

World Englishes, Native Speakers and English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

As the global lingua franca and a dominant medium of trade, communication, education, and cultural exchange, English has evolved through centuries of interaction with diverse peoples, societies, and historical forces. Its widespread adoption across regions has led to the emergence of multiple varieties, collectively referred to as World Englishes, reflecting the language's dynamic and adaptive nature. This article examines the changing character and functions of English through two key lenses: the paradigm of World Englishes and the concept of the native speaker. It traces the development of World Englishes and critically engages with the native versus non-native speaker debate, highlighting the limitations of traditional frameworks. The discussion proposes a more fluid and contemporary understanding of English that acknowledges the realities of globalisation, digital communication, and translingual practices. While existing models remain valuable, they require revision to accommodate evolving linguistic landscapes and the increasingly diverse ways in which English is used and negotiated in the twenty-first century.

KEYWORDS: World Englishes; English as a Lingua Franca; English as an International Language; Multilingualism; Translanguaging.

INTRODUCTION

Braj B. Kachru's (1985) diagrammatic representation of World English (WE) was created in the shadow of a colonial and tentatively post-colonial world. He discussed (1992) "the spread of English in terms of three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle...with reference to the historical, sociolinguistic and literary contexts". The Inner Circle provides the norms (for example, the USA and UK), the Outer Circle develops and maintains the norms (for example, India and Egypt), and the Expanding Circle follows the norms (for example, China and Russia). Kachru concludes the same article, "World Englishes: Agony and Ecstasy" (1992) with these words,

...and thereby hangs a linguistic tale of cross-cultural attitudes about the forms and functions of world Englishes. What is viewed as deficit by one group of English users indicates pragmatic success to other users. What causes linguistic agony to one group is the cause of ecstasy for the other.

Looking at the phenomenal growth and the range of prototypes makes one pause and wonder whether 'English' would be the accurate word now and whether such a diagram would still be relevant. In the current scenario, Industry 5.0 is based completely on

the devices that we carry, the screens we depend upon and the technology that has become a part of our lives. World Englishes have been transformed by the global media exposure and the overwhelming amount of data in the Digital Wild. Since the mind of the time could not foresee Industry 5.0 and its Digital turn, the Kachru Concentric Circles model was an accurate representation of the way English was used and disseminated. He is also considered to be the pioneer of this standard/non-standard or the native/non-native debate, emphasising that we need to focus on the "WE-ness" rather than the dichotomy of an "us and them."

WORLD ENGLISHES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The twenty-first century has seen a substantial interest in the hybrid varieties of English and their unique features. The Indian speech community once viewed English as the oppressive weapon of the coloniser. As more Indians became proficient in English, the threat of English as a weapon diminished. After India's independence in 1947, it became clear that no Indian language would be accepted as a lingua franca. Hence, English came to be accepted as the language of official discourse.

With the liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991 and the subsequent digital turn, India saw an upswing

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in hybrid forms of English used in daily discourse. The economic liberalisation forced English Language Teaching (ELT) to transform into a large-scale project, and English came to be a central economic competence instead of being a colonial inheritance. This economic pressure pushed ELT away from pedagogy towards functionality and fluency, with private tuition centres and ed-tech platforms promoting English as a source of social mobility. But this also entrenched linguistic inequalities, prioritising

urban, middle-class learners over regional-language speakers. English thereby became a symbol of hope and a gatekeeper of opportunity in the neoliberal economy. The same youngster today has become proficient enough to use one variety of English in the classroom, another variety at home and yet another variety on social media. So, the question of language dilution merits no worry because the multiple hybrids of English ensure that the language is breathing, alive and dynamic while staying relevant.

