INTERNATIONAL/GLOBAL/WORLD ENGLISH: IS A CONSENSUS POSSIBLE?

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1. ***Introduction***

One eternal ideal of humankind is the establishment of an international, global or world language—a shared language which could be used by people of every nation to communicate with one another without economically or culturally privileging one country over others. In reality though, a language becomes an international language precisely because of its accompanying political, military, economic and cultural power. English has become an international language not because of any utopian ideal, but by virtue of the political and economic progress made by English-speaking nations in the past 200 years. Since English has spread around the world, research exploring 'New Englishes'—Singapore English, Indian English, and various African Englishes—has increased. Opposing research suggesting that English should be limited, standardized for global use, and simplified for international teaching purposes has also emerged. Additionally, there have been quite a few proposals to search for an alternative name that would more accurately reflect the global state of English language usage, as critics claim that the label 'English' fails to express the diverse usages of the language that are in effect today. Suggestions for a new label for English include:

> English as an International Language (Smith), International English (Brieger), General English (Ahulu), Global English (Raley), Global (Toolan), World English (McArthur), and World Standard Spoken English (Crystal).

Ironically, due to the extensive amount of discourse surrounding the study of English and its international spread, there is no single label appropriate to describe the entity that I am

attempting to discuss today. Moreover, it seems that choosing one is a political decision, as each label carries with it ideological associations. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, I am going to use the term international English for this paper. Although there is a rather broad range of depictions of the English that is used throughout the world today, nowhere in these discussions is international English clearly and concisely defined; there is no explicit indication of what it is or where it can be found: There is no conceptual agreement as to what international English represents.

This paper is an attempt to survey the rather vast range of labels, definitions, and ideologies that have been put forward over the past 25 years to characterize the global use of English. It is also an endeavour to uncover why this English-naming-mania has occurred. In short, it is a first step in establishing some sort of conceptual agreement about the international usage of English.

2. Kachru and Quirk: The initial stages of the international English debate

2.1 New Englishes/Kachru

The current discussion about international English began in the mid-seventies when serious academic attention was first paid to both the international spread of English and the rise of new Englishes. Braj Kachru was in large part responsible for the recognition of the multiple varieties of English and was the main organizer of efforts to discuss the conceptualization of New Englishes and their implications. Kachru (1992) identified three broad sociolinguistic contexts within which English is used. He refers to these as three circles:

1. The Inner Circle represents the conventional bases of English, dominated by the 'mother tongue' varieties of the language (Britain, the USA, Canada, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand).

2. The Outer Circle includes countries like Ghana, India, Nigeria, Singapore, etc. where English is an official language and has a wide range of internal functions, often even the medium of education.
3. The Expanding Circle consists of countries like Germany, Indonesia, Korea, or Sweden where English is used as the primary foreign language, and the uses of English are increasing (Kachru 1992: 195).

Kachru and his colleagues called for a new direction of research consistent with the identities and functions of world Englishes[1]. Traditionally, the Outer Circle countries looked to and accepted the norms given by users in the Inner Circle, but research in New Englishes has encouraged linguistic independence of varieties of Outer Circle English.

2.2 Nuclear English/Quirk

At around the same time, Randolph Quirk also became interested in the state of the English language. Because of the international spread of English and the developments within New Englishes, Lord Quirk became concerned with:

1. the degree of variation within English as it is used as an international language.
2. the difficulties of teaching English, especially on a mass scale, to the level required for international usefulness.
3. the colonial spread of British or American culture with the English language (Quirk 1982: 37).

[1] In 1978, the international functions of English became the focus of two major international linguistic conferences, and for the first time the sociolinguistic and political contexts of the countries where English is used as a non-native language was discussed. The first conference was organized by Larry E. Smith in Hawaii and the second was organized by Braj Kachru in Illinois. These resulted in two publications, Smith (ed: 1981) and Kachru (ed 1982).

Quirk's worries about the diversification of varieties of English and loss of intercomprehensibility led him to propose a simplified variety called 'Nuclear English' a core form of English structure and vocabulary, similar to Ogden's 'Basic English[2]'.

His pretext was that Nuclear English would also be easier to teach and easier for students to learn as this form of English eliminated features that were considered 'dispensable,' in the sense that the language has alternative means to express them. When all such options are removed, only the obligatory minimum of the language, its communicative 'nucleus' would remain.

Nuclear English was also designed to be as "culture-free as calculus" with no literary, aesthetic, or emotional aspirations (1982: 43). Quirk argued that it was "more free" than British or American English of linguistic imperialism or any suspicion that it puts some countries at an advantage over others in international communication since native speakers of English would also have to be trained to use it (1982: 44).

