# English, a Global Language for All?: Multiplicity, Challenges and Possibilities\*

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### Abstract

English can be characterised functionally as an international language. In contrast to all modern or obsolete tongues, its uniqueness rests on the fact that only English qualifies for the status of a 'global language'. The expansion of English through time and space has had a remarkable effect on our daily existence, so much so that anyone with multilingual endeavours and aspirations of upward social mobility is obliged to have at least a working proficiency in it. For some, having English at one's disposal is a natural process, but for others, it may involve painstaking and often fruitless efforts to approximate themselves to the former group in identity and speech, let alone to stake a claim to the ownership of English. This paper sets out to explore the role, status, language contact and directions of English in various dimensions and domains of use, as well as to bring to light people's perception about standardness ideologies and what constitutes a native speaker of English. Brief consideration is also given to incorporate a discussion of what the future of English could be like, taking into account both fallacies and more objective argumentation.

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# บทคัดย่อ

ภาษาอังกฤษถือว่าเป็นภาษานานาชาติในด้านหน้าที่การใช้ เมื่อเปรียบเทียบ กับภาษาอื่นทั้งที่เป็นภาษาปัจจุบันหรือที่ไม่นิยมใช้แล้ว ภาษาอังกฤษมีลักษณะ เฉพาะคือเป็นภาษาเดียวที่มีสถานะเป็น "ภาษาโลก" การแพร่ขยายของภาษา อังกฤษเข้าไปในแทบทุกแห่งหนตั้งแต่อดีตถึงปัจจุบันก่อให้เกิดผลกระทบ นานัปการต่อมวลมนุษย์ บุคคลใดก็ตามที่จำเป็นต้องพบปะกับผู้คนจากหลาก พื้นฐานภาษาและต้องการที่จะยกระดับชีวิตให้ดีขึ้นนั้น อย่างน้อยต้องมีความ สามารถในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษให้พอสื่อสารได้ คนบางกลุ่มเป็นเจ้าของภาษา อังกฤษได้ด้วยการเรียนรู้ตามธรรมชาติ ในขณะที่สำหรับคนกลุ่มอื่น การนำ ตนเองไปเปรียบว่ามีเอกลักษณ์และความสามารถทางภาษาเท่าเทียมกับคน ในกลุ่มแรกนั้นถือเป็นความพยายามที่มักยากลำบากและไร้ผล แต่ถึงกระนั้น ก็ยังไม่ยากเท่ากับการที่จะได้รับการยอมรับว่าเป็นเจ้าของภาษาอังกฤษด้วย บทความเรื่องนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายที่จะสำรวจบทบาท สถานะ การสัมผัสภาษา และ ความเป็นไปของภาษาอังกฤษ ในหลากหลายมิติและบริบทการใช้ ตลอดจน สำรวจแนวคิดเรื่องมาตรฐานทางภาษาและปัจจัยในการประเมินว่าผู้ใดบ้าง ที่ถือว่าเป็นเจ้าของภาษาอังกฤษ นอกจากนี้ ผู้เขียนจะได้อภิปรายถึงทิศทาง ของภาษาอังกฤษในอนาคตโดยพิจารณาทั้งความเชื่อที่หลายคนมักเข้าใจผิด และข้อสนับสนุนที่มีความเป็นไปได้ในเชิงปฏิบัติมากกว่า

# 1. International Languages vs. Global Language

No one knows for certain when human beings first interacted beyond their own groups. Though interesting, it would perhaps be as complex to try to explicate this curiosity as to find out whether we are all descended from the same ancestry, what language was first spoken on earth and, following Christian tradition, to what extent divine punishment should be held accountable for the multiplicity of languages. While cross-linguistic communication may be hindered by mutual unintelligibility, potential miscommunication can be alleviated by the use of a lingua franca. The Latinate term *lingua franca* means a

'common language' employed by people from similar linguistic backgrounds or otherwise. In fact, any language can serve as a communication tool internationally. As a technical term, international language is reserved solely for those languages that 'have achieved some position of power in a region' (Edwards, 1994: 39). To complicate the picture a little further, to be called a global or world language in the strictest sense, it must be used ubiquitously and owned by the entire world population. Again, not all international languages warrant a place in the nomenclature.

A three-way distinction of international languages is quite useful here (cf. Edwards, 1994: 39). Natural languages are the first and best known. Since the early centuries AD up until around the eighteenth century, in Western Europe and its vicinity towards the east, Latin and Greek used to hold prestige variously as languages of civilisation, high culture, scholarship, religious faith, and political and military expediency. French had once been a well-recognised language of diplomacy well into the twentieth century (Rickard, 1993), but this role was eventually replaced by English, with further functions most notably as a language of international commerce, technology and the media. Such syntactically simplified and lexically restricted forms of language as Basic English and Voice of America English also belong to this type of international languages. In the opposite direction, Chinese has been very important as an international language in the Far East and Southeast Asia, as can be attested by extensive borrowing of the Chinese alphabet into written Japanese and Korean, and the widespread use of Mandarin in countries outside of Mainland China, especially Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia.

The second type is a mixed form of natural languages, such as the numerous pidgin and creole languages developed in former colonies under western powers. Pidginisation takes place when two (or more) groups of people who do not have a common language come into contact for transactional and political reasons over a short period of time, and hence simply mix the resources they have in their verbal repertoires with those of the other group. Pidgins tend not to last very long. When the groups in question no longer need to communicate and sooner or later separate, their pidgins disappear too, unlike creoles, which are by definition pidgins acquired as mother tongues by the children of those who have previously interacted in pidgins (Trudgill, 2001). Tok Pisin and Patwa exemplify English-based creoles now spoken in Papua New Guinea and Jamaica, respectively.

