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**Quo vadis, English?
Current outlook, perspectives & visions**

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Abstract

This paper pays heed to the transformation of the omnipresent English language into a lingua franca of the 21st century within the framework of on-going globalization. The paper investigates the spread of English in order to provide a backdrop for the present-day status of the English language in the world. In line with the English language's impact factor, the most influential models of the spread of English, as propounded by Kachru, Modiano and Graddol, are outlined and interpreted with broader implications in manifold sociolinguistic situations and/or domains. In order to map out the proclivities in present-day English, current phonetic, lexical and grammatical trends are touched upon. Special attention is paid to the somewhat declining prestige of Received Pronunciation in favour of Estuary English, dialect mixing and levelling, innovations in lexis motivated by the digital revolution resulting in a large number of Net-speak based neologisms and 'colloquialization' of grammar. Drawing on the existence of so many varieties of English (including Euro-English), offshoots and outgrowths, the issue of the ownership of English, precluding native-speakers from clinging tenaciously to their 'property', is addressed. The last section of the paper deals with the possible scenarios and predictions about the English language revolving around World Standard English, fragmentation of English into many varieties, convergence and divergence of English and its (un-)intelligibility.

Keywords: *English language, global English, spread of English, linguistic innovations, globalisation, linguistic trends, Euro-English, predictions*

Introduction: The English language – where are we now?

Beyond doubt, English has become an all-important language in the present-day world and is firmly rooted in many countries as a lingua franca of the 21st century. Its global status in the world is an intriguing phenomenon *per se* which has been explored by a number of scholars who were interested

in the events and/or factors which contributed to its current position. David Crystal (2003, p. 29), the father figure of contemporary English linguistics, believes that the status of English as a lingua franca has its geographical as well as socio-cultural roots.

Concerning the history of English, the expansion of the British Empire due to colonialism is viewed as a crucial factor. In this connection, Jennifer Jenkins (2009, pp. 5-9) explains the history of English by means of two dispersals (or diasporas) which are essential for understanding how English secured its position in the world. The first diaspora of the English language refers to the migration of the British to America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and also to South Africa, resulting in new mother-tongue varieties of English. The second diaspora of the English language refers to the spread of the English language to Asia and Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries as a result of the British colonisation, leading to the emergence of the second language varieties, also known as 'New Englishes'.

The socio-cultural reasons of the spread of English refer to the U.S. and its status achieved by the power of its economy and military forces, especially after World War I and II. Hand in hand with the rise of new media such as television and film, American culture and its language have travelled around the globe. Later on, with the digital revolution stretching back to the 1980's and 1990's and the advent of the Internet, the position of English as a lingua franca, has only been solidified. Thus, both Britain and the USA have "put English in its position as the world's pre-eminent language" (Bauer, 2002, p. 19).

English currently has over 360 million native speakers, and according to some estimates, a billion second language speakers. It is the third most common native language in the world, after Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. It is widely learned as a second language and is an official language of the EU, many Commonwealth countries and the United Nations. Besides, almost 85% of all Internet web-sites are currently available in English (Schmitt & Marsden 2006: 136). According to a British Council's prediction, about two billion people, *i.e.* almost one third of the whole world's population, will have acquired some knowledge of English by 2020 (Svartvik and Leech, 2006, p. 228).

Reaching out: models of the spread of English

The spread of English was predicted as early as the 18th century by John Adams who said that "English would be the most respectable language

in the world and the most universally read and spoken in the next century, if not before the close of this one" (Kachru and Nelson, 2005, p. 9). Due to the fact that Britain became a world power thanks to the Industrial Revolution and the growth of the colonial Empire and the U.S. involvement in world affairs, Adams's prediction has been fulfilled.

Some linguistic properties of the English language when it functions as a *lingua franca* can be described by Braj Kachru's model of World Englishes proposed in 1985. Even though Kachru's model may be a bit outdated in the 21st century due to recent changes in the use of English and his attempt at a three-way categorisation of users of English, it still holds the esteem of the most influential model of the spread of English to date.

