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Indian English: A Linguistic Reality

Richa, Ph.D.

The Most Widely Used Language

English is the most used and studied language in the history of human race. One in five of the world's population speaks English, approximately 375 million people speak English as their first language, and over 375 million people speak English as their second language.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was already one of the foremost languages of the world, because it was the main language of both the British Empire and the United States of America. Though, at that time, it had significant competition from other widespread European languages such as French, German, Russian and Spanish and, beyond Europe, from Chinese, Arabic and Swahili. But since World War II English has been alone in becoming the sole universal language, the world's *lingua franca*.

World English, etc.

Noting its ever growing role, linguists and other scholars have been, for some time, giving distinctive labels to this language. Increasingly, since occasional use in the 1930s, it has come most commonly to be known as 'World English'. This term has also been put into the plural, as 'World Englishes', so as to highlight proliferating varieties that are often called simply 'the Englishes', and in Asia and Africa, 'the New Englishes'. (The conceptualization of 'World Englishes' with a theoretical framework in linguistics actually goes back to the early 1960s (Kachru, 1965).

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Since at least the 1970s, the language complex has also been called ‘International English’, and in the 1990s, the term ‘Global English’ has proved very much fashionable, to accompany and blend in with the current economic buzzword ‘Globalization’.

A Pluralistic Language

English is really a pluralistic language, having layers after layers of extended processes of convergence with other languages and cultures. Contact with other languages is quite unique as it has altered the traditional sources like, French, Italian, German, etc. It is like an opening up of English language to the non-western world: which was traditionally not a resource for English. The non-western world has now become contributors to and partners in the pluralism of the language.

The fact must be acknowledged that now English is larger than any of the communities in which it is used and also that the members of those communities need to be fully aware of the international linguistic resource at their disposal. One positive and natural outcome of this unique state of affairs is that no one can even think today about who *owns* the language or its many varieties. The English language has become a global resource. As such, it does not owe its existence or future to any nation, group or individual. In as much as a language belongs to any individual or community, English is the possession of every individual and community that wishes to use it.

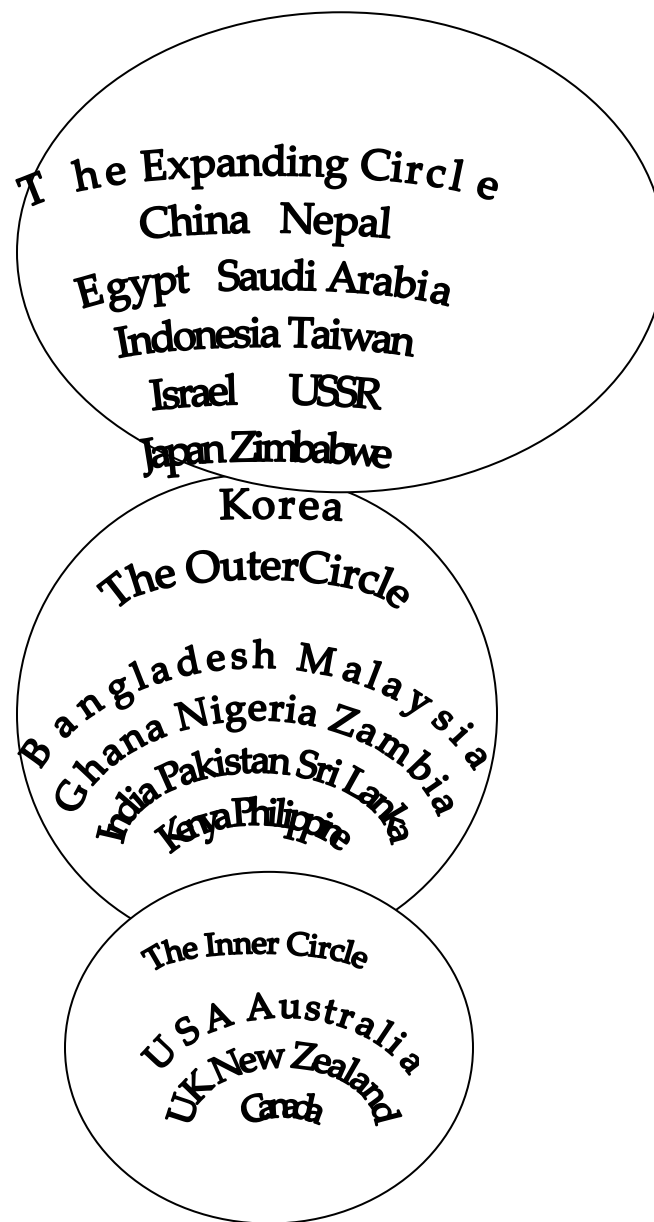
Validity of the Traditional Dichotomy between Native and Non-native Under Challenge

