

# English: The Melting Pot

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## **ABSTRACT**

***Globalization has made English the new language of the global world. Mother Tongue is acquired whereas English as a second or foreign language has to be learnt. The way English is spoken in different parts of the globe is different from one another and also very different from the Standard English. Stress, rhythm and intonation are three important suprasegmental elements used in English and the basic difference in English usage lies in here. Though there are different varieties of English and eyebrows are often raised at their legitimacy but as long as it is comprehensible the purpose is served.***

## **One World: One Language**

Globalization has indeed brought us closer to the concept of “one world: one language” (Morrison, 2002). The primary reasons for a language to become global are war and conquests, trade, migration and the introduction of newer channels of communication. The voyages of exploration by British seamen; the vast spread of British colonialism and the industrial revolution in Britain are primarily responsible for turning English into the global language. This world presence of English has been further maintained and enhanced through the economic, political and technological superiority of America. The dominance of English has been registered and recognized worldwide. English today has become the most sought after language in the realm of scientific studies and technology, career growth and advancement, and is also viewed as a stepping stone on the ladder of socio-

economic status and prestige.

Sapir had predicted way back in 1931 that English would enormously grow and become the global language. Crystal’s acknowledgement in 1997 that the use of English as a link language and lingua franca was responsible for the rise and growth of the English language echoed the same voice.

To quote Redmann (2002, p. 45) “English spans the divide between people and cultures. It is not owned by Britain and America: now it belongs to everyone.” The very fact that English has gained its entry and established firm grounds in so many countries speak in itself about the worldwide status that the language has acquired. There are many scholars like Phillipson (1992) who feel it is a part of linguistic imperialism; Graddol (2006) terms it as “English Triumphalism”, and many others term it as ‘predatory’, ‘killer’, or ‘imperialist’. There are still others who feel it has broken all

“Linguistic Barriers” and has in fact been instrumental in reviving many endangered languages by giving them longer life in terms of rendering them a creolized or pidginized form.

The use of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by various professional communities eg.: “Seaspeak” spoken in the marine fraternity; “Airspeak” spoken by pilots and people manning air-traffic vouch for the supremacy and reach of the language (Wallraff, 2007). Technology has played a dominant role in the spread of English. The emergence of Internet with about 80% of its material being available in English clearly indicates the lead of English in this realm of modern technology.

English proficiency tests like TOEFL, IELTS, MELAB which are essential for gaining a seat in education or profession on a global front point at the continuing worldwide spread and hold of English.

The global dominance of English has made it the lingua franca and linguists and language specialists have been addressing it by different terminologies. McKay uses the term English as International Language (EIL) as an umbrella term covering both local and global uses of English; Seidlhofer (2001, 2004) and Jenkins (2000, 2003, 2006) refer to English in the Kachruvian outer circle (Africa, Asia and the Caribbean) as World Englishes and for the English spoken in the expanding circle they term it

as ELF i.e., English as a lingua franca. Terms like ‘International Englishes’, ‘World Englishes’, ‘World English’ (in the singular), ‘World Standard Spoken English’ (Crystal, 2003), ‘Nuclear English’ (Quirk, 1982), ‘English as a Lingua Franca’, ‘English as a Family of Languages’ (Canagarajah, 2006), ‘General English’ (Ahulu, 1997) are all being used for this language which has come to rule the world.

### **The Pot-Pourri**

But there is no standard variety of English maintained worldwide. Language purists (Quirk, 1985) feel that there has been a fragmentation and distortion of the so called pure and pristine variety of English as we now have different flavors of English in its hybridized form i.e. Chinglish, Japlish, Hinglish, Singlish etc. There are linguists like Braj Kachru who sees English spread globally in three concentric circles and justifies the nativization of English (2005).

While Quirk (1985) vouches for the proficient use of the language by native speakers, Kachru (1992) counter argues, “the native speaker is not always a valid yardstick for the global uses of English”.<sup>1</sup> Whatever these arguments may lead to, it is an established fact that there is no homogeneity in English on the global front. There are no standards or set rules. The prescriptive grammar books of yesteryears are a thing of past; today’s English is best described as what is seen, spoken or heard worldwide. “The English

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<sup>1</sup> Kachru, 1992, Teaching world Englishes. In B.B. Kachru (Ed.), *The other tongue: English across cultures* (2nd ed.) (pp. 358). Urbana: University of Illinois Press

language now belongs to all those who use it” (Brown, 2000). As linguists say language is what it is in terms of usage, it is descriptive. How can then one define and describe English in today’s perspective – we have Singaporean English, Malaysian English, African English, Japanese English, Korean English, and the list goes on and on and within each of these varieties there are further sub-varieties too, for eg., Tamil English, Punjabi English, Bengali English, Malayali English etc. Each community, group or nation carries its own cultural imprints on English. There are traces of Mother Tongue influences in these varieties of English.

One does not forget one’s roots and culture and is not completely immersed in a new language and culture. Speaking English does not necessarily mean turning English in entirety. English spoken worldwide is not spoken the English way; it has local flavors to it. We cannot expect the English speaking word populace to turn English in their outlook; “to change the colour of their skin, the straightness of their hair, or the shape of their eyes to conform to other groups” (Cook, 1999, p. 196).

Alok cannot become Alec and Harmeet cannot transform into Harry. We cannot have an Arnold in an *angrakha*, a Shelley in a *salwar*, a Byron in a *burkha*, a Lawrence in a *lungi* or a Joyce in *jodhpuris*. English cannot be acquired the English way. There is a difference between language learning

and language acquisition (Krashen). Mother Tongue is acquired whereas English as a second or foreign language has to be learnt.

The English bred (pun intended) across the globe – prepared by the dough kneaded from the flour of English knowledge, leavened by the desire to be more Anglicized and British in their outlook, baked in the academic oven of English medium institutions – now seem sandwiched between the buttered slices of the Mother Tongue influence of their native dialects and the Received Pronunciation (RP)<sup>2</sup> of the native speakers of English. Native speakers of English look at non-native varieties – a legacy of colonial period – with either amusement or irritation (Kachru, 1983).

Though linguists do not agree on one standard form of English; yet they agree that it being a common link language should adhere to and maintain mutual intelligibility at least in those fields and domains where it is used internationally. (Kachru, 1985).

### **Mosaic of Varied Cultures**

As linguists agree to the existence of a wide variety of English – all of them adapting some feature of English and stabilizing them into their own native milieu (Kachru, 1986); all these varieties are acceptable as long as they are intelligible and comprehensible.

We might hear a Dutch businessman talk about earning his *celery* instead of his *salary*, or a Korean finding it difficult to

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<sup>2</sup> Received Pronunciation or R.P. is the kind of pronunciation that is well received or accepted as the standard in England. It is the form of speech generally used by educated people in the south of England.

differentiate between *pork* and *fork*. We can hear an Indian having trouble with the word initial cluster sounds like *st-* and words like *station* or *statue* are either *sation* or *istation*; or *satatu* or *istatu* depending on the place where the speaker is from. Non-native speakers of English often have a tendency to pronounce English words as they are spelled.

Clusters are an important area where non-native speakers usually face a lot of problem and often tend to ease out their problems by either inserting a vowel or dropping a consonant. The phonetic realization of English is poor amongst the non-native speakers as there are many sounds which are completely new to them and though there are some which do exist in their own languages but may be just as allophonic variations and not as distinct units. It can also be the other way round for eg., features like aspiration give rise to distinct and separate phonemes in Hindi whereas they are just allophonic variations in English used for plosive sounds in the word initial position. Often when a non-native speaker of English finds difficult to pronounce the English phonemes he replaces it by the closest approximation in his Mother Tongue, at times rendering his speech even unintelligible. These variations are difficult to comprehend for a non-native ear than for a native one. Though the native speakers do realize the mistake they don't have much problem in comprehending them than others who are neither natives nor belong to the place where such variant forms are used. For example a Japanese person as

compared to an American may have problems in understanding a Dutch person speaking English.

The vowel length is yet another feature which is a major reason for unintelligibility. The lack of finer distinction between longer and shorter vowels by non-native speakers result in speech which often sound strenuous for listeners.

Suprasegmental features like stress, tone and intonation pose much problem for non-native speakers of English. Modifications in connected speech and r-insertion are also difficult to copy. For non-native speakers of English from a syllable timed language following weak-form words and unstressed vowels in English is another area of trouble.

Though British or American English do carry accent but as long as it is neutralized in the non-native speakers it is intelligible and comprehensible to people across the globe. Strong MT (Mother tongue) influence in the form of heavy accents is a characteristic feature of non-native variety of English. Accents not only vary according to the geographical setting but they also vary along with the social class, age and gender.

In Arabic English /r/ is pronounced as a flap or trill; in Indian English often as a retroflex. For Hebrew speakers it is very difficult to pronounce English words like *hit/heat* as they fail to discriminate between a long and a short vowel. The confusion between /w/ and /v/ is across most of the languages. The Germans fail to pronounce a velarized /l/ in the word-final position.

Hungarians often replace /è/ and /ð/ sounds by [s;] and [d\*]. The Italians replace /œ/ with [a]. As Russian does not have [è] and [ð] sounds, the Russian speakers of English language often replace them with either /s/ and /z/ or /t/ and /d/. Japanese speakers have a lot of confusion in pronouncing /l/ and /r/ as they face problem both in the perception and the production of these phonemes because Japanese language does not distinguish between the two. People from Vietnam generally do not produce final consonants as there are very few final consonants in Vietnamese.

Non-native varieties of English do not just sound different but also differ in word formation process and syntax. The word formation process which is prevalent in the MTs of people speaking the non-native varieties of English are often carried over to their English. We often see features of reduplication and at times even there is a lot of intra-word code-switching and code-mixing. English is not a Pro-drop language whereas there are many south Asian languages which are + Pro-drop. There is often a carry over feature of Pro-drop when these non-native speakers speak English. As Chinese lacks representation of number, the Chinese people while speaking English, often have problem combining subject and verb. Their subject and verb often don't agree in number. For Koreans there is confusion in gender.

As language has a cultural imprint English often cannot adequately take care of the

entire vocabulary of a non-native culture. Exact translation is not possible. There are three Hindi words for second person singular *aap*, *tum* or *tu* which when translated into English becomes *you*, losing out on the honorific/non-honorific information. Kinship terms like *uncle* and *aunt* cannot encompass the entire range of relationship that is connoted in the Indian context. A *mama*, *phupha*, *chacha*, *tau*, *mausa* or a *mami*, *bua*, *chachi*, *tai*, *mausi* cannot be put under an umbrella term of *uncle* and *aunt*. Each kinship term has different meaning and is culture specific.

Words often acquire colloquial meanings which are entirely different from their dictionary meanings and the same is true with English across many nations. English has also been enriched by other languages and cultures and the numerous loan words in English vociferate the same.

### **Conclusion**

Although English has spread across the globe, an important factor that can reduce or marginalize this influence of English could be the economic power. "English is by no means the only language in global business ... as it only accounts for 30% of the world Gross Domestic Product, and is likely to account for less in the future" (Davis, 2003). China is emerging as a new force to reckon with and maybe it is not far off when Mandarin becomes essential for all to learn. While the Internet might have been once a primary factor which led to the growth and global status of English, it is the emergence of newer languages on the



net which might lead to the decline of English. The flavors of global English (Spanglish, Hinglish, Japlish etc.) are themselves posing a threat to the language and the Standard English users are gathering up for some sort of movement towards its preservation which can lead to the decline in its growth. "The US-dominated phase of globalization is fading ... and English does not enjoy a complete hegemony." Graddol (2006, p. 113).

But the vast spread of English cannot vanish soon. It has firmly rooted itself in almost the entire globe. Though there may be many varieties and flavors of English but as long as it serves the purpose of communication, the language lives.

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