Within Kachru's model, the spread of English around the world has been visualized as three concentric circles, representing the type of spread, patterns of acquisition and functional domains in which English is used in different countries (see Figure 1). The inner circle refers to the traditional bases of English where it is used as a native language (ENL). It includes the UK, the USA, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The English spoken in the inner circle is said to be 'norm-providing'. The outer circle involves the countries where the English language has become part of a country's chief institutions, plays a vital second language role (ESL) and is said to be 'norm-developing'. It includes the former British colonies such as India, Bangladesh, Singapore, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and other countries. Finally, the expanding circle comprises countries such as China, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Saudi Arabia, former countries of the USSR and many others where English functions as an international language (EFL) and speakers develop performance varieties. The English used in the ever growing expanding circle is 'norm-dependent' because its speakers learn English as a foreign language and are dependent on the norm-providing inner-circle countries. In sum, Kachru classifies varieties of English based on three groups of English speakers of ENL, ESL and EFL. Considering the norms, the Inner Circle varieties of English are believed to be 'norm-makers', while the Outer Circle varieties are considered to be 'norm-breakers' as they are not identical with those varieties which are regarded to be the norms (Quirk 1985: 16). In other words, despite the fact that English has become the dominant language in the world it is important to realise that this language does not occur only in one variety. Although the varieties of the Outer Circle are true-born varieties of English, they are not widely accepted for they differ from the norm and thus they are often considered incorrect (Bhatia, 2005, p. 74).

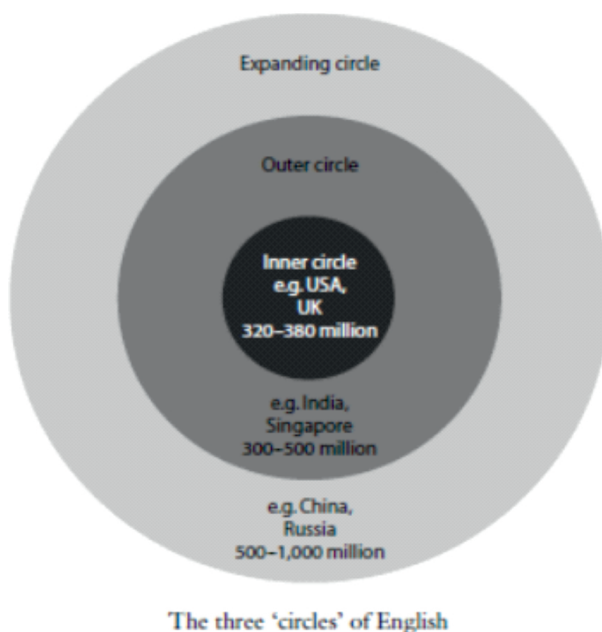


Figure 1: Kachru's three-circle model of World Englishes (adapted from Crystal, 2003, p. 61)

As implied above, the limitations of the model discussed reside in the following (see Jenkins, 2009, pp. 20-21): the model is based on geography and history rather than on the way speakers currently identify with and use English; the term Inner Circle implies that speakers from the ENL countries play a pivotal role in shaping English whereas their worldwide influence is in fact in decline; there is a difficulty in using the model to define speakers in terms of their proficiency in English (a native speaker may have a limited vocabulary and low grammatical competence while the reverse may be true of a non-native speaker); there is a grey area between the Inner and Outer Circles (in some Outer Circle countries, English may be the first language learnt for many people, and may be spoken at home rather than used purely for official purposes such as education, law and government) and between the Outer Circle and Expanding Circles (some countries such as *e.g.* Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland are in fact in transition from EFL to ESL status).

Other more recent models taking account of developments in the spread of World Englishes are those of Marko Modiano (1999) and David Graddol (2006), as shown in Figures 2-4, respectively. Modiano breaks completely

with historical and geographical concerns, in sharp contrast to Kachru, and bases his model, 'The centripetal circles of international English' (see Figure 2) on what is mutually comprehensible to the majority of proficient speakers of English. The centre of Modiano's model is made up of the speakers who are proficient in International English with no strong regional accent, regardless of whether they are native or non-native speakers. The next circle comprises the English speakers with native or foreign language proficiency. The third circle consist of learners of the English language who are not yet proficient in English and beyond this circle are speakers who do not know the English language at all. Granted, the model at hand has also some weaknesses since it is hard to draw a line between proficiency and non-proficiency in English and a plausible definition of International English has been missing, too.