Artificial (or auxiliary or constructed) languages are the third type. An objective behind planning an artificial language is often socio-political: a common language should be absolutely neutral in the sense that its users are equal on linguistic, ethnic and historical grounds (see Large, 1985). A chief criticism is that since there are no native speakers and no nation state for them to identify themselves with, artificial languages like Esperanto, Ido and Latino Sine Flexione just are not capable of making people interested enough in wanting to start or continue learning them. Another serious impediment is that despite claims of universality and ideal usefulness, a number of artificial languages have been structurally created out of European languages. This allows those familiar with English and Polish easier acquisition, but results in those who are not to lag behind.

We have witnessed throughout history a vast array of international languages: some are now out of everyday use while

others have enjoyed fluctuating popularity or increasingly become part and parcel of people's lives over a large area. There are some crucial differences between what can count as international and world languages. English is seen to have taken on both qualities, but unlike any other language, only English is the world language. How English has come this far and why an unprecedented number of people have been so eager to 'own' or in other words, to have command of it, as well as what complications are involved in the process and whether English can be a language for all global communities are the issues that I wish to address in the sections that follow.

## 2. Origin and Development

### 2.1 Early Language Contacts

Various chronicles tend to support the premise that a nomadic tribe, the Celts, was the first group to speak a language which formed the basis for the English we know today. The arrival of the Roman troops in Britain from as early as the first century BC gave rise to a great many consequences, an unavoidable one being language contact between Celt and Latin. As Latin was perceived by many as superior and thus came to be employed in more serious domains of use, in particular in scholastic and religious matters, the native tongue of hunters and gatherers like the Celts was all but marginalised to informal, familial and other 'popular' affairs.

Around the early years of the fifth century AD, the Roman legions returned to their Mediterranean homeland to help fight off wayward visitors. In the face of persistent raids by the Scots and the Picts from Scotland, the Celts had to obtain assistance from elsewhere. Three northern European groups, the Angles, the Saxons (hence the term *Anglo-Saxon*) and the Jutes, came to their rescue and settled in various parts of England at the invitation of a Celtic king. This marks the beginning of the 'Old English' period: the Germanic languages of the conquerors dominated English soil and after prolonged contacts with the existing Romano-Celtic speech, the new form of language that emerged started to become identifiable with present-day English, however remotely then.

A new influx of linguistic influence began in the eighth century AD, with the invasion of the Vikings (mostly Danes and Norwegians), who attempted to subjugate the whole island, but in 878 were prevented by King Alfred's armies from claiming further territories inland (i.e. the west of England) (Crystal, 1988: 145ff.). Not only a national hero, Alfred's role in the standardisation of Old English was also significant on two counts: he regularised the spelling system (as there had not been a single, agreed-upon one before) and commissioned the translation of Latin texts and those of other Old English dialects into the then-standard West Saxon variety.

Throughout the bygone centuries, just as much of England had been undergoing bilingualism as well as changes along the post-creole continuum (McArthur, 1992: 270-271), yet another prominent language contact took place around 1066, as a result of the conquest of the Norman French and the succession to the English throne by William of Normandy. French became the language of the ruling class at the expense of English, to the point that after only a few generations, English kings had no command of English at all. The language situation was triglossic in kind: aristocracy, clergymen

and the educated population spoke French – and to a lesser extent – alongside Latin, while commoners and labourers, despite being the majority, spoke English or had to be bilingual in English and French to climb up the social ladder. Given these circumstances, it is interesting to note in passing how the rigid class system started to make itself felt in English society. 'Middle English' is the name used in describing this period of drastic changes, both socially and linguistically. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw a gradual decline of the prestige of French, not least due to disputes which ended beyond reconciliation between monarchs of both countries. 'English' kings became more and more English in their speech, and it was in 1399 that England had for the first time since the Norman Conquest a king (Henry IV) whose mother tongue was English. Bureaucratic documents and literary work came to be written in English at an increasing rate, in particular thanks to the role of the printing press that came to the fore in the fifteenth century.

Each period mentioned can be presented with the idiosyncrasies of its phonology and syntax, but what remains most reminiscent of French on the English language since then was vocabulary. Barber (2000: 146) makes a relevant remark: 'this is one of the reasons why so much of the vocabulary of Old English and Early Middle English now seems so unfamiliar to us'.

## 2.2 Paths to Modernity

The start of the 'Early Modern English' period spans across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Apart from the growing popularity of intellectual and social movements such as the Renaissance and the Reformation, another sure sign that this period was well underway was the impact the introduction of printing had on society as a whole. In Europe at large, it was a period when the thought of Europeans being unified by a common religious bond (i.e. Christendom) and a common international language (i.e. Latin) began to lose currency. Each group now aspired to be different from one another (Fennell, 2001: 136-138). Clearer national boundaries were drawn and the idea of establishing national languages more firmly pursued. Homing in on Britain, although printing met with considerable controversy by the authorities who perceived it as an act of evil, in practical terms, it made the publication of scientific discoveries, chronicles, social affairs and written entertainment available faster, cheaper and to a much wider public than was the case since the Old English time, when scribes were kept busily writing things down by hand.

The spread of literacy triggered a lack of uniformity in the writing practices of different regional and social varieties of English. Likewise, along with this came the need for language standardisation. The first variety to receive such treatment was the parlance of London, home of the Early Modern English standard dialect. Because each printing house, author and individual language user preferred a writing convention of their own, it took more than two centuries before orthographic and punctuation systems would become consistent – at least much more so than in the centuries prior to that. This linguistic chaos should not be seen as an obstruction against English along its paths to modernity. On the plus side, it constituted an indirect compulsion for those involved to expend further efforts in language standardisation. What followed were successive and massive publications of grammar books and stylistic manuals, as well as lexical and pronunciation guidelines, plus dictionaries dealing with a bundle of

disciplines of knowledge and many other types of publication.

