contexts. He suggested this possibly for the fear that the language (English) would divide up into unintelligible varieties or different forms, which would result in its losing the function of international communication. In response to him, Kachru (1985), on the other hand, claimed that such norms as speech acts and registers were irrelevant to the sociolinguistic reality in which members of the Outer Circle use English. However, he did not mention that what he said might also be relevant to English as a Lingua Franca and the use of English in the Expanding Circle. Kachru also believed that acknowledging a variety of norms would not lead to a lack of intelligibility among different users of English and in a way, Widdowson (1994) supported Kachru saying that many bilingual users of English acquire the language in educational contexts, which put emphasis on a particular standard and tend to ensure some unifying forms. Kachru (1985) suggested challenging traditional notions of standardization and models as they tend to be related to only Inner-Circle users:

... the global diffusion of English has taken an interesting turn: the native speakers of this language seem to have lost the exclusive prerogative to control its standardization; in fact, if current statistics are any indication, they have become a minority. This sociolinguistic fact must be accepted and its implication recognized. What we need now are new paradigms and perspectives for linguistics and pedagogical research and for understanding the linguistic creativity in multilingual situations across cultures. (p. 30)

Widdowson (1994) agreed with the Kachru's statement against Standard English and the ownership, maintaining that native speakers cannot claim ownership of English:

How English develops in the world is no business whatsoever of native speakers in England, the United States, or anywhere else. They have no say in the matter, no right to intervene or pass judgment. They are irrelevant. The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it. To grant such custody of the language is necessarily to arrest its development and so undermine its international status. It is a matter of considerable pride and satisfaction for native speakers of English that their language is an international means of communication. But the point is that it is only international to the extent that it is not their language. It is not a possession which they lease out to others, while retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it. (p. 385)

In addition to the standardization, Kachru's main argument against IL theory was that Outer Circle English speakers were not trying to identify with Inner Circle speakers or native speakers. That is, they were not interested in the norms of English based in Inner Circle such as requesting and complaining. Thus, he criticized the attempts to label the Englishes in the Outer Circle as deviant or deficient and fossilized since these views were not considering the local Englishes (Outer Circle) and the sociocultural context. He was also against the label 'errors' since again utterances which are considered as errors may not apply to the local Englishes as they may be perfectly acceptable. Let us look at some examples of English in Outer Circle (Bhatt, 2005, pp. 39-40):

- a) You have taken my book, isn't it?
- b) You are soon going home, isn't it?

These are unindifferentiated tag questions in Indian English. In these examples, it can be seen that the meaning of tag is not the meaning of the main proposition, but rather social meaning. These two examples show how the linguistic form is constrained by cultural constraints of politeness. These tags (*isn't it*) as used in Indian English are governed by politeness principle of nonimposition. In standard American or British English, tag questions are formed by inserting a copy of the subject (pronominal) after an appropriate modal auxiliary. If we again consider the examples given above, these tag questions will be as the following:

- a) You have taken my book, haven't you?
- b) You are soon going home, aren't you?

The influence of culture on grammatical rules in Indian English can also be seen in the use of 'May'. Consider the following example (Bhatt, p. 41):

*These mistakes may please be corrected.

Here, 'May' is used to express obligation politely, whereas in Standard English, it will be used as 'These mistakes must be corrected' or 'these mistakes are to be corrected'. While the examples from Standard English are unacceptable in Indian English since they are positional in their social context, a native speaker can see them as what they should be definitely due to grammar or the norms, which Kachru rejects, in local context. Although the use of tags and the modal

auxiliary 'May' in Indian English seem odd and can be regarded as the violation/deviation of rules, it can be agreed that they are acceptable in its own context rather than being regarded as signs of fossilization. However, if these forms are used in international context where English is used as a means of communication by members of different cultures, there may be some communication breakdowns or misunderstandings.

Considering the arguments Kachru proposed, the traditional applied linguistics perspectives seem to fail to consider multilingual context. However, this does not mean that *IL* and *errors* do not contribute to language acquisition. Consider an imaginary situation in which a person who has moved to an Outer Circle country (India) and utters a sentence 'You must come early tomorrow' in his/her attempts to learn Indian English, which is positional and in a way unacceptable in the local context. What would Kachru say about his/her utterance? This can be considered a simple logic, but Kachru would possibly talk about IL or a kind of error that does not consider the social context. Alternatively, would he say that everyone has his/her own way of saying and that person is right since he does not want to use 'a norm of Indian English'? Kachru talks about the ethnocentrism of Inner Circle practitioners, but he may also be promoting 'nationalism' as Pennycook (1994) suggested. Moreover, instead of benefiting from WEs discussion, local people might also suffer as their use of English, as seen in the examples, may mark them off as low proficient users or even be stigmatized in the English L1 communities (Luk & Lin, 2006).