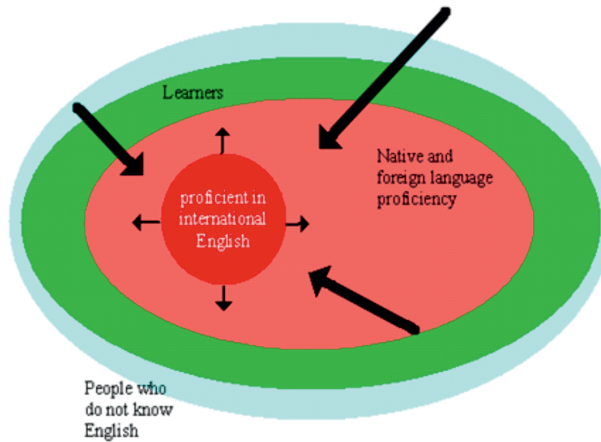


Figure 2: Modiano's centripetal circles of international English (source: Jenkins, 2009, p. 22)

Later, in response to the critical comments he had received upon drafting his first model, Modiano reshaped his model with the centre made up of International English of native and proficient non-native speakers (see Figure 3). The next circle includes features common for all the English varieties. Finally, the outer circle consists of five groups (American English, British English, other major varieties, local varieties, foreign varieties) each with features specific to their own speech community and which are unlikely to be understood by most members of the other four groups. Nonetheless, even the redrafted model garnered contradictory reviews due to (among

other things) equating native speakers with 'competent' non-natives, implying that all native speakers of English are competent users, which is patently untrue. Further, Modiano's designations of the native English varieties as 'major' and some established Outer Circle varieties (e.g. Indian English) as 'local' are somewhat objectionable (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 21-23).

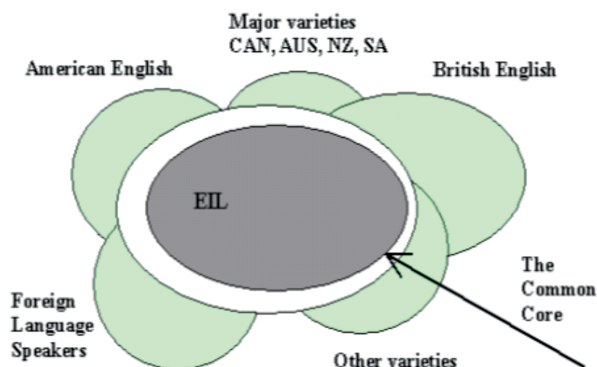


Figure 3: Modiano's English as an international language (EIL) (source: Jenkins, 2009, p. 23)

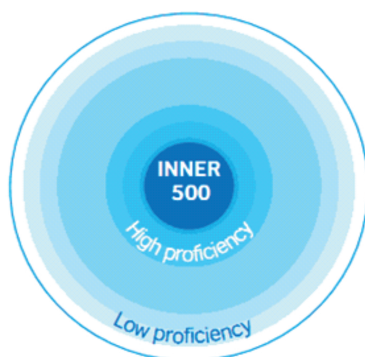


Figure 4: Graddol's model representing the community of English speakers

Finally, David Graddol's model (see Figure 4) suggests that in a globalised world there is a need to distinguish between proficiencies in English. This is similar to Rampton's (1990) notion of 'expertise', which seems to be a more appropriate concept for English than that of nativeness. Whatever the designation used, degree of proficiency or expertise is an eminently useful way to approach the English of its entirety of speakers nowadays,

regardless of the speakers' origins. All the same, when comparing Kachru's and Graddol's functional nativeness, there seems to be a point of difference. While Kachru refers to the use of English in the world, Graddol refers to the proficiency level of speakers of English within the entire community. At the same time, Graddol suggests that there is a shift in the use of English. In the 21st century those who speak English alongside other languages will outnumber first-language speakers and, increasingly, will decide the global future of the language (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 23-24).

English today and tomorrow: some linguistic novelties

In order to map out the tendencies in present-day English, phonetic, lexical as well as grammatical innovations deserve to be addressed. Starting off with the phonetic level, in the 1920's the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) opted for an accent for all its speakers to be used on the radio. This was the accent of the educated: people in government, at the universities and the Church. It came to be known as 'Received Pronunciation' or 'RP' or the 'Queen's English'. Even though RP may have lost some of its prestige over the past twenty years or so, it still remains the accent usually taught to foreigners learning British English. Nowadays most educated people in England (barring Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland) speak a kind of RP which has some of their regional accent in it. Recently, 'Estuary English' has been receiving a good deal of attention, a variety used by educated speakers in the south-east of England and beyond. This is the accent used by many radio and television announcers and presenters these days, not RP, in compliance with the changing linguistic preferences and reality (Viney, 2008, pp. 47-48).

