# FROM SINGULARITY TO SINGULARITY[1]

## Sachin Labade
Associate Professor,
Department of English,
University of Mumbai, Mumbai,
Maharashtra, India
sachin.labade@english.mu.ac.in

## *Abstract*

*Due to the widespread growth and the flexibility to adopt itself to geo-socio-cultural changes, English has become a global language. This article intends to show the transgression of English from being the language of cultural hegemony (singularity) to becoming the language of multicultural identification in the light of the world Englishes (plurality). However, the main focus is to show how New Englishes can encourage as well as threaten the chances of English to become the Global Common Language (singularity)*

**Keywords:** *Standard English, New Englishes, Global language, Kachru's Concentric Circles, cultural hegemony*

## INTRODUCTION

Globalisation is probably the most significant socio-economic process affecting the world in the 21st Century. One of the significant issues connected to this process is a language which can function as a means of global communication. Among many options English has been considered the one that claims the status of a Global Language (See Crystal, 1997). However, this article does not attempt to argue the case of English as the only global language: the only endeavour, here, is to see the synchronic and diachronic growth of English from English-English to World Englishes and to ponder whether it can become Global English with one world standard.

### Spread of English

English was initially known as the language spoken in England. This, in my view, is the singularity of English. Bauer (2002) observes that at the time of Elizabeth I (1553-1603) there were at most 7 million native speakers of English and few non-native speakers. Later on, English spread all over the world including the American, African, Australian and Asian continents. Now, there are 104 countries (McArthur 1998) where English is used. It has more than a billion speakers worldwide. English claims 377 million native speakers (Crystal 1997), many more speak it as a second language but most speak it as a foreign language. This shows that, demographically, English has more users than any other language and it is the most widespread language in the world.

### From Cultural Hegemony to Multicultural Identification

English, no doubt, spread as a result of exploitation and colonization. For a long time, the spread of English amounted to cultural hegemony. In many ex-colonies of Britain, English is still considered as the language of an exclusive social elite. English has been constantly transgressing itself from the language of cultural dominance to a language that people learn to express their thoughts. According to Kachru (1985:222) its (English's) propensity for acquiring new identities, its power of assimilation, its adaptability to 'decolonisation' as a language, its provision of a flexible medium for literacy, and other types of creativity across languages and cultures have contributed to its continuous spread. It provided the most scientific, technological and cross-cultural domains of knowledge. "Many successful African and Indian writers, whose works blend the elements from centre and periphery cultures and languages, aim to decolonise literature." (Chinweizu quoted in Phillipson 1992).

### Kachru's Concentric Circles

Kachru (1985) has visualised the spread of English around the world as three concentric circles- representing different ways in which the language has been acquired and is currently used.
*The Inner Circle* refers to the traditional historical and sociolinguistic bases of English in the areas where it's the primary language (native or 1st language). It includes England, Ireland, Scot- land, United States, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Even Ireland and Scotland can be included in this circle.
*The Outer Circle* comprises regions colonized by Britain; the spread of English in the non- native settings

---

[1] This research paper was originally written for English For International Conferences: Quo Vadis, Society? in Technical University, Dresden, Germany on 14 June 2004.

https://www.gapbodhitaru.org/

where the language has become part of the country's chief institutions and plays an important role as a 'Second Language' in a multilingual setting. This includes India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nigeria, Zambia, Ghana etc. The number of people who speak English as the 2nd language will exceed the number of native speakers, which may result in shifting the centre regarding language from the native speakers to the non-native speakers.

*The Expanding Circle* involves nations which recognize the importance of English as an international language, but they do not have the history of colonization; nor does English have any special status in their language policy. In these areas English is primarily a foreign language.

## Plurality of English

The spread of English in all these circles has led itself to the plurality. English is not one uniform language spoken all over the world any more. The native varieties — with approximately 377 million speakers (Inner Circle) — split into British English, American English, Australian English, South African English, Hiberno English, New Zealand English, whereas the outer circle (approximately 375 million L2 speakers) has non-native varieties such as Indian English, Nigerian English, Ghanaian English. It is the Outer Circle which is open to the expansion as the countries in the Expanding Circle (approximately 750 million FL speakers) might shift towards the Outer Circle (see David Graddol, 2002:10)

## The New Englishes

The term 'New Englishes' is used for the varieties which have developed in the Outer Circle, have been transplanted and, therefore, can be called 'Diaspora Varieties'. In a linguistic and historical sense, these varieties are not new. They are called so because it is only recently that they have been linguistically and literature-wise recognized and institutionalised, although they have a long history of acculturation in geographical, cultural and linguistic contexts different from the English of the Inner Circle.

## The Question of Standard

This scenario seems quite promising for English to stand the chance of becoming a global language but, at the same time, it questions the uniformity of standard which a common global language requires.

The above model of Englishes by McArthur (1998) represents the standard native and non- native Englishes as well as the standardizing non-native Englishes.