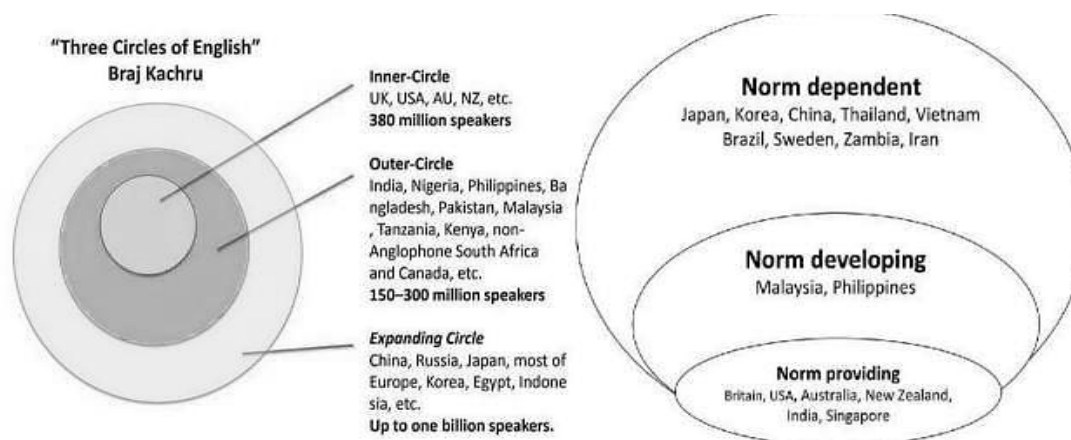


Figure 1: “Three Circles of English” by Braj B. Kachru

Against the global pandemic and the widespread requirement of the digital way of teaching, learning and communicating, the complete concept of World Englishes has metamorphosed into a multi-strand and many-hued organism that is chameleon-like in its mutations. That is the distance World Englishes have travelled from the concentric circles of Kachru. Digital Englishes is a result of this mutation of language and linguistics; it deals with the multi-faceted and multi-hued evolving forms, uses and functions of the English language, especially in digital communication environments. Digital Englishes include the multimodal, hybrid and global/glocal nature of the usage of English.

Considering the global connectivity of English users, any inventory of the specific features of a single variety of English will be seen to be shrinking as compared to the features common to every kind of World English. From the perspective of the diachronic linguist, the varieties of World English seem to be moving towards a common core, while from the perspective of the synchronic linguist, each variety is shedding specific features and adopting features from the common core. The growing multilingual nature of the world means that each language user holds a repertoire of languages and varieties, picking whatever is required at a particular time and in a specific context. Code-

switching is fast becoming the norm, and its proliferation holds implications for not just code-mixing but the development of the common core and the specific variety of World English.

In the Colonial and early post-colonial times, there was some justification for maintaining the Native Speaker versus Non-Native Speaker dichotomy. Place of birth, geographic location, speech community and mother tongue were labels that signified justifiable watertight compartments.

David Graddol (1997) gives an interesting figure (Figure 2) to demonstrate what he calls the “shift from linguistics monopoly to oligopoly.” Expanding upon Kachru’s model, he categorises speakers into L1, L2 and EFL (Figure 2), shifting the centre of gravity from L1 to L2 and reinforcing that L2 and EFL speakers outnumber L1 speakers, emphasising the importance of Global/World Englishes.

David Crystal (2003) goes a step further when he writes that the centre of gravity of English has shifted decisively away from its native speakers. Davies (2003), for instance, indicates that “the native speaker, it is proposed, is important both as an ideal (the ‘myth’) of the title and as model (the ‘reality’ of the title)”. On the contrary, Leung, Harris and Rampton (1997) suggest using “language expertise, language

inheritance, and language affiliation” instead of “native speaker” and “mother tongue”, thereby emphasising proficiency, identification and social context. Canagarajah (1999) elaborates that ELT, when exported globally, acts as a neocolonial project, propagating Western norms, while teachers and students act as creative mediators negotiating meaning across native norms. Cook (1999) observes that if learners see L2 learning as a battle to become native speakers, they become dispirited, whereas recognising their unique status between two languages can lead to higher levels of use. Erling (2005) argues that ELT professionals must move away from privileging L1 varieties and teach English as a means of intercultural communication and critical analysis.