Although Quirk's ideas for Nuclear English gained some attention for a while, they were soon abandoned. Most scholars felt that English could not be controlled and contained in this way, and that it was not desirable to reduce international communication to a limited range of vocabulary and minimalist patterns of grammar (Smith 1983: vi).

[2] Basic (an acronym for British, American, Scientific, International, Commercial) is a reduced form of English that was intended to improve international communication and simplify language learning, devised in the 1920s by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards. It was used mainly to teach English to non-English-speaking people and promoted as an international language.

2.3 New vs. Nuclear

Even though Quirk now seems to have given up his plan for Nuclear English and has accepted the existence of New Englishes, he, among others (e.g. Honey), is still opposed to the introduction of so-called 'non-standard' forms from New Englishes into standard English and language instruction. And this is precisely Kachru's goal—to promote research in New Englishes, support their literatures and encourage their use in the teaching of English worldwide.

With his support of New Englishes, Kachru promotes a diverse set of regional varieties through which individuality or nationality can be expressed. However, the increase in diversity of forms brings in its wake a number of anxieties and problems for the users of English. This has resulted in Quirk's concern that English will diversify and fragment into many mutually unintelligible local forms and therefore no longer be able to serve as an international lingua franca. So in Kachru vs. Quirk we have identified the main problem within the Global English arena—the conflict between the acceptance of new forms of English from around the world versus the fear of fragmentation of English as it spreads. This conflict, as you will realize, is similar to the traditional debate surrounding standard languages.

3. ***New labels: Solving the international English debate?***

In an attempt to solve the problems encapsulated by the Kachru/Quirk debate, numerous theories of international English have been developed. Various scholars have suggested a means for the English language to allow for the expression of individual identity while also remaining internationally comprehensible. This next section is a survey of several proposals for some type of international English, which try to resolve the predicament presented in the international English language paradox. Notice how part of each of these proposals involves a choice of a new label for the English language.

3.1 English as an International Auxiliary Language (EIAL)/Smith

Larry Smith has been involved in the teaching of English internationally since the 1970s. In an attempt to resolve the conflicting tensions due to the global spread of English (i.e. those marked by the Kachru/Quirk debate), Smith suggested a solution which would simultaneously allow English to function as both the language of international communication and an identity marker for other varieties of English.

Smith's first suggestion was to no longer use the label 'English,' as it did not accurately reflect the state of English language usage around the globe (1976: 2). He therefore suggested the implementation of the term English as an International Auxiliary Language (EIAL). Smith claims that EIAL is different from English because it no longer belongs to the native speaker, and it is not inextricably tied to the cultures of 'inner circle' countries (Smith 1976: 2). The core argument of EIAL is that the responsibility for effective communication is shared by both native and non-native speakers, and native speakers must learn how to understand non-native speakers using EIAL.

Smith's solution was to mix features from New Englishes and standard English to come to a new international standard. This language would function as a 'neutral' means of communication, so that any identity could be expressed. It would not be restricted like Nuclear English, so it would allow for any type of communication, and it would be kept in place by the mere fact that it is international and needed for communication.

3.2 General English/Ahulu

In Samuel Ahulu's 1997 article "General English," he argues in the same vein as Smith that the

word ‘English’ is “too restrictive a way of referring to the language” (1997: 17). Ahulu is dissatisfied with both titles ‘New Englishes’ and ‘Standard English,’ as neither appears sensitive or precise enough to encapsulate “the educational and social reality of English as an international language” (1997: 18). According to Ahulu, even though Kachru’s term New Englishes attempts to incorporate changes within the English language and accept forms that are typically associated with non-native speakers of English, it fails to express the many features that are shared by the different varieties. Quirk’s type of standard English is no longer an acceptable term because it has come to be associated only with British and American standards, and the international use of English has resulted in forms that diverge from these norms. The insistence on standard English reveals scepticism about non-native and non-standard forms of English, and by barring them from the centre, can be seen as ethnocentric or imperialistic (Ahulu 1997).

Ahulu’s answer is that variations in English as it is used internationally should be subsumed within the concept of Standard English, as we need a standard that is common to both groups of native and non-native speakers of English for the purposes of international communication (1997: 19). As a more appropriate label to represent this type of English, Ahulu suggests the employment of the term “General English”.

3.3 World Standard Spoken English/Crystal

David Crystal, in his 1997 book *English as a Global Language*, also presents a possible solution to the international English dilemma. He argues that even as English varieties around the world increasingly diversify, a world standard will still continue to function for worldwide communication. A likely outcome will be that English speakers will simply extend their usage in order to meet the demands of the international situation:

> "We may, in due course, all need to be in control of two standard Englishes—the one which gives us our national or local identity, and the one which puts us in touch with the rest of the human race. In effect, we may all need to become bilingual in our own language" (Crystal 1988: 265).