With respect to dialects, a certain process of convergence is taking place inside Great Britain: the different dialects are being mixed and levelled. Alongside this dialect levelling, some linguistic features, mainly associated with the London area, have become widespread throughout the UK, particularly in the speech of younger people. This does not mean, of course, that regional and social differences have disappeared. Another feature which may be frequently heard in the speech of young British people is what has been variously termed *High Rising Tone* or *Uptalk* or *Australian Question Intonation*. This refers to the speech pattern where the final syllables of a declarative utterance have the rising tone typical of questions (Barber, Beal and Shaw, 2009, pp. 266-268).

Furthermore, one of the striking tendencies at the moment is the expansion going on in the lexis. At the height of modernity, the Internet has had a number of effects on English. Firstly, new words have been made to denote the Internet itself and its activities: *e.g. cyberspace (1982), e-mail (1982), website (1993) and blog (1999)*. Also, the meaning of existing words such as *mouse, web, surf, link* and *chat* has been extended. Secondly, people have developed a new informal way of using the language in chat rooms by shortening words, using only single letters or numbers, and often not using capital letters or much punctuation. As regards Netspeak, fashionable prefixes in recent years comprise *cyber-* (*cybercafé, cybersex*), *mini-* (*minidisk, minibar*), and *nano-* (*nanodevice, nanotechnology*); (Viney, 2008, p. 48).

Shedding some light on grammar, what was formerly considered non-standard may now come to be accepted as standard due to the changing understanding of 'standard'. Mair (2006) has noticed a phenomenon which he refers to as 'colloquialization', whereby features which have been associated with informal and/or spoken usage, such as contractions, are becoming acceptable in more formal registers, and conversely, formal structures such as the passive, are being disfavoured. One recent grammatical change that can be allegedly attributed to the rise of feminism in the late 20th century is the increasing use of *they* with a singular verb (*e.g. Anyone who does sports regularly knows that they will lose some weight*), preferring this gender-neutral pronoun over phrases such as *he* or *she* or *s/he*. Moreover, there have also been recent developments in the use of modal verbs, such as the tendency for young British people to use the auxiliary *may* instead of *might*, disregarding their potential to convey varying degrees of certainty. Similarly, the modals *shall* and *must* are likewise becoming increasingly rare: *shall* tends to be replaced by *will* or *be going to* and *must* is giving ground to *need to* (Barber, Beal and Shaw, 2009, pp. 277-279).

Besides, the issue of the ownership of the English language has been on the receiving end of some attention over a considerable period of time. What each and every user of English should be aware of on the cusp of the 21st century is that English no longer belongs to the British or Americans, *i.e.* the inner-circle speakers but to the whole world and its non-native speakers whose number is on the rise more than ever. English continues to be used by speakers of other languages all over the world, and to be shaped and moulded by those languages. Thus, native speakers are no longer endowed with the exclusive right to determine the international development of English (Widdowson qtd. in Jenkins, 2009, pp. 184-190).

Moreover, the 21st century specificities of English are closely intertwined with the existence of many new varieties of English (*e.g.* Singlish, Chinglish, Japlish, Spanglish and others) showcasing a mixture of linguistic influences. In mainland Europe, Euro-English has been used as a contact language among speakers from different first languages, i.e. in its ELF function. As a result, Euro-English speakers bring into their English a slower rate of speech, avoid idioms and colloquial lexis and pronunciation features that would be natural for a native English speaker. The following lexico-grammatical features (based on Jenkins, 2009, pp. 145-146) may be identified in the said English variety: dropping the third person singular *-s*, confusing the relative pronouns *who* and *which*, omitting definite and indefinite articles where they should occur, failing to use correct forms of question tags, inserting redundant prepositions (*we have to study about...*), overusing certain verbs of high semantic generality (*do, have, make, put, take*), replacing infinitive constructions with that-clauses (*I want that...*) and overdoing explicitness (*'black colour' rather than just 'black'*).