What can applied linguistics do regarding these discussions? The situation cannot be simply ignored. Especially from second language acquisition perspective, future research should go over the traditional approaches and make necessary changes/additions or at least be aware of the forms that learners produce not only in the Outer Circle but also in the Expanding Circle, which reflect the sociolinguistic reality of their English use.

3. World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca and Teacher Education

World Englishes debate lead to related issues such as English as a lingua Franca and teaching World Englishes and teacher education. The uses of English internationally are not just related to the Expanding Circle, but also it includes native speakers as well as members of the Outer Circle English. English is currently seen the best option for communication among people from different language backgrounds, thereby being labeled as 'English as an International Language (EIL)' or 'English as a Lingua Franca'. Scholar such as Jenkins (2006, 2000) and Seidlhofer (2004, 2002) have made significant contributions to this issue with their valuable articles and books, notably Jenkin's 'The phonology of English as an International language' (2000) and Seidlhofer's (2002) corpus the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE). Both analyzed the use of ELF speakers from a variety of different backgrounds. Jenkins provided which pronunciation errors led to intelligibility problems and which did not. Seidlhofer focused on ELF lexicogrammar and tried to find out which items were used frequently, but differently with respect to native speakers. Both scholars paid specific attention to uses that do not cause communication problems. This was an attempt to reflect the sociolinguistic reality of the largest group – Expanding Circle, especially. Although Jenkins and Seidlhofer did not aim to reflect ELF as a World English, some World Englishes scholars mistook ELF for that function. What takes notable attention about their studies is that the burden- being aware of World Englishes and Standard English) is not just on the Expanding Circle, but also on Outer Circle and notably Inner Circle.

The discussion of World Englishes have also arisen questions about teaching and teacher education. One could ask what kind of English or Which English should be taught in the Expanding Circle. If we are teaching Turkish students to use English well in an educational institution in the USA, the best answer will be American English, but if we have the aim of allowing our students to communicate across cultures, then we should teach English so that they will be able to understand/tolerate many accent and varieties through exposure. Awareness should be created and cross-cultural communication strategies should be studied. It is of utmost importance for teachers to develop a greater tolerance of differences and adjust their expectations according to the settings. They should be informed about the varieties and provided with the opportunities to collaborate with other teachers in all three circles. However, what matters most seems to be the intelligibility of the uses of English in different countries or regions, not just in national boundaries. This can be achieved through the publishers in all over the world, providing World Englishes and ELF perspectives in their books, materials, and more importantly in their practices of language testing and assessment.

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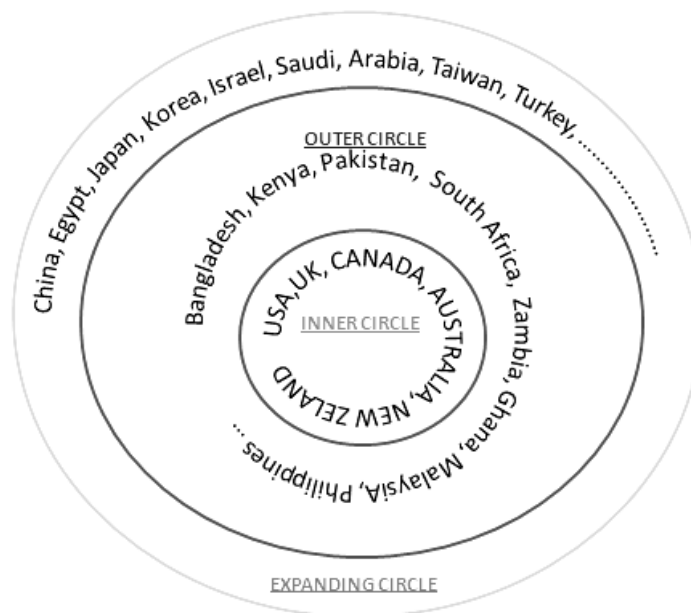


Figure 1. Concentric circle model (Adapted from Kachru (1997))