Crystal predicts that in the future, English speakers will still have their dialects for use within their own country, but when they need to communicate with people from other countries they will use WSSE, in other words they will code-switch into international English. People then will have a dialect in which they can continue to express their national or regional identity, and they have a dialect which can guarantee international intelligibility (Crystal 1997: 138).
[show model—central core is WSSE—other varieties spring out from there.]

3.4 EIL/Modiano

As his solution to the international English dilemma, Marko Modiano suggests that the concept of standard English should be replaced with English as an International Language (EIL)[3]. EIL, according to Modiano, is not based on any native variety of English, but on "a composite of the features of English which are easily understood by a broad cross-section of native and non-native speakers" (1999a: 27). Modiano's model is based on Kachru's, but has been altered to have at its centre all "competent speakers", who are not necessarily 'inner circle' members.

Modiano claims that the standard for this centre should be based on the common core of all the varieties of English. Native speakers who speak with strong regional accents are not speakers of EIL, as it is naïve to expect all speakers to understand the vast number of varieties of English.

[3] Modiano's proposals for EIL are explained in the following articles: 1999a. International English in the global village. *English Today 58*. Vol. 15, No. 2: 22-28, 1999b. Standard English(es) and educational practices for the world's lingua franca. *English Today 60*. Vol. 15, No. 4: 3-13, and 2000. Rethinking ELT. *English Today 62*. Vol. 16, No. 2: 28-34..

Also, “outer circle” members and speakers of English pidgins and creoles would only be considered EIL speakers if they could code-switch into an internationally comprehensible variety. So Modiano, like Crystal, foresees that most English speakers will be able to speak at least two types of English—their regional variety and the international variety.

3.5 English as an International Language/Davies

In his 1989 article “Is International English an Interlanguage?,” Alan Davies explores the problems arising from the international spread of English. Davies’ solution is to consider International English as the classification which includes all uses of English and all uses of English for international purposes from reduced codes to standard educated written English used both in native and non-native contexts:

> “The range of International English is so wide that it has to be thought of as a continuum, from the fluent written and spoken English of (educated) L1 users to the pidgins and creoles of West Africa and elsewhere and the specially reduced codes for air traffic control (Airspeak) and ship handling (Seaspeak)” (1989: 456-7).

In his definition, EIL is a stable standard and not very open to change (1989: 450). However, EIL also accommodates variability in its uses around the world. In this way, EIL allows for the expression of individual identity but also enables communication to take place. Davies’ definition of international English seems to be a replacement term for what has been previously conceived as the English language.

4. ***Establishing consensus?***

Having looked at these various proposals for an international English (and these are not the only ones), I'd like to get back to my original question: is consensus possible in the arena of international English? The answer must be yes, as the models of Smith, Ahulu, Crystal, Modiano, and Davies have the many features in common. A compilation of these models show that international English is the following:

1. **It is English used for international communication**, a language which is increasingly used to communicate across international boundaries.
2. **It must be learned by native speakers as well as non-native speakers.** Native speakers have to "accommodate their speech so as to conform to it when they talk to each other" (Toolan 1997: 7). Anyone who plans to interact in English with non-native speakers or with other native speakers who use a different national variety will code-switch into this international variety.
3. **It is neutral.** EIL can be considered "a neutral language of communication" (Platt and Weber 1984: 14).
4. **It is not the vehicle of a single culture but is "the vehicle of any culture to which a user applies it"** (Bryan 1994: 101).
5. **It has a common core of shared syntactical and grammatical features, but it is also open to vocabulary and minor grammatical differences coming from New Englishes**. It both welcomes innovation and gives correctness its proper value (Davies 1989: 464).
6. **It is no longer controlled by British or American authority.** International users are increasingly claiming ownership of English (Toolan 1997: 3). It has become a language for which there is no native-speaker custodian (Widdowson 1997:144).

These features give some insight into what international English is, but, unfortunately, the

compilation still does not provide a satisfactory definition. Serious questions and problems still remain in the discussion of international English. In the above list, numbers 3-6 should especially be questioned.

4.1 Neutrality

Proponents of international English insist that this language is neutral and therefore does not carry with it the culture of 'inner circle' countries. However, if international English is to be neutral, and therefore a language without identity, then it is doomed to be unsuccessful as a global language, as it cannot function as the vehicle for cultural expression (as the attempts to implement artificial languages such as Esperanto, Volapük, etc. have shown). Indeed the concept of 'neutral communication', according to linguistics, seems to be impossible, as the expression of identity and power is intrinsic in language use.

Moreover, claiming that international English has no link to British or American culture is irresponsible and dishonest. Even though language is not tied exclusively to one culture, no language can be stripped of its historical past. Instead of denying the connection between the English language and its accompanying 'baggage' (whether viewed positively or negatively), applied linguists should openly admit that some cultural values necessarily accompany a language.