The future of global English

These days, there is no maybe about English having become the global language and its position is more often than not taken for granted. However, it is not sure if its position will remain so strong in the foreseeable future. There have been a number of questions concerning the future of the English language. What agitates the scholars are the following: What will happen to English now? Will there be many Englishes, or just one? Will the international use and learning of English continue to grow? Or will other languages take its place? (Svartvik and Leech, 2006, p. 222)

To give exhaustive answers to the questions above may prove an almost impossible task, but there have been certain predictions which could give one a clue. For example, Crystal (2003, pp. 127-128) voices an opinion that the position of English may alter, if the power of the U.S. shifts to another country. It was a high number of native speakers of English living in the USA together with the political and economic power of the country, which resulted in the strength and prestige of English as a global language. If the U.S. lost this power, interest in English would decrease in favour of another language. As Graddol (2006, p. 32) argues, Chinese economy could easily overgrow those of the U.S., Germany and the UK in the future as it has been growing fast. Besides, China had already enjoyed a status of economic superpower in the world, together with India, before the 19th century. Thus, a possible

future scenario for the development of English is that it could lose its strong position on the international scene.

Alternatively, English could commence to share its position with at least one other language. According to Jenkins (2009, pp. 40-42), Spanish may be a potential competitor of English due to its simpler pronunciation, spelling and verb system. It is possible that English will succumb to the same fate as its precedents such as Latin or French, and eventually be ousted by another dominant language in the future, and the most likely challengers are Chinese and Spanish. There are scholars, however, who are of the opinion that the monopolistic position of English as a lingua franca in the world will not change as its position in the world comes from a long historical development across the centuries that is unlikely to happen with another language.

Furthermore, with the increase in the number of EFL speakers in comparison with ENL speakers, the dominance of English in areas such as broadcasting and the World Wide Web is expected to change. With English becoming only one of the dominant languages, an increase of the global importance of other languages is on the cards.

As far as the number of EFL speakers with their varieties of English is concerned, another possible scenario for the future of English deserves a mention. English could evolve into several mutually unintelligible varieties as it happened with Latin, which split into new varieties of French, Spanish, Romanian, and Italian. In fact, there are already miscellaneous varieties of English, which are taking on their own specific features and thus, they are on their way to diverge rather than converge. This divergence would result in (if it is not already under way) the incomprehensibility of certain English varieties to speakers of other varieties (Bauer, 2002, p. 100). Hence, there seems to be a growing clash between the issue of mutual intelligibility and local identity. While the former one can be achieved by promoting Standard English for both native and non-native speakers, the latter one can be achieved by promoting local dialects and varieties of English (Crystal, 2003, pp. 175-177).

Thus, in the situation of mutually unintelligible English varieties' formation, a new variety might develop known as 'World Standard English' (WSE) that would be preferred in international communication with the local varieties used within a country. Crystal (2003, pp. 185-188) predicts that this new variety of English would be influenced in all probability by American English because of its dominance in the media. Thus, this prediction suggests that in the not so distant future English will be divergent with regard to the local varieties of English as well as convergent by means of merging into a single world variety.

However, as the most daring prophecies about the English language may be put to the test of time and may turn out to be wrong in the long run, it proves impossible to accurately predict any future linguistic heading of English. For this reason, all the above must be taken with certain reservations. Moreover, the tiny voice of this article can only affirm David Crystal's claim (2003, p. 78) that "all predictions about the English language have a habit of being wrong", so only time will tell to what extent the predictions and visions depicted above will become true.

Conclusion

As a matter of fact, the English language in the 21st century must be considered in the context of globalisation. Even though English has been enjoying its position as a global language for quite some time, this situation may change, although it is difficult to say with certainty whether it will remain a sole global language or it will share its position with at least one other language. Nowadays, the transformation of English into a planetary language has become a sociolinguistic reality. The British or Americans are no longer the owners of the English language; English continues to be used by non-native speakers all over the world as a lingua franca and is altered by their languages. The paper paid attention to the models of the spread of English as proposed by Kachru, Modiano and Graddol, serving as frameworks for studying the multifarious roles English plays in varied countries/sociolinguistic situations/domains. With regard to the latest linguistic situation dominating the English language, Received Pronunciation seems to have been supplanted by Estuary English. In grammar, more vital changes could be brought about by the permeation of the standard language by usages which at present are informal and/or non-standard. Even though there are changes on the phonetic and grammatical levels taking place in present-day English, the most prominent strand of the English language's development seems to be linked with lexis. In mainland Europe, Euro-English represents the most recent stage in the development of English, fulfilling its role in a multilingual setting marked by non-native speakers.

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