By the eighteenth century, the features of English became more similar to the ones we encounter at present and this is exactly how the name 'Modern English' period came into existence. There was, however, a wealth of grammatical properties that were considered acceptable then, but which our contemporary readers would without doubt say hint at ungrammaticality. Crystal (2003a: 77) cites from Jane Austen's early nineteenth-century novel, examples such as 'so you are come at last', 'to be taken into the account', 'she was small of her age' and 'it is really very well for a model'.

So far we have considered solely the development of English in Britain, but more justice will be done in later sections to the varieties of English that experienced processes of expansion and modernisation elsewhere. The fact that English had made its way into territories in the British Isles (Leith and Graddol, 1996) and then Western Europe (Phillipson, 2003) since the Norman time was an initial indication of the status of English as an international language. This prominence was strengthened ever since the Early Modern English period by British colonialism in North America, South Asia, West Africa, then the Antipodes, Southern Africa and Southeast Asia. It is often said that had the influence of English, and consequently of those who spoke it, been halted at some stage during this timeline, the issue of English as a global language and the conception of 'Englishes' would not have materialised.

Towards the nineteenth and especially twentieth centuries, the supremacy of English escalated even further, owing to factors which involved, or were pioneered or led mostly by English-speaking peoples, namely the advancement of modern technology and consecutive military, political and social movements. Numerous other forces that have been conducive to English obtaining an international and eventually global status have been identified. A widely held but unfounded conjecture is concerned with the assumed relative simplicity of its language structure (e.g. less inflectional endings as well as less gender markers). On closer inspection, though, one soon realises that even though Latin and French are more complex on these counts, they were once 'languages of wider communication' also. Still, with regard to language-related issues, the allowances made for lexical borrowings from other languages are a rather more convincing determinant that illustrates why English should get the priority over some other languages, say, French (Ager, 1990). Here, whereas French authorities have tried the best they could to keep out foreign elements from their vocabulary, English speakers have shown a more or less indifferent attitude to such a matter.

Crystal (2003b) recognises some types of non-linguistic power that have been associated with the ever-increasing global status of English: British military dominance that lasted throughout the colonial period, followed by the advent of the USA as a world leader in economic affairs since the second half of the twentieth century. Taking into account the mere three hundred years or so that have gone into the Modern English period, far more changes have happened to the life of English than ever before. Also of note is the speculation that the ownership of English changes hands all the time: first as a language of inhabitants of Britain and then of emigrants to the USA and people in the rest of English-dominant countries. An important question appears to loom large still: could users of English in categories other than these be said to own English as well? To give

a satisfactory and all-inclusive answer is not easy, as will be shown in the discussion below.

# 3. Role and Status of Contemporary English and Its Users

Although it might come across as rather peculiar to non-academics, linguists tend to accept the practicality of the term Englishes, when considering the pluricentricity, or in other words, the 'international' diversity and variation of English in the contemporary world. Like English, Arabic, French, Hindi and Spanish also consist of several national varieties (see Kachru and Nelson, 2001: 9), but English has much more often been described in the plural form. For our current purposes, I shall refrain from discussing aspects of English dealing with pedagogical concerns such as English for Special Purposes (ESP), English for Science and Technology (EST), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and shall look at issues connected with English as a Global Language, namely regional and attitudinal variation of English in an international context, the two 'diasporas' of diffusion and expansion, the questions of standardness ideologies and the consequences that have ensued from the different and often conflicting views users as well as practitioners of English hold about themselves and each other.

### 3.1 English Transported

Only a few centuries ago, the English language consisted of a collection of dialects spoken mainly by monolinguals and only within the shores of a small island. Now it includes

such typologically distinct varieties as pidgins and creoles, 'new' Englishes, and a range of differing standard and non-standard varieties that are spoken on a regular basis in more than 60 different countries around the world (Crystal, 1985) [quote in original]. English is also, of course, the main language used for communication at an international level (Cheshire, 1991: 1).

For good or ill, at the end of the second millennium AD and the fifth full millennium since recorded history began, English is unique. No language has ever before been put to so many uses so massively by so many people in so many places — on every continent and in every sea; in the air and in space; in thought, speech, and writing; in print on paper and screen; in sound on tape and film; by radio, television, and telephone; and via electronic networks and multimedia. It is also used as mother tongue or other tongue—fluently, adequately or haltingly; constantly, intermittently, or seldom; happily, unhappily, or ambivalently — by over a billion people (McArthur, 1998: 30).

Remarks such as the above are self-explanatory. Indeed, one need not carry out sophisticated linguistic investigation or look around too far to realise that English can be found very often in modern societies. For a lot of people, English has become a way of life. Like it or not, virtually everywhere we go, sightings of at least something rendered in English (e.g. labels on clothing, notes on vehicles and electrical appliances) and the mention of English terminology (e.g. through code-mixing) are commonplace. The oft-quoted cliché that portrays English as a 'language on which the sun never sets' (Kachru, 1998) has traditionally been linked to the scenario when British colonialism reached its zenith shortly before the end of the nineteenth century. The same truth still holds at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Even after independence was granted, most former protectorates have also continued the use of English in their own ways and with varying

standards. This is a fact which is much to the chagrin of pro-British English supporters who rather wish to see English flourish in its most original, purest form. Nevertheless, concerns expressed by some language prescriptivists in Britain that as English has been transported to the other side of the Atlantic, and to the Pacific and Indian Oceans and beyond, it might fragment and disintegrate into mutually unintelligible tongues may most likely never come true (see details in section 4).