Keeping in view these facts, obviously the traditional dichotomy between native and non-native is functionally un insightful and linguistically questionable, particularly while discussing its functions in multilingual societies, as Kachru (1988a) correctly points out. Rajendra Singh in ‘Views on Englishes’ suggests that oxymoronic labels such as ‘non-native variety’ should be dropped for ever as these labels hide a multitude of sins and accuracies.

ENL and EFL Distinction Under Attack

The earlier distinction of English as a native (ENL), second (ESL) and foreign (EFL) language has come under attack.

Consider the following diagram showing the spread of English:



In the above diagram, Kachru (1985 a) represents the spread of English in terms of three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle.

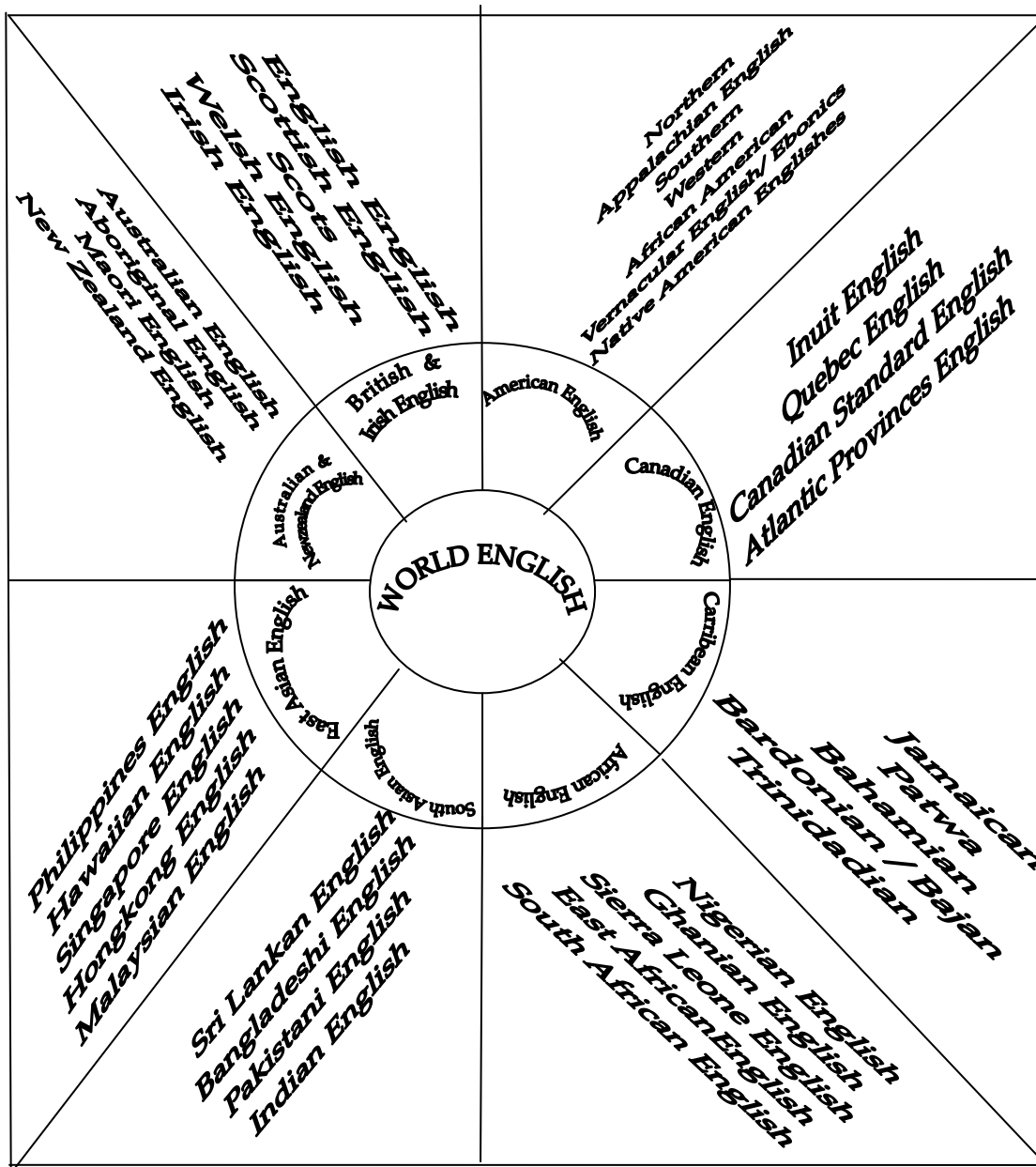
The Inner Circle represents the traditional bases of English, dominated by the ‘mother-tongue’ varieties of the language. In the Outer Circle, English has been institutionalized as an additional language. The Expanding Circle includes the rest of the world where English is used as a primary foreign language and the users are unpredictably increasing.

