

ROLE OF ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY IN THE EVOLUTION OF WORLD ENGLISHES

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ABSTRACT

Ethnicity and Identity are two fields that reflect the postcolonial rejection of the idea of universal humanism as proposed and practised by the erstwhile colonizers. The growing importance of English as the lingua-franca in the present globalized economic-political-social and cultural scenario has also witnessed the growing postcolonial tendency of rejecting the concept of a 'standard' English, the English used by the 'natives'. There is now a growing consensus among scholars that there is not one English language anymore: rather there are many (McArthur, The English Languages). The conceptual framework that governs the study of these Englishes is termed World Englishes. Attempts have been made in this paper to examine how the postcolonial perspectives of ethnicity, identity and literature are instrumental in the use of 'World Englishes' and how World Englishes shape the linguistic and literary treatment of English in the decolonized nations.

INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial writings refer to the literary and textual processes of assertion of the natives regarding their difference from, resistance to and negotiation with former colonial masters and also evolving strategies to counter the growing trends of globalizing and neo-colonial methods through which the American and European imperialists try to establish their dominance over the erstwhile colonies and other lesser developed nations. Ethnicity and Identity are two fields that reflect the

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postcolonial rejection of the idea of universal humanism as proposed and practised by the colonizers. The growing importance of English as the lingua-franca in the present globalized economic-political-social and cultural scenario has also witnessed the growing postcolonial tendency of rejecting the concept of a 'standard' English, the English used by the 'natives' which should be the benchmark as far as 'universality' is concerned. There is now a growing consensus among scholars that there is not one English language anymore: rather there are many (McArthur, *The English Languages*), and most of these types of English are not at all connected with the language's early tradition based on Judeo-Christianity. The conceptual framework that governs the study of these Englishes is termed World Englishes. Attempts have been made in this paper is to examine how the postcolonial perspectives of ethnicity, identity and literature are instrumental in the use of 'World Englishes' and how World Englishes shape the linguistic and literary treatment of English in the decolonized nations.

THE EMERGENCE OF ENGLISH AS A GLOBALLY RECOGNIZED LANGUAGE

It is an irrefutable fact that English nowadays occupies a position of universal global acceptability. In fact, it is the lingua-franca of the present world. Its spread is arguably the most striking example of 'language expansion' of this century if not in all recorded history. "It has far exceeded that other famous case, the spread of Latin during the Roman Empire" (Platt et al, *The New Englishes* 1). John Adams's prophecy that "English will become the most respected and universally read and spoken language in the world" (Kachru, *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*) has in fact come true. This global spread of English has come about due to two factors: firstly, by the transplantation of the language by the native speakers and secondly, by the introduction of the language as an official language along with other national languages. The first factor saw the introduction of English in Wales, Scotland, parts of Ireland, North America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The adoption of English especially in North America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand was instrumental in the emergence of English as a major language in the world, though it was yet to be accepted as a global language.

The global stature of English was achieved only when the second factor emerged, i.e. when English arrived on the shores of South Asia, Africa and Latin America-----places that traditionally had no contact with the English language. The introduction of English into the socio-cultural environment of these parts of the world resulted in various alterations in the sociolinguistic colour of the English language. English came into contact with a wide variety of languages: Indo Aryan and Dravidian languages in Asia, languages of the Niger-Congo family in Africa and with Altaic languages in Southeast Asia. This Socio-Cultural-Linguistic contact saw the emergence of regional-contact varieties of English namely, Indian English, Malaysian English, Singaporean English, Philippine English, Nigerian English and Ghanaian English (Kachru, English as an Asian Language 50). The global spread of English has been explained by Kachru through three concentric circles where the inner circle comprises the nations with native English speakers, the outer circle of the nations where English has come to occupy equal status with the native languages and the expanding circle comprises of nations where there is an increased use of the language in this era of globalisation. Kachru's (English as an Asian Language) concentric circle model (Figure 1) captures the historical, sociolinguistic, acquisitional, and literary contexts of the spread and diffusion of English.