Similar to other languages of wider communication, English comprises several dozens of regional and social, as well as national varieties. Miscommunication on linguistic grounds between speakers across English-speaking communities does exist. Mutual intelligibility is very much a matter of degree and perhaps there are no such extremes as complete misunderstanding or cases of speakers being able to express their own and interpret others' thoughts impeccably perfectly (Smith, 1992). Urbanised British English, American English and Australian English speakers may not have to spend much effort putting their messages across and making themselves intelligible to one another, but even for inhabitants of much closer territories, such as when a blue-collar London Cockney converses with a Scottish Highlander or someone from the Welsh valleys, the task would likely be harder.

There is no correlation between the size of territory and the scope of linguistic variation. Sociolinguists have pointed to a notorious layman's view that judging the much larger size of the USA (the first British overseas colony) when compared to that of Britain, the scope of American dialect and accent variation would be broader, when in fact, the opposite is true. Britain has a longer history of settlements and development of closely-knit speech communities.

This, together with relatively less geographical mobility, has made Britain the English-speaking world's most diversified society in terms of the distinctive features of local accents, dialects, vernaculars, etc. (Trudgill and Hannah, 2002). Overt consciousness towards language variation is such that key British accents are given special monikers (e.g. *Geordie* for the speech of someone native to the Newcastle area and *Scouse* for Liverpudlians'), and that an educated British person is, on average, able to tell apart the nuances of the accent of one county from that of the next without much difficulty. Given the sheer size of the USA, the American isoglosses show no more than three major areas of distinct dialects and accents, and yet when it comes to Australia and New Zealand, such regional variation appears minimal or virtually non-existent (see Bell and Holmes, 1990; Woods, 1997; Holmes, 2001, among many others).

A classification of two diasporas represents the ways in which English was dispersed through time and space worldwide. The first diaspora has to do with the transportation of English to the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, where it was subjected to 'dialect levelling', a process defined by Dillard (1992: 32-59), Cheshire et al. (1993: 53) and Leith (1996: 184-185) as occurring when speakers of different varieties of the same language are brought together in a new territory and, in time, their speech behaviours converge to form a new language variety, with its own autonomy regarding phonology, lexicon, stylistics and pragmatics (cf. 'koineisation' in Edwards, 1994: 42-43). There were, of course, also contacts with the languages of other groups of settlers and of the indigenous population, and the need to coin additional vocabulary for new flora and fauna and social practices.

No matter what socio-geographical complexity and what language or ethnic origin, the populace of these new territories tended to resort to English most especially for use among themselves (Trudgill, 2004). Four major forces or 'agencies of focusing' have been responsible for an adoption of English among the people in an English-speaking nation (cf. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985). In the first place, English is used on a wide and daily basis in the community. Secondly, it is a main language in which people receive their formal education. Thirdly, when a common language (in this case, English) is adopted, a sense of group loyalty among users develops and helps strengthen the role of English. And lastly, since leaders, public figures and other media personalities speak and write most especially in English, there is no good reason why the general public would not follow suit.

It goes without saying that the national varieties (or 'new Englishes' of white settlers and their descendants) that emerged are considered to approximate properly to the English of Britain, or in other words, to be its only 'legitimate offspring' (Jenkins, 2003: 64ff.). This is in contrast to 'New Englishes', another cover term associated with the second diaspora, which ranges from countries such as Kenya, Tanzania to India, Singapore and Malaysia. Here not only did dialect levelling not take place, English also failed to gain ground as the only dominant language, particularly due to the more firmly established nature of the existing speech communities and stronger resistance to linguistic and cultural imperialism inflicted on them by their colonisers. People generally take these New Englishes to be equivalent to nonnative Englishes, a somewhat derogatory appellation much despised but often cannot be refuted by residents of localities mentioned in

relation to the second diaspora, plus by those in countries beyond this category, such as Spain, Russia, Thailand, Indonesia and Peru.

Three other leading models that distinguish the domains of use and adoption of English are also worth mentioning. As early as the 1970s, Strang (1970) must have had felt the growing influence of English that cut across national boundaries, when she coined the terms A-, B- and C-speakers of English based on the acquisitional yardstick. This is not completely unlike the distinction of Quirk et al. (1972) who advocated another tripartite model of English as a Native Language (ENL), English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). To offer broad generalisations, ENL speakers are those who learn the language since infancy and are native speakers of English par excellence, while ESL speakers acquire English in addition to their home language for use in official settings (e.g. education, commerce, government) where English is the major vehicle of internal communication, to be contrasted with EFL speakers who obtain English almost solely in the formal classroom context, outside which serious exposure to English is to a large extent limited (Richards and Schmidt, 2002).

Holding a slightly different stance, Kachru (1988; 1992b) put forward an approach of three concentric circles, which epitomises an average number of English speakers, the diffusion and status of English, and how it is acquired and functionally distributed. The *inner circle* represents around 320-380 million speakers of nativised varieties (e.g. British English, American English, Australian English), for whom English has a role to play in all domains. The *outer circle* comprises a larger group of speakers, currently close to 400 or 500 million, who make use of institutionalised varieties of English (e.g.

Indian English and Singaporean English), often with official status, alongside other indigenous or immigrant languages. Speakers in the expanding circle (e.g. performance varieties like Chinese English and Thai English – if these varieties really practically exist!) outnumber their earlier counterparts by up to two-fold, at present in the region of 500 million-1 billion; for them, there is no colonial relic, nor has English held any administrative status. According to Kachru (1992a: 55) and Crystal (2003b: 61), because non-native speakers from the last two circles form the largest majority, it is often said that the faith of English in the future will rest upon their very hands.