Kachru has not placed countries like South Africa and Jamaica within the above concentric circles, since, as he feels, their sociolinguistic situation is rather complex, particularly with reference to the English using populations and the functions of English.

D’Souza (2006) uses the term “New Varieties of English” (NVEs) for the Englishes which are peculiar to the ex-British and American dominions.

Varieties of World English

Tom McArthur, in *Encarta World English Dictionary*, 1999, represents the varieties of World English through the following diagram.



The study of the spread and the stratification of English in the non-western world, within various theoretical frameworks, is essentially a post-1960 phenomenon. These Englishes have become an object of study as because of this spread, formally and functionally, English now has multicultural identities. In order to explore these multicultural identities, the linguistic implications of these Englishes, at various levels, have been studied, its linguistic creativity and innovations as well.

The Indian Situation

In the multilingual context of India, English adds a unique and distinct colour. Used extensively in communication, trade, business, media, technology, education, it really is a purpose bound presence and not a free existence. After nearly forty years of independence, in the field of higher education, English continues to be functionally a very potent language (Srivastava & Gupta, 1982:1).

In spite of the fact that English is used by less than 3% of the entire population as a necessary means of communication, it is the language of 'power' and 'prestige'. Though one cannot neglect our rather diffident and uncertain relationship because of its 'colonial hangover', English, as a matter of fact, clearly outweighs all the Indian languages in terms of power. It continues to be a status symbol in Indian society and commands prestige in walks of life.

Indian English

The term 'Indian English' has come a long way from being a semi pejorative term for uneducated or semi literate usage (Lal, 1951/1987:226-27), to the English used by educated Indians (Kachru, 1983). For Kachru (1983:77), Standard Indian English is no more "elusive" than is Standard American English or Standard West African English. He clearly states that in the description of language use, "artistic needs" for creative use of language are as much a part of the total range of language use as is purely functional use.

Kachru's examination of literary texts reveals a conveniently assembled initial body of data belonging to the larger corpus of the written and spoken use of English by Indians which he calls Indian English (IE), having a spectrum ranging from the peaks of what is accepted as the best and pits of what is not. Kachru, Verma, Bansal, Daswani etc. suggest a 'cline of bilingualism' with different degrees of competence in English which explains the 'peaks' and the 'pits'.

