

English in the world today:

who speaks what and how ?

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Abstract

It is undoubtedly true that English today is used by a variety of people around the world in a host of various sectors such as business, economics, science and so on. Yet, the expansion of English as a world's leading global language has raised a number of questions on its usage and what types to learn and teach. It is generally assumed that the word English in phrases such as "English learning", "English teaching", "English songs", "movies in English", "books written in English" refers to standard British or American English because Great Britain and the United States of America are after all countries where English emerged and developed as the mother tongue. Furthermore, the expansion of the British empire in the nineteenth century and the economic success of the United States in the twentieth century contributed to the exportation of the language across the world. Speakers of English from these countries are referred to as native speakers. Yet, English is widely spoken in certain parts of the world by people who have never been to a native country of English nor even met a native speaker of English. However, the majority of people assumes that the English spoken, taught and learned outside of the native countries of English is not real because it does not conform to the norms of standard English which is a form of English highly codified by rules created by native speakers and therefore spoken and written as the main and often the only language of the native countries of English. Similarly, some assume that learners around the world may always prefer to learn standard British or American English to any other form of English. This, of course, has prompted the question of how credible standard English really is and whether it can cater for every learner's needs. For example, will learners of English in Pakistan aspiring to do business in South Asia need to strictly follow the rules of standard English or will they benefit more from being receptive to the forms of English spoken in the regions of South Asia ? This paper will therefore provide an insight on the aforementioned by looking into the number of English speakers around the world, how English is spoken and by who, what models of English exist and which of these, if any, best suit learners' needs.

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this article is to bring some clarity on questions which may come to mind on the issues raised in the abstract. Questions about the birth of English and its evolution, for example; did English stem from one linguistic family or several? and, is the type of English spoken the same everywhere or are there differences? but also questions on the teaching and learning of English; what are the implications of it all for us teachers in the classroom and how do we adapt our teaching? What features may influence learners' choice to choose a variety of English over another? Eventually, I hope this paper will have provided a clear insight on the