### 3.2 Standardness Ideologies

A great deal of research interest has been shown in the direction of the social, regional and situational dynamics of English of the contemporary world, and indeed another area of investigation that has attracted no less attention of sociolinguists and language educationists has been how to settle on a well-justified criterion for acceptable and non-acceptable versions of English. English does not operate in a vacuum, in the sense that what are taken to be Standard English and Non-Standard English have nothing to do with the 'inherent quality' of language forms, but rather with the 'attitudes' people hold towards their variability. Standard English is an elusive concept which some equate with a kind of English used with high formality. McArthur (1992: 982), for instance, explains that Standard English is 'a widely used term that resists easy definition but is used as if most educated people nonetheless know precisely what it refers to'. At a national level, Standard English is a rather regionless dialect of English which is most widely understood across a nation and which the minority with high social standing are inclined to recommend as a desirable communicative and educational target. At the international level, by contrast, the matter is very much of what appears to be 'standards within standards' of English. Each has its own set of recurrent linguistic features, such as the case of the inner circle, not to mention thornier cases in the two remaining circles.

Most modern languages the world has known, with the inclusion of English, have undergone four stages of language planning or, in a narrower sense, 'language standardisation': selection, codification, elaboration and acceptance (Haugen, 1966; Crystal, 1997). These are indispensable because otherwise there would be no norm of acceptable usage to fall back on for the production of general and specialised literature, and for administrative and educational purposes. As already noted, language standardisation can be done through 'linguistic engineering', by giving a selected national language a de jure official status, as did India and Singapore. Nevertheless, in the case of the UK and the USA, English has only a de facto official status to date, although ironically these are the places where the overwhelming majority of English native speakers are based and there has never been any formal establishment like the French Académie française, the Spanish Real Academia Española or the Italian Accademia della Crusca, to codify usage and convention for either Standard British English or Standard American English (Kachru and Nelson, 2001: 16). Even without official intervention and partly owing to the four focusing agencies touched upon on pp. 15, these two very influential centres of norms and standards managed to conceive their own principles of acceptability of grammar, vocabulary and orthography anyway. It is quite well-accepted

nowadays that in a few days' time is the preferred syntax in the UK, whereas it is in a few days in the USA; British windscreen is called windshield in the USA; and in the UK, there is a Ministry of Defence, not Defense.

Scholars tend to be in agreement that an analysis of Standard English will have to focus primarily on the written language (Trudgill, 1999; Melchers and Shaw, 2003; Jenkins, 2003), but in any event we should not lose sight of another important facet of language that has a lot to do with the ongoing debate about the vagaries of Standard English: pronunciation. Standard English can be verbalised by wide-ranging accents, whether standard or non-standard.

Again, take Britain and the USA as examples. For over 100 years, the Received Pronunication (RP) has been chosen as the prestige British accent. It is emblematised by its non-localised character, clear and soft-spoken tone and use by the upper echelons of society, who have it at their regular disposal. Many public spheres and radio and television broadcasts (e.g. the British Broadcasting Corporation) once employed RP as their only model of pronunciation. Only in the later years of the twentieth century did the monopoly of RP begin to be eroded by the steady tolerance of Estuary English (that is, a mixture of the speeches of the upwardly mobile middle and working classes of the estuary of the River Thames and the adjoining regions), by pronunciation patterns displaying covert prestige (namely local regional accents) and by Americanism and so on.

In the USA, the General American (GenAm) accent or better known as Network Standard, is spoken over a vast area of the continent, stretching from the Western and Northern states to the Midland and Central Eastern states on the Atlantic Ocean (Trudgill and Hannah, 2002). While GenAm, as the name suggests, is a mainstream and rather classless accent of a majority of American citizens, RP is an essentially (upper-) class-laden accent, and used by merely three or at most four per cent of the entire British population. (There is excellent literature on accents and dialects of English such as Wells (1982a; 1982b; 1982c), Hughes and Trudgill (1987) and Trudgill and Hannah (2002), to which the readers are referred, but for the sake of economy, I shall not pursue them here.)

A language variety of the privileged elite, Standard English is prone to provoke social division at both national and international levels and to exacerbate power differentials between native speakers, between non-native speakers, and between both groups. In spite of this, in recent decades, the perception that Standard English should refer to either British or American usage only has started to be seriously questioned in English Language Teaching (ELT) academia. This in a way indicates that the current situation appears to favour 'Standards within Standards' of English. Positive attitudes in the direction of language matters in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Nigeria, India, etc. have made these nations more and more accepted as English-speaking communities in their own right.

There should be no denying that every nation needs to keep records of their identity, pride, history and culture in written form. Their language is to be given the same treatment as well; this is why publication after publication of reference works and national dictionaries of new Englishes and New Englishes has become available in the course of the last 30 years (Cheshire, 1991; Gramley, 2001), and a significant paradigm shift now looks up to endonormative (local) rather than exonormative (external) standards. This signifies

that not only Australian English, but also Singaporean English and Indian English are – when compared with British English and American English – perceived as equally valid models for ELT (Richards, 2002).

On closer inspection, we see that scepticism has been raised with reference to whether the search for an absolute equality of World Englishes only represents another attitudinal myth in applied linguistics. Melchers and Shaw (2003: 30ff.) draw attention to at least two mutually contradictory ideologies, each representing a political stance taken by World English scholars in their attempt to promote the globalisation of English. The conservatives (e.g. Quirk, 1990; Honey, 1997) are advocators of the view that it would be beneficial if members of the less powerful groups would leave their local or indigenous language practices behind and, as a way to obtain respect and credibility from others, conform to the accepted norms of their powerful counterparts. Taking issue with the above conviction, the liberals (e.g. Kachru, 1991, 1992b; Cook, 1999; Crystal, 2003b), on the other hand, call for equal recognition for non-native Englishes and emphasise that each variety has their communicative efficiency when applied to the local contexts. With all the good intentions, the positions held by both sides remain open to a number of possibilities or at best impracticalities, of which four interrelated ones are summarised below:

> • If the advice of the conservatives were to be heeded that non-native English-speaking users should set their targets at achieving and/or maintaining their language command to a level close to that of the native speakers, we are faced with some very challenging predicaments, notably an inadequacy of financial and technical resources, and a lack of appro

Even if a country could afford to hire enough native English-speaking teachers, who are often assumed to have an advantage over non-native English-speaking teachers in proficiency and acceptability judgments, research has shown that both groups possess relative strengths and weaknesses when it comes to teaching behaviour, attitude to teaching the language and culture, and such like (Pennycook, 1994; Medgyes, 2002).