Even if Standard British English or Standard American (U.S.) English have been used as the model varieties in the curriculum of English as a Second or Foreign Language, a change is taking place due to the influence of Standard non-native varieties of English. Standards in the other native and non-native Englishes are moving away from Standard British English in terms of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Nigeria makes a good illustration of a nation with its own English, giving rise to Standard Nigerian English. They don't ask other English-speaking nations any more what Standard English is (See Gilsford, J. 2002).

Indian English is another example of a variety in the process of standardization. There exists a Standard (General) Indian English Pronunciation System (Bansal/Harrison 1991) which has a few distinct consonants, vowels and vowel glides which are different from Standard British or American English. Shaw Philip et al. (2003) found the verb complementation pattern in Indian Standard English to be distinct form that of Standard British English.

Gilsford (2002) points out that it is not only the linguistic aspects which distinguish these varieties, but also the pragmatic or the cultural aspects. He mentions that "different Englishes may not have American Conversation Conventions. The topics and styles for small talks in the

U.S. might give offence in France or Japan. To Arabs, U.S. Conversation can seem brusquely and unenthusiastic. To Americans, German and Swiss people sometimes seem brusquely inconsiderate of 'Face'".

This leads us to think whether or not English will reach the singularity in the form of a Global English with uniformity and common standard from this complex plurality. According to Strevens (in Kachru 1992) the ELT industry may play an important role in maintaining an international standard. But one cannot ignore that the 2nd language countries are likely to develop their own curricula material and teaching resources which they seek to export to neighbouring countries. For instance, the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, India is working towards the same direction.

Crystal (1997) provides a sketch of World Standard Spoken English (WSSE) model in a couple of pages and Quirk (1985) gives a model of Nuclear English, 'identifying and exploiting redundancy within the code of Standard English'. Crystal also predicts that American English will be the greatest influence on the development of Global English. Making such predictions and models, however, is too early an attempt. Moreover, ignoring the growing influence of other Englishes, by no means, will be helpful for the expected singularity of English as a global language. Kachru (1985), on the contrary, suggests that the international English as a Global Language community should no longer be regarded as 'norm-dependent' but 'norm-developing' and ultimately the 'norm-providing.'

Approximately 80% of the interactions in which English is used as a foreign language or 2nd language take place without the presence of a native speaker. Moreover, 'native speakers as much as non-native speakers

need help when using English to interact internationally.  There is no room for Chauvinism.' (Smith, 1983) In such case, accepting or proposing Standard British or American English may be seen as a way of imposing imperial hegemony on the new Englishes which may be termed as 'colonisation of new Englishes'.

## CONCLUSION

If English has to be considered as the global language with a single standard in light of the  growth of various standard varieties of world Englishes and their relative significance in the process of globalisation, then the approaches by Quirk and Crystal, which view Standard Global English without any consideration of world Englishes, need to be avoided.  Instead, the amalgamation of world Englishes, taking the international intelligibility and communicative purposes into consideration, may bring the desired/expected singularity in the standard of English as a global language. This, no doubt, will remain a utopian idea until such an amalgamation is reached.

## REFERENECES

[1]   Bansal. *Spoken English*. Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd. 1991.

[2]   Bauer, Laurie. *An Introduction to International Varieties of English*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2002.

[3]   Crystal, David. *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

[4]   Gilsdorf, J. "Standard Englishes and World Englishes: Living with a Polymorph Business Language." *Journal of Business Communication*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1 July 2002, pp. 364–378, https://doi.org/10.1177/002194360203900305. Accessed 4 Oct. 2020.

[5]   G¨orlach, Manfred. *Studies in the History of the English Language*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1990.

[6]   Graddol, David. *The Future of English? A Guide to Forecasting the Popularity of the English Language in the 21st Century*. London, The British Council, 1997.

[7]   Hohenthal, Annika. "The Spread of English around the World - New Englishes." *Www.postcolonialweb.org*, www.postcolonialweb.org/india/hohenthal/2.1.html. Accessed 4 Feb. 2022.

[8]   Kachru, Braj B. *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*. 2nd ed., Urbana, University Of Illinois Press, 1992.

[9]   Kachru, Braj.B. Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: The Englishes in the Outer Circle. *English in the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

[10] McArthur, Tom, and Tom Macarthur. *The English Languages*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[11] Phillipson, Robert. *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

[12] Quirk, R. and Widdowson, H.G. *English in the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

[13] Shaw, P. et al. "Verb Complementation Patterns in Indian Standard English." *English World-Wide*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2003, pp. 137–161, https://doi.org/10.1075/eww.24.2.02ers. Accessed 13 July 2020.

[14] Smith, Larry E. *Readings in English as an International Language*. Oxford, Pergamon, 1983.

[15] Strevens, Peter. "English as an International Language." *The Other Tongue*, by Braj Kachru, Illinois, University of Illinois, 1992.