On this cline, Standard IE, for Kachru (1965), means the speech of educated speakers of English used effectively for social control marked by the central point of the cline of bilingualism. This English, Indian English, has been stable for a long time and stability calls for the postulation of an object of description (Dasgupta, 1993:119).

Kachru thinks "the term IE is contextually self-explanatory, and linguistically significant. Furthermore, it makes [it] clear that the English language is used as a non-native language by the users of Indian languages, and more important, that it functions in those contexts which are "non-English" or "non-American" (Kachru 1983:142, n.12). He situates the language in an India-based English-L2-speaking community.

Indianisms

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While dealing with Indian English, one has to consider, in a linguistically realistic manner, some important and natural things as Dustoor (1968:126) points out, ‘there will always be a more or less indigenous flavour about our English’. This Indian flavour, Kachru suggests, is a kind of device of the Indianness of the nativized variety of English which has been used by Indians to serve the typically Indian needs in distinct Indian contexts for almost two hundred years. These Indianisms in Indian English, are, for him, culture bound and language bound which he terms as ‘deviations’. These are linguistic manifestations of pragmatic needs for appropriate language use in a new linguistic and cultural context. Verma (1978:217) calls IE “a highly structured system, which is systematically deviant from the Standard British English”.

Acts of Identity, Acceptability and Intelligibility

Another frequently used term for innovations/bilingual creativity is ‘acts of identity’. The Indianness of IE can also be seen as ‘acts of identity’. As Salikoko Mufwene comments on Englishes, ‘think of every acceptable combination of linguistic behaviour’, the Indianness of IE can also be thought of as acts of [linguistic] identity. Obviously, these variations presuppose sameness. This is a kind of linguistic flexibility.

At this point, one important question should be raised- how acceptable is this variety as ‘Standard’ variety of English?

The term ‘acceptability’ conveys the meaning of correctness according to certain standard. This term also expresses a language attitude and implies various types of appropriateness.

The second aspect is acceptance by whom. First, the acceptance within the Expanding Circle, i.e. within the institutionalized variety speakers, then by the Outer Circle speakers and at last, acceptance while communicating with the Inner Circle speakers. The same process is taken into consideration while discussing intelligibility of these varieties of English. Before, jumping to any conclusion, one must keep in mind the fact that English has interactional uses with mostly other non-native speakers.

So, how much importance should be given to acceptability and intelligibility with regard to the Inner Circle speakers?

Perception from Within

Indian English, like other World Englishes, is perceived from the vantage point of the Inner Circle. That is why, Bansal (1969) rejects some of the most widely accepted features of IE, in respect of sound, stress, intonation etc. But the reality is that a language is what its speakers or users make of it.

As with other World Englishes, IE has its own role to play in determining the future structure of English and use by its own usage. So many changes are taking place in English language due to the World Englishes. IE is part of this exploding world of English. It is in this context, IE as an object of study has to be explored.

A Heuristic Effort is Called for

Therefore, for an adequate description of Indian English, we have to indulge into a kind of heuristic effort and to concentrate on any systematic basic. More importance should be given to the functioning of Indian English within the linguistic and cultural space of India and as Dasgupta (1993) suggests, the main point of reference should be the Indian systems in the light of which facts of Indian English have to be described and interpreted which will make the examples core facts about the language.

Existing descriptions of IE have been based primarily the written material; there being very few instances of descriptions based on the spoken language. It is, therefore, essential to explore IE on the basis of the spoken material. Moreover, less attention has been paid to the area of syntax.