THE EXPANDING CIRCLE

- **China**
- **Caribbean Countries**
- **Egypt**
- **Indonesia**
- **Nepal**
- **Japan**
- **Korea**
- **Israel**
- **Saudi Arabia**
- **Taiwan**

THE OUTER CIRCLE

- **Bangladesh**
- **Ghana**
- **India**
- **Kenya**
- **Malaysia**
- **Nigeria**
- **Pakistan**
- **Philippines**
- **Singapore**
- **South Africa**
- **Sri-Lanka**
- **Tanzania**

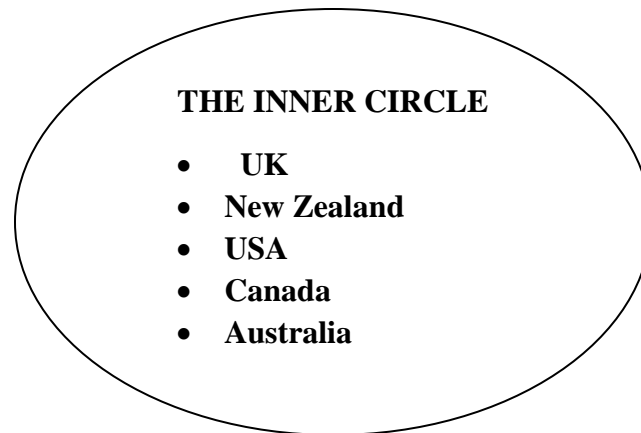


FIGURE 1: THE CONCENTRIC CIRCLES BY KACHRU (English as an Asian Language)

Just as the inner circle denotes the nations where English is the native language, the outer circle comprises of nations where English has grown among non-native speakers and where it enjoys a position equivalent to any other native language of those regions. The expanding circle, on the other hand, comprises nations where English does not enjoy a status as in those nations in the outer circle and is only a foreign language to be learnt for some specific purposes.

REACTIONS TO THE GLOBAL GROWTH OF ENGLISH

The emergence of English as a global language has both been appreciated and frowned upon by various socio-linguists. On the one hand, we have great linguists like Professor David Crystal hailing the emergence of English as a global language and on the other, we have scholars like Dr. Phillipson who have rejected this claim and also have pointed out the danger of such a development.

While exploring the global emergence of English language in recent times, Crystal, in his book 'English as a Global Language' has opined that those who don't speak English will in fact be empowered by learning the language. Moreover, the growth of non-native speakers has witnessed the emergence of a World English which is being shaped and structured by not only the native

speakers, but also by the non-native ones. Crystal talks of a new world that hinges on global interdependence where he envisions English playing a central role in empowering the subjugated and marginalized, and significantly bridging the gap between the haves and the have-nots (Douglas, *The Problem of World English: Reflecting on Crystal and Phillipson*).

Dr. Robert Phillipson, on the other hand, has related this global emergence of English to linguistic imperialism. According to his theory, the global spread of English through agencies like BCL (British Council Library) and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages), and that too, the so called Standard English is only a part of the foreign policies of major English speaking nations. The priority here is the imposition of English under non-native contexts through the exercise of power and dominance. This is necessary in order to establish a smooth relationship between the producers and consumers where the producers belong to the major English speaking nations and the consumers constitute the non native markets of developing nations (Douglas, *The Problem of World English: Reflecting on Crystal and Phillipson*). Rakesh Bhatt (*World Englishes*) has opined that due to linguistic imperialism, there is the emergence of an asymmetric relationship between producers and consumers that is established as natural, normative and essential. Moreover, this creates a hierarchy in languages which is pervaded by hegemonic value judgements that cater to the ideologies which serve the interests of only those in power.

The other reason behind the concerted effort to promote English on the part of British imperialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and American imperialism since the nineteenth century till today, is the fact that the industrial revolution and the subsequent growth in trade and commerce has increasingly necessitated the emergence of a common language or commercial lingua franca for commercial exploitation. After World War II, with the emergence of the UNO, WB, IMF, UNESCO, UNICEF and other similar agencies, the general competence in English inevitably became a very important priority in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres of all nations, especially the third world countries. Many third world nations of Asia and Africa have adopted the faulty approach of adopting English as their main language and have gone on an overdrive to introduce English at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of pedagogy. This

approach is the inevitable outcome of the concerted effort on the part of the neo-colonial powers led by America for an unshakable hold on the resources and markets of the third world nations. This patronage of the English language has seen the marginalisation of native languages and many regional languages in third world countries like India are gradually fading into oblivion. Hence, emergence of English as a global language can also be regarded as a part of the neo-colonial agenda of a homogeneous socio-cultural-economic-political world order to facilitate an unflinching control by the America led imperial powers upon the global market.