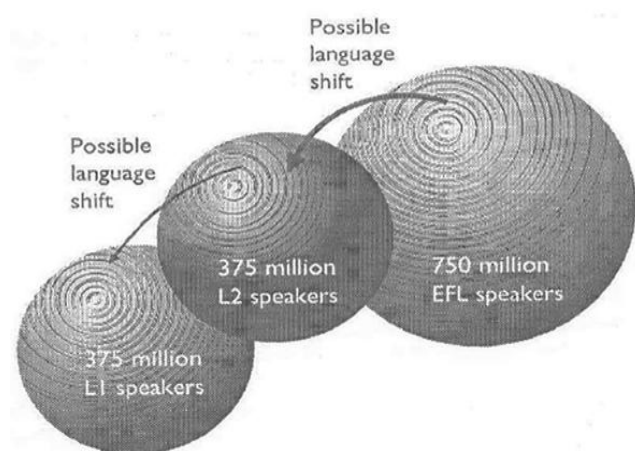


Figure 2: Graddol's Illustration of WE

Societies live in constant fear of losing cultural identities to dominant languages, along with the anxiety of being isolated in the global community, for which Llurda (2004) suggests a solution: “local changes in the heartland should not be transferred to the international use of the language, and changes caused by the international nature of the language should be learned by members of the native-speaking communities.” In other words, EIL must become a stabilised variety. In most ELT classrooms today, appropriacy has joined the traditional pair of accuracy and fluency. In an increasingly multilingual world, the many faces of World Englishes do not evoke a political or hierarchical response. Rather, there is a sense of pride in selecting the appropriate English for the suitable setting.

A FRESH LOOK AT WE

Figure 3 is a conceptual representation of WE within the paradigm of Industry 5.0, digital communication and globalisation. It illustrates the dynamic ecosystem of English by mapping the interplay among

local, global and emergent language practices with fluidity, hybridity and user versatility. The dynamic nature of English is represented by the interconnectedness and fluidity among common, local and emergent English language usage and practices, especially considering fluidity, hybridity and fluid user identities. The earlier models were useful for contemporary research in the field of English language and communication; the changes of the age and era have made it pertinent that the perspective is rewritten.

The earlier models of WE, while foundational, are increasingly insufficient in accounting for the contemporary linguistic reality. Kachru's concentric circles, for instance, remain geographically anchored and implicitly hierarchical. This privileges regions which have historically provided the norms of English, and positions other regions as norm-dependent.

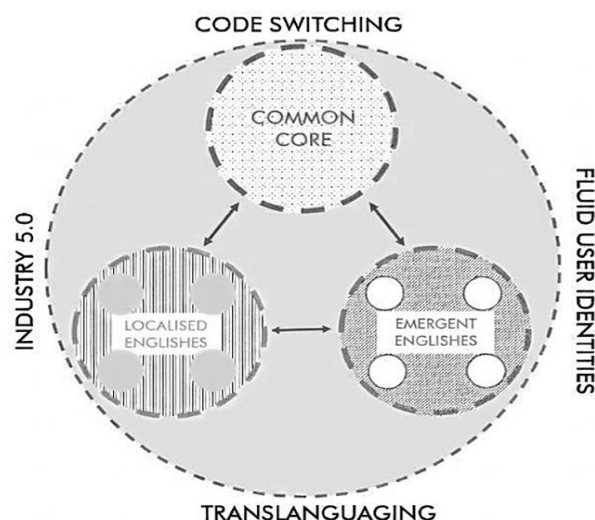


Figure 3: Integrated Model of World Englishes
Inner Circle

At the centre of the model is a triangle of interaction among three varieties of Englishes.