• At the other extreme, as some of the liberals have maintained, it is just not a feasible solution for the non-native users to be in contact with the native users, to interact with them often enough for internalisation as well as acculturation to be put into maximal effect. And since English is used far more often in multilingual contexts between non-natives than between natives, or between natives and non-natives, therefore, in the first circumstance, British and American conventions 'are not only irrelevant; these may even considered inappropriate by the interlocutors' (Kachru, 1992b: 357). Whereas the adoption of institutionalised and performance varieties of non-native Englishes is in essence an identification of sociolinguistic realities and a right to linguistic identity, change, functionality, innovation, creativity, this conjecture should be interpreted with caution. Whether it would also be received in the same light in the global community is a matter of speculation (see Bamgbose, 1998, for instance). An issue of more pressing concern in this connection is that as long as international publications

of books, journals, and language teaching and testing syllabuses continue to employ only inner-circle standards as a reference point, work written in 'less than native' varieties can hardly ever see the light of day worldwide.

• Assuming that all non-native speakers across the three concentric circles should hold an identical ambition is a somewhat sweeping generalisation. Common trends for staff recruitment and promotion in academic and professional sectors in the present age of globalisation tend to require at the very least a 'good command of (Standard?) English' as a sine qua non, which indicates that for ease of access to knowledge and mutual international intelligibility, as well as the concomitant wealth, rank and all sorts of privileges modern life has to offer, any concerned individual may need to sacrifice nationalism and their sense of identity in order to make these ends meet. Such views may well represent how an increasingly large number of non-native speakers in the expanding circle, the biggest group of all, approach the issue. The outer-circle counterparts have adopted either British or American linguistic and cultural heritage ever since the dawn of their colonial history and, as a consequence, find it more natural to continue using English their own way. (Kachru (1990; 1992a) and Canagarajah (1999) offer views on the plight of South Asian Englishes, but see an opposite case reporting on Singaporean English in Crystal (2003b: 174-175).) By contrast, the population of the expanding circle, for whom English has much less use for intranational commu-

nication, seem to aim for any one of the exonormative models of the inner circle, not their own varieties nor any other norm. Japanese and Korean national headlines have since the early 2000s released a series of reports on their governments' attempts to make English an official second language, while mulling over the merits of starting teaching English to students at an earlier age than has always been the case. Thailand may not have come up with a similar academic initiative, but given that a plethora of Englishmedium curricula at all levels of education (which, it should be stressed, tend to show preference for instructors who are native speakers of Judeo-Christian varieties of English) are now new alternatives for the elites and the nouveaux riches alike also says a lot about the enduring hegemony of traditional standards of the inner circle amongst this particular group of users (cf. Bamgbose, 2001: 360; for more case studies, see Tollefson, 2002).

• A norm of English that is neutral and acceptable on global terms which many scholars anticipate may emerge in the future could disentangle the dilemmas brought about by the above debate. The questions will then rest on 'what' such a norm would be like and whether there must be a one and only standard, in line with the 'minimal variation but maximal function' idealisation. If so, doubts may still abound as to how a universal model of usage would be realised and implemented, and to what extent people's attitudes could be changed in the direction towards English becoming a language for all in the absolute sense.

### 3.3 Defining the Native Speaker of English

There is little reason to refute the claim that anyone who has ability in the most basic forms of English communication and writing skills can be called a 'user of English'. To start with just a few other related terms, we find that a 'native English speaker' is not the same as a 'mother-tongue English speaker' (Davies, 1991; 2003). The first term incorporates the word native, which gives an etymological impression that ethnic origin, country of birth and length of residence are the ruling factors. This speculation no longer holds when discussing multi-ethnic but largely English-dominant speech communities such as the UK, the USA and Australia. Remember that a lot of native-speaking residents might have been born elsewhere and have spent only sporadic lengths of time within the national borders. The second term also has to do with biography and is in part consistent with the problem the first encounters. To say that a mother-tongue English speaker signifies an individual speaking his/her mother's language (i.e. English) is an outright oversimplification.

The consideration as to how the 'native speaker' can best be defined is an important issue that throws further light on the contemporary life of English and its users. In the language teaching profession and second language research, it is not uncommon to hear that, in spite of a life-long, sustained effort, the mastery of nativespeaker proficiency can be such an elusive goal, almost next to impossible to come by. Teaching and learning how to construct grammatically correct sentences and phonetically acceptable stretches of sound also does not guarantee that a learner passes for a native speaker of the target language (Pawley and Syder, 1983). Besides the unreliable factors mentioned, what are other complications involved? Who are and are not native speakers? Do native speakers speak only the standard language variety? And so on. Two fundamental assumptions I put forward are: individuals undergoing the native-speaker review should be (i) those past the age of puberty only (cf. Lenneberg's critical period hypothesis), since we do not usually construe children as native speakers as such; judgements and proficiency on the part of youngsters like them are in general not yet as developed), and (ii) ones seen producing unrehearsed speech only, since the written language and other genres of spoken language (dramatic exchanges and scripted talks included) are to be discounted; in my view, they do not reflect as much spontaneity.

Our attempts to reduce the complex nature of reality to fixed boundaries can turn out to be a daunting experience at times. Taking all into consideration, I hazard a hypothesis that a 'native speaker' needs to satisfy at least the four following conditions (cf. Tay, 1982; McArthur, 1992; Marx, 2002; Richards and Schmidt, 2003; Davies, 2003):

- extended childhood acquisition,
- competence (in the Chomskyan sense),
- pronunciation, and
- use as a dominant language.