WORLD ENGLISHES - POST COLONIAL ASSERTION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

Language has always been regarded as a primary component of 'identity' and 'nationalism' is closely related to identity. Hence, in the post-colonial context, we have seen the rejection of the effort of imposing the native English in non-native contexts on the pretext of Standard English. English in non-native contexts has evolved through a close contact with native indigenous languages and cultures in countries like India. The post-colonial assertion of the natives regarding their difference from, resistance to and negotiation with the neo-colonial masters has led to the growth of World Englishes. Native speaker model is nowadays neither desired nor relevant to the large number of people who are using the language for lingua franca purposes. Post Colonial literature has used local varieties of World English to not only resist the assertion of neo-colonial supremacy, but also to firmly establish and preserve one's own indigenous identity. In other words, the global emergence of English has been used to the advantage of the post colonial movement. The stress on the use of colloquial terms by Asian and African writers like Mulkraj Anand, Soyinka, Achebe, Cherrie Moraga, Naipaul, to name a few can be regarded as an assertion of the identity of indigenous people and their existence.

Moreover the hybridized usage of English in countries like India where English is hybridized with any other native language e.g. words like 'Dillogical' (Dil is the Hindi word for heart), 'Hinglish' (combination of Hindi and English), local culture induced usage like 'chacha-chachi (paternal

uncle-aunt), ‘mama-mami’ (maternal uncle-aunt), use of ‘ji’ while addressing people to show respect etc. bear testimony to the fact that there is a growing tendency of regarding Indian English as an inevitable and perhaps desirable turn in the English language.

Under the new world order, while the third world nations are subjected to cultural, political, economic and literary invasions, there have undoubtedly been reactions against such tendencies in all the aforementioned fields. In literature we find this revolt in the form of not only the themes of Asian and African writers, but also in the type of English which is used by these writers. There has been a growing tendency of considering the reincarnated English or transplanted English as part of the local pluralistic linguistic heritage in countries like India. English in Asian countries like India have been in existence for more than three hundred years now. For multilingual societies like India, which have passed through various postcolonial contexts, assertion of the validity of transplanted English is necessary for strengthening the pluralistic natures of our societies. As stated by Kachru, “Sociocultural and sociolinguistic reasons of convergence and cultural interaction have made it vital that we redefine the concepts of the nativeness and the distance-marking otherness of the language we use” (The spread of English and sacred linguistic cows). The claims of ownership of English by the nations belonging to the inner circle have been questioned because of the expanding worldwide role of English. As stated by Widdowson, due to the global spread and the creation of new varieties while coming in contact with other languages and cultures, the claims of sole ownership of the language no longer holds any water (Widdowson, EIL, ESL, EFL: Global issues and local interests 142). Sense of ownership of English is vital for people using English for communication purposes. Hence, the English learners must feel that the language that they are using is their own and one’s identity can be found with it. To assume that there are idealized native speakers of English is a myth (Davies, The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality). The identity of a native speaker is constructed socially and culturally and hence is not fixed. As stated by Davies (The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality), neutral terms like more/less proficient, expert/novice should replace the native/non-native speaker dichotomy. Cook (Going beyond the native speaker in language teaching) advocates the use of the term ‘successful second language learner’ for more proficient speakers of the language. The fundamental goal of traditional language teaching was to

make the learners capable of communicating with the native speakers of English. This is something that can never be achieved and is also irrelevant since there the idealized native speaker does not exist. RP (Received Pronunciation) and GAE (General American English) were considered to be the standard varieties and are still the targets for students belonging to the Outer and Expanding circle nations. The standard language ideology was “drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class” (Lippi- Green, *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology and Discrimination in the United States*). But the emergence of the concept of World Englishes is an outcome of the Asian and African assertion of their indigenous ethnic identity in the face of neo-colonial aggression. This concept has made critics question the intelligibility of English, which, they argue, with all the varieties in use, will be affected. However, YKachru and Nelson (*World Englishes in Asian Contexts*) argue that national and local intelligibility should be the target since global intelligibility is required only for international communication and not for intra-national communication.

CONCLUSION

Thus, it can rightly be stated that from a postcolonial perspective, emergence of World Englishes is desirable since it marks the preservation of one’s ethnic identities and also leads to the coexistence of a very colloquial brand of English with other native languages through mutual exchanges. This nullifies the threat that English poses to these ‘other’ languages and thereby thwarts the neo-colonial designs of total control on third world nations. The evolution of the concept of world Englishes has marked a complete paradigm shift in research, teaching and application of sociolinguistic realities to the forms and functions of English. The new approach rejects the dichotomy of ‘Us’ (native speakers) vs ‘Them’ (non-native speakers) and emphasizes instead ‘We-ness’ (McArthur, *The English Languages* 334). The field of World Englishes has been superbly interpreted by McArthur (*The English Languages* 334) through his observation that “there is a club of equals here.” The pluralisation of English into Englishes, the functional and formal variations occurring in the other English speaking nations and its various identities in

diverse sociolinguistic and cultural contexts has gradually witnessed the acculturation of English in new sociolinguistic ecologies and the emergence of Englishes.

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