4.2 The common core

As we have seen in all of our models, a common core is located at the centre of the circle or English, much like a nucleus. But if Quirk's model of Nuclear English was cast off as imperialist and impractical, why then are these other nuclear models acceptable? The main difference is that

these nuclei are much bigger and supposedly more inclusive of other varieties than the one envisioned by Quirk.

However, we still have a centre, a common core, and the question remains what constitutes this common core and who decides what is standard in an international context? If other varieties are developing new ways of expression, who is the custodian who decides whether this is to become part of the international standard, or not? And is there really a tendency to incorporate more features from new Englishes into standard English?

When looking at the list of compilers of Microsoft's new *Encarta World English Dictionary*, there are the token Native-American specialists or Linguistics professors from Cape Town, etc., but for the most part, the contributors still seems to be made up of mostly what seems to be American or British standard English speakers and the entries seem to be mostly what we would consider standard English.

4.3 Political correctness

So perhaps there really isn't a difference at all between standard English and international English, just a difference in the name. The primary concern of the aforementioned writers is that English as used in an international setting should not bring with it the cultural values of English-speaking countries. As the label 'English' has powerful associations with its original source, these scholars have suggested a change of name to de-emphasize the connection to England and its imperial past. This shift of name seems to be part of a concerted effort to avoid reminders of imperialism due to post-colonial guilt.

The insistence on replacing one usage with another is an effort to be 'politically correct'.

Unfortunately, though, this politically correct linguistic reform tends to focus much more on language than on the social questions at issue. Instead of actually employing more critical procedures in English language teaching, the trend has been to simply change the name of the subject taught. Unlike British or American English, varieties that resonate with colonialism and capitalism, international English is presumed to be culture-free and belonging to everyone. In spite of this, international English textbooks made in the UK look suspiciously like the former British English textbooks (see Brieger 1989). Within the realm of applied linguistic research on this subject, there is more emphasis on changing the name of the language than advice for teachers on how to teach less imperialistically, how to be more sensitive to other cultures, and how to make sure that the local languages are not replaced by English but are cultivated and cherished.

Perhaps the 'crime' of simply replacing one label with the more 'correct' one of international English has been committed less by language teachers than by publishing companies. In response to public demand for textbooks which are less nationally or culturally based and more global in their approach (especially from the Middle East or China), I am not convinced that they did not simply rename their "How to speak the Queen's English" textbooks "Global Speak". Perhaps this term international English is more of a marketing technique than a linguistic reality.

4.4 New Englishes in the classroom

If international English is a linguistic reality, English teachers should be accepting features from New Englishes in education. I teach English in a German university where the students are, for the most part, nearly fluent in English when they start their studies. Most of them spend time abroad either working or studying in an English-speaking environment: They may be au-pairs in Chicago or work for the summer at the Edinburgh festival, but they also may volunteer in a

hospital in Calcutta, work on a farm in Ghana, or study for a semester in Singapore. These students come back with authentic accents and vocabulary, marking the place where they have spent their time. Some non-standard features of New Englishes which are supposedly starting to be accepted into the standard are the same constructions that my German students often produce; however, when they produce them, they are certainly counted as 'errors' by my colleagues. My own experience has confirmed that most features of New Englishes are still seen as errors in language teaching contexts.

For example, linguistic research has found that some of the characteristics of New Englishes are:

1. over-use of the progressive (I am having your book). I am encouraged to train my students not to overuse the progressive, which is a common 'German' error.
2. occasional loss of distinctions between count and non-count nouns (luggages, informations, advices). In our department, a German student would absolutely lose full-points for the production of 'informations' or 'advices' in an exam, even though this may be standard in many varieties of New Englishes.
3. use of non-native-sounding collocations[4]. Anyone who is often involved in an international environment must be used to some confusion as to what 'sounds right' or not. I am a native-speaker but have been accused of sounding non-native at times, probably due to my American background, my studies in Britain, and interference from my second language, German.

5. *Conclusion*

Having examined the many definitions of international English, we have found some consensus. But the claims these definitions hold as central are questionable. It is absolutely irresponsible to

[4] This information is taken from the MSc lecture notes of G. Ferguson (see References).

promote international English as a neutral variant of the language. In fact, upon close inspections, international English may not be any different from what we have previously called standard English, just in a much larger international context.

We, as applied linguists, need to be aware of the different varieties and usages of English as it spreads around the world. And we also need to promote awareness of these varieties of English developing familiarity with other cultures and reading new literatures in the classroom. But we also need to encourage awareness about standard English and encourage learners to think about who designs, promotes and guards international English.

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