Common Core: This is the shared intelligibility zone between English varieties. Not a rigid “standard English” but mutually understood grammar, vocabulary and structure. A source of connection among various Englishes. This is the standard space of academia, pedagogy and learning of the English language. It is important to note that the Common Core is not a fixed or predetermined standard, nor is it owned or regulated by the Inner Circle. Instead, it emerges through repeated interaction, mutual intelligibility and communicative success across diverse contexts of use. It simultaneously acts as a source of grammar, function and negotiation, as per the users' requirements, rather than those imposed

by prescriptive norms. As such, the Common Core is best understood as an evolving zone of shared understanding. A Core that is continuously reconstituted through global usage. This ensures that it remains flexible and inclusive.

Localised Englishes: These are varieties moulded by particular social, cultural and geographical environments, e.g., Nigerian English or Indian English. These features include local idiom, pronunciation and sociolinguistic norms. They tend to act as markers of identity. The solid circles inside this perimeter signify the formed identities of these Englishes. This particular version of English further becomes a marker of power and identity. Language transfused with a foreign element, not changed but transfused, acts as a site of resistance against the authority and the centre, paving the way for the margins.

Emergent Englishes: These are the new forms of English. These fluid and hybrid identities are often digital or youth generated. These arrows suggest ongoing negotiation, code-switching, code-mixing and context-dependent use of English. The empty circles denote the unstable and fluid state of these Englishes. Nigerian English, for instance, has two varieties, based on regional and ethnic lines (Oyebola & Ileku 2025). The English used by Gen-Z on online platforms, the shorthand and slang used in gaming chats and Instagram captions, are also different from what is generally deemed as standard English.

The Common Core interconnects Localised and Emergent Englishes. It also enables cross-cultural and cross-linguistic understanding. The line between Localised and Emergent Englishes is highly fluid. There are numerous external elements that continuously aid in developing a dynamic web among the varieties of English. The arrows illustrate the connection and bond between the Englishes and their enduring fluidity, accentuated by practices like code-switching, code-mixing and context.

The interaction between these elements happens with constant negotiation, accommodation and adaptation. Local users interact with the standard English and pave the way for localised versions of the language. It is because of such localised versions of English that the open and welcoming lingua franca has reached people far and wide. This pluriverse space paves the way for co-construction of meaning, thereby turning the diagram into a process.

Outer Circle

The discontinuous outer circle represents macro-contexts and forces that impact the use of English and its development. At the top of the circle, there is Code-Switching, whereby users shift languages or registers due to audience, purpose or platform. Such a process supports and enhances both localised and emergent forms. There are certain macro-forces in play; they are active agents that shape the production, circulation and reception of English in real time. Platform affordances of spaces like X, Instagram, Facebook, Discord, Reddit and other online spaces present limitless exposure to the language. These platforms encourage compressed, hybrid and multimodal expressions. Similarly, the second force, algorithm mediation through predictive text, autocorrect and AI-driven communication tools, subtly standardises certain linguistic patterns while simultaneously enabling hybridisation through suggestion, translation and adaptive phrasing. These functions make the standardised language accessible.

Globalisation further intensifies this dynamic by creating overlapping communicative domains. English simultaneously works within offices, public spheres, online platforms and educational contexts. A user may employ the formalised Common Core in their professional life but still choose to go for the localised and hybrid variety in peer interaction, along with multimodal English in digital or social media spaces.

It is within this framework that code-switching presents itself as a strategic, context-sensitive resource. It helps users negotiate their identity, audience and purpose. This further reinforces the interconnectedness between localised and emergent Englishes while continuously reshaping the Common Core.

FLUID USER IDENTITIES, INDUSTRY 5.0 AND TRANSLANGUAGING

The right side is labelled Fluid User Identities, a symbol of the translingual nature of identity online: individuals experiment with various selves. English use mimics the toggling among formal/informal, local/global and academic/casual depending on context. This legitimates translingual practices and challenges fixed 'NS' ideologies. Focus should also be on the fact that identity is performed and not possessed. Each and every word that a speaker utters brings forward its own modern etymology. Students are already aware of a language that openly exists in the digital world, a language that is different from the

one they study and are taught in the classroom. While a standard form of the language becomes the goal of an English classroom, the standard rules and techniques become obsolete in a system like this, where their prior knowledge of English can act as a successful scaffold.