To explicate, the earlier in life one starts obtaining the knowledge of a given language's internal systems and rules of usage, the better chance he/she grows up being able to understand and to interact in a broad 'range' of speech events with a huge variety of 'depth' (Kachru, 1998) appropriately without undue effort, as well as to produce utterances

at similar levels of command as other native speakers in the speech community, who also use that particular language as a chief means of communication and share similar cultural backgrounds. In the most typical cases, non-native speakers are seen to lack some or all of these elements, among which pronunciation appears extremely difficult to internalise but extended childhood acquisition is impossible 'unless he or she is born again' (Lee, 2005: 160).

Kachru and Nelson (2001: 15) provide a preliminary consideration of the developmental attributes of a native speaker: a native speaker learns a language from childhood, in a natural environment and as a first or sole language. In any event, terms such as 'first language' and 'second language' are to be understood technically as not corresponding to the order of acquisition, but should they be used in the literal sense, an immediate drawback is that one might as well qualify for native speakership by acquiring another language first, or being bi- or multilingual. A certain adult born into a monolingual Thai family and raised speaking Thai until the age of two when he/she was adopted by English-speaking parents is more than probably a native English speaker, in much the same way as someone who is competent in Thai and English only and can converse on any topics and situations equally well in both languages. From a more linguistic and functional perspective (see Stern, 1983; Davies, 1996; Johnson and Johnson, 1998), it can be encapsulated that a native speaker:

> • possesses subconscious knowledge of grammatical rules and meanings, and an ability to interact in a spontaneous manner within social settings peculiar to a given speech

community, the cultural norms with which he/she identifies him/herself;

- is capable of producing fluent discourse, making use of a range of language skills and language creativity; and
- is aware of the differences between his/her own speech and that of the standard form of the language, and, if necessary, can interpret and translate into the language/dialect variety of which he/she considers him/herself a native speaker.

I agree with Cook (1999: 186-187) who argues that, however promising at first sight, these characteristics are variable. Native speakers of English encompass those who are literate and educated, and those who are much less so. Some members of the latter group can be oblivious of the privileged language forms, unable to interact fluently in their own variety, nor use their verbal repertoires creatively, any more so than they can lend themselves well to translating and interpreting another language into English and vice versa. Without exaggeration, there is no shortage of evidence to bear out that where these non-developmental components are a major case in point, many non-native speakers stand the chance of being much better off than native speakers.

The nativeness and non-nativeness distinction is not supposed to account for just two clearly defined groups, each representing both extremes. The 'four concurrent conditions' I have laid out above may set ENL and EFL speakers apart reasonably well, but may not do the same job for ENL as contrasted with ESL speakers. If we accept the assertion that a language or variety of a language (whether standard or non-standard) is often characterised by a set of consistent rules of pronunciation, syntax and morphology (Trudgill, 2001), and that every

competent human being must be a native speaker of one language or another, bilingual ESL speakers of the outer circle are, therefore, deemed to have English native speakership in their own right, provided that they acquired the variety from childhood, have competence in their variety's formal rules, speak it with a more or less distinctive (national) accent, and employ it on a regular basis across all domains, both horizontally and vertically. Put differently, just as speakers of Oxford English, Australian English, Cockney, Welsh English and Black Vernacular English are more often than not perceived as native speakers of English, speakers of Indian English, Singaporean English, Filipino English or Nigerian English should thus be on a par with them (Kachru, 1990; Rampton, 1990; Cook, 1999).

With hopes to tone down the negative value judgements of the terminology (i.e. 'natives' as exerting power over 'non-natives'), scholars suggest alternative dichotomies, such as one bound up with 'expertise' vs. 'non-expertise' (Rampton, 1990: 98-99) and another with 'monolingualism' vs. bilingualism' (Jenkins, 2003: 83). It seems to me that such proposals are circular and minimalistic on one obvious count: irrespective of how hard we try, it is doubtful whether the generic terms 'native' and 'non-native' can be removed from our mental and written lexicon for good (Lee, 2005: 161). Therefore, a further proposal that I derive from this perspective is simply to resort to circumlocutions (cf. Kachru, 1998; Turner, 2004; views exchanged by pseudonymous contributors to on-line resources, for instance, http://www.englishforums.com (2006) and http://www.languagehat.com (2006)). Grounded in the acquisitional, fluency and usage criteria, four tentative categories of native speakers of English are given below:

- canonical (NN) native speakers are the prototypical individuals who make use of an inner-circle variety, with biographical details and speech behaviours neatly corresponding to the four concurrent conditions;
- *peripheral* (Nn) native speakers are ones harder to define. At face value, they may resemble the first group in a number of respects. What mainly distinguish them have to do with (at least) slight nuances in pronunciation and grasp of words, constructions and meanings. The people I have in mind especially are bilinguals born and bred either inside or outside the inner circle, but who are in constant touch with an inner-circle model;
- transitory (nN) native speakers used to have the four concurrent conditions intact, but, due to factors such as an adoption of another more dominant language, their English productive and receptive skills have atrophied and are not as native-like as they once were (e.g. second-generation British immigrants living in non-English-speaking Southeast Asia). It should be noticed that peripheral and transitory native speakers share very close definitional borders; and
- functional (nn) native speakers have internalised an outer-circle variety or any other institutionalised model, for whom the four concurrent conditions are in effect as well. However different from other groups of native speaker in biography and speech behaviours, their variety of English plays an essential part in the everyday existence and serves (virtually) all communicative 'functions'. The phrase 'functional native speakers' is intended to incorporate typical ESL speakers

but excludes typical EFL speakers, to whom the four 'rules of thumb' are unlikely to apply.