Characteristics of Indian English Syntax

Following are some of the characteristics of Indian English (IE) syntax in relation to British English (BE):

A. Use of Reduplication- Indian English does have the phenomenon **reduplication**, a hallmark of Indian languages unlike British English, which does not have any instance of **reduplication**. For example-

- i) There were many *short-short* statues in the shop. (IE)
There were many too *short* statues in the shop. (BE)
- ii) I saw very *cute-cute* toys there. (IE)
I saw very *cute* toys there. (BE)

B. Use of ‘Only’ and ‘Itself’ as Emphasizers - Indian English speakers use ‘only’ and ‘itself’ as emphasizees frequently. It should be note here that ‘only’ and ‘itself’ are used as emphasizees with quantifiers, numerals and adjectives but not with determiners. e.g.
* I saw a *short-short* toy there. British English speakers use intonation in its place. For example-

- i) I was going to Bangalore only. (IE)
I was going to Bangalore (falling-rising tone). (BE)
- ii) I will visit the emporium itself. (IE)

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I will visit the emporium itself (falling-rising tone.) (BE)

C. Deictic Use of Expletives – In Indian English, expletives have deictic use. For example -

i) An insect is there in my bathroom. (IE)
There is an insect in my bathroom. (BE)

ii) The van comes there! (IE)
There comes the van! (BE)

D. Deictic use of 'it' – In Indian English, deictic use of 'it' is fairly common. For example-

i) Give it (pointing at 'it') to the servant. (IE)
Give this to the servant. (BE)

ii) Move it!. (IE)
Move this!. (BE)

E. Absence of Reflexive Verbs - In Indian English we do not get the reflexive verb reading of 'hurt oneself' or 'enjoy oneself' as we get in the British English. For example -

i) Did you get hurt? (IE)
Did you hurt yourself? (BE)

'Did you hurt yourself?' in Indian English would mean 'Did you hurt yourself *on purpose?*'

ii) You did not enjoy. (IE)
You did not enjoy yourself. (BE)

F. Absence of 'Do' Insertion – Indian English does not employ 'do' insertion to make questions, instead intonation is used for this purpose. For example-

i) You know? (IE)
Do you know? (BE)

ii) They took the bag? (IE)
Did they take the bag? (BE)

G. Absence of Question Tag - There is complete absence of *question tags* in Indian English. For example-

i) It is right. No? (IE)

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It is right. Isn't it? (BE)

- ii) Neela will do this. No? (IE)
Neela will do this. Won't she? (BE)

H. Absence of Infl. to Comp. Auxiliary Movement – Despite Wh-movement, I to C Aux. movement is absent in Indian English. For example-

- i) Why you are going there? (IE)
Why are you going there? (BE)
- ii) From which place Ram is coming? (IE)
Which place is Ram coming from? (BE)

I. Wh-fronting to IP, not to CP – Wh-fronting in Indian English adjoins the phrase to IP instead of moving it to Spec. CP. For example-

- i) Shekharan wants to know that how many copies you have ordered. (IE)
Shekharan wants to know how many copies you have ordered. (BE)
- ii) I want to know that how many biryanis he has ordered (IE)
(Dasgupta, 1993).

I want to know how many biryanis he has ordered. (BE)

J. Distinctive Use and Non-use of Articles – Indian languages have no articles, hence, Indian English has a very distinct use as well as non-use of articles. The indefinite article “a” gets replaced with the quantifier “one” and when it IS used, it always means “one.” Otherwise “a” is missing. For example,

- i) Give me one pen. (IE)
- ii) Give me a pen. (BE)
- iii) Give me pen. (IE)

The article “the” is used whenever there is definiteness, otherwise it is missing.

- i) I went to hospital. (-definite)
- ii) I went to the hospital. (+definite)

K. Wrong Usage of Tense – Indian English uses the present continuous in contexts where BE uses the simple present. This is most obvious with the stative verbs and verbs of sense and knowing. For example,

i) I am knowing this place. (IE)

ii) I know this place. (BE)

Conclusion

As we have observed above, Indian English (IE) has firmly established itself as one of the World Englishes with its own syntactic characteristics, one of the most important aspects in the recognition of any new language. Indian English has acquired its own character in a country which is a melting pot of various cultures, people, and traditions, and languages. But the need of the hour is to get spoken data and work on various aspects of Indian English with its own regional variations.

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