The left represents Industry 5.0 or the Fifth Industrial Revolution, influenced by forces such as automation, AI, international communication and digital platforms. Industry 5.0 actively integrates advanced technology with human creativity, wellbeing, sustainability, and ethical collaboration. English usage is increasingly influenced by algorithms, platforms (Zoom, Slack, GPTs) and globalised workplace software. This changes tone, form, expectations and access, moving towards standardisation and hybridisation. AI especially has made language and language learning accessible to many; correctness can easily be achieved via these platforms, but communication will always be influenced by linguistic heritage and exposure. These digital and AI platforms have created and recreated new norms of correctness.

A key concept that Suresh A. Canagarajah has worked on is Translanguaging, the idea that bilingual/multilingual individuals create a unified linguistic repertoire to make meaning and navigate communication. It was then popularised by Ofelia Garcia in the 2000s as a pedagogical tool and sociopolitical act of resistance. The concept focuses on language boundaries as socially constructed, flexible and fluid, enabling code-switching and code-mixing in communication. The bottom of the representation contains Translanguaging, a significant addition, that helps users draw on their entire linguistic repertoire to create meaning. It erases distinctions between 'languages' and enables integrated meaning-making in multilingual contexts, particularly in digital environments.

The model is fluid; there are no rigid boundaries that can categorise or dominate a particular linguistic community. Although it is not as structured as Kachru or Graddol's illustrations, it presents a representational view of the realities of language in this era. It allows for analysis and evaluation and leaves space for further research and development as well. The present fluidity is not chaos, but a patterned variability, honouring all linguistic identities and social structures.

This diagram depicting a post-normative, user-focused model of English indicates that:

1. English today is a spectrum; it is not fixed, but in endless negotiation.
2. Users construct English as much as English constructs users.
3. Fields such as code-switching, translanguaging and user agency form the core of English operating in the twenty-first century.
4. 4. This model of WE challenges the NS norm by placing fluidity, context and flexibility at its centre.

English is no longer a system to be mastered but a resource to be mobilised. We need to realise the power of language as a mode of communication and a ground for lifelong learning. To put the students in a container and a fixed mould is to kill their identities and individualities. The legitimacy of a language comes from its use and not its origin. The future of English lies in interaction, and not standardisation.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of WE has definitely challenged classroom pedagogy and the traditional methodology of teaching and learning the English language. ELT has always been shaped by the dominance of the Inner Circle and its standardisation, especially British and American English, but the contemporary age has observed a large-scale spread and growing recognition of linguistic diversity that calls for re-evaluating pedagogy and classroom practices. English must move beyond the native-speaker norms towards a pluralistic and inclusive classroom framework that reflects the sociolinguistic reality of today.

Teachers and curriculum designers must include plural Englishes and their varieties based on the geographical region, along with Digital Englishes as realia or primary teaching resources. This will help the students develop linguistic awareness and tolerance toward diverse Englishes and promote competence over accuracy. Teachers must move from a model of error correction based solely on native norms to a more flexible approach. Multilingual resources should be encouraged in the classroom, aligning with the concept of translanguaging, as such practices support cognitive development and reduce linguistic anxiety. Teacher training programs must also be inclusive of non-native speakers and emergent Englishes. Language assessment and evaluation must also be revamped to accommodate the developments in the English language.

Considering the effervescent model of Englishes in the contemporary age, we need to accept and embrace

the dynamism of language identities as well. English has travelled a long way; an understanding of this trajectory and its implications is crucial today. Change will bring new avenues of linguistic, stylistic, and ELT research, creating novel spaces in academia. Moreover, this new communication style and its relevance to the current generation need to be understood and applied by the policy-makers, instructors, facilitators, trainers and teachers of English language and communication.

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