These suggestions are far from being conclusive and should not be seen as another series of prejudices against different groups of English users. Defining who are/are not native speakers is not a meaningless academic past time. The concept is a multi-faceted one and has practical implications for ELT in that it can serve as a target for learners when acquiring and mastering the necessary skills in their chosen variety of English. Suffice it to say that becoming canonical native speakers seems the hardest to achieve, but with the inclusion of three additional possibilities proposed, in particular functional ones, the likelihood that a lot more than a mere handful of the global population can be said to own English as well will be more plausible.

# 4. Future Prospects of English

It would be presumptuous to assert with overt confidence what kind of future is in store for English. Having said that, we can entertain a number of prospects based on the evidence we have of principles of language change and variation, and the changing profile of English users around the globe.

As discussed earlier, compared to erstwhile languages of wider communication which rose and fell at different points in history, English is at present the most important international language and is unique for taking on a further role as a global language. Crystal (2003b: 190) speculates that it could be that English 'has already grown to be independent of any form of social control' (by analogy

with the nuclear physics notion of critical mass) and once a language achieves this status, it will stay with us forever. The shift of favour for monolingual standards giving way to linguistic pluralism will soon become more apparent. Also, processes of contact with other languages and/or varieties that have taken place hint at the possibility that a clearer picture of an English family of languages will emerge in the not too distant future (McArthur, 1998: 180ff.).

Linguists are familiar with the branching out of Romance languages from Latin, and the manner in which English and Northwestern European languages descended from common Germanic origins. British English will, in the same way, be called the parent language of sister languages such as the transplanted varieties (i.e. new and New Englishes) of the inner and outer circles. Once novel varieties that will appear become standardised in further due course, they too will hold membership in the same family tree. What is all the more remarkable is: should international gatherings of people take place more frequently in (some form of) English, and should the use of the internet and other leading-edge communication technologies continue to grow and keep the people who interact mainly in this global lingua franca physically and verbally connected (Crystal, 2001a), there will be only a slight chance that – in contrast to Portuguese and Romanian on the one hand, and Icelandic and German on the other hand – Englishes will end up as 'completely' mutually unintelligible tongues as academics predicted in previous centuries. In line with Smith (1976), Crystal (2001b: 57-59) believes that Englishspeaking generations in the future will be more multilingual or multidialectal. In domestic or intranational settings, they will interact in a selected language or variety, but will switch to 'World Standard

Spoken English' (WSSE) or 'World Standard Printed English' (WSPE) for communication with people from different linguistic backgrounds. To use both WSSE and WSPE, one does not need to be trained to get to grips with new language patterns (cf. the principles of the three types of international language discussed in section 1). Two things that seem to matter are to have an awareness of potential miscommunication arising from the adoption of language-specific grammar and vocabulary, and, as a consequence, to try to use 'neutral' linguistic features wherever and whenever appropriate.

Another point of enquiry to receive much public attention has been that if the authority of English decreases one day, what language(s) will come to the fore and replace it as a global language? Most casual observations give weight notably to Mandarin, Spanish and Hindi on demographic grounds, in particular, the massive number of their speakers (see Maurais, 2003). Even so this alone is not a satisfactory justification: first, taken together they are currently no match for English-speaking people in terms of socioeconomic power, the most noticeable factor that gives a language its worldwide influence, and second, there is still a long way to go for communication and literature in Mandarin, Spanish and Hindi to attract an audience as internationally as English has.

By means of the 'engco' forecasting model, Graddol (2000) speculates that the twenty-first century would see no language (even English itself) achieving the single-handed hegemony which English enjoyed during the twentieth century. According to the model, hard and fast conclusions cannot be drawn for the centuries to come. But with 2050 projections, English could form part of an 'oligopoly' with (Mandarin?) Chinese, Hindi/Urdu, Spanish and Arabic; their speakers

will increase in number, become more affluent and 'enter social networks which extend beyond their locality: they are the people with the wherewithal and ambition to "go about" in the world, influence it and to have others seek to influence them' (Graddol, 2000: 59). Such so-called big languages are placed at the apex of a pyramid-like hierarchy, underneath which there are six regional languages of major trade blocs. Here again, Arabic, Chinese, English and Spanish remain strong candidates along with two newcomers: Malay and Russian. Immediately further down we see around 90 languages representing 220 nation states, with the remaining local languages being right at the bottom. This trend will unlikely be welcome everywhere, and if it happens, will accelerate the disappearance of minority or already endangered languages. From then on, linguistic variety may be less and less of an issue for future languages of the world – a scenario comparable to the return to the way the human kind had interacted before the days of the Tower of Babel.

#### 5. Conclusion

The ability to express oneself in English (much more so than in other competing languages) is an indispensable tool for speaking and written communication in the international community. In principle, as long as we manage to understand others and have them understand us with our kind of English, successful communication can be guaranteed. However, things are not as easy as they would seem. An awareness and ability to realise appropriate usages, especially grammatical, phonological, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences, is another set of concerns that should be given (even more) priority among native speakers as well as non-native speakers. The question then rests on

how we could make all these ends meet in practical terms. Also could it be that the conflict between identity and intelligibility will never be resolved? A prospect that will make itself felt more profoundly in the foreseeable future is that English in its worldwide incarnations will multiply even further. This sociolinguistic reality seems possible, but in any event would linger as a source of considerable enjoyment for some as well as an immense grievance for others at the same time. In summary, I quote a few lines from Crystal (2003b: 172): 'language is an immensely democratising institution. To have learned a language is immediately to have rights in it. You may add to it, modify it, play with it, create in it, ignore bits of it, as you will'. Needless to say, will the attitudes of all people around the globe be as optimistic as far as the ownership of English is concerned? We cannot hope that the answer would be 'yes' for everyone, but let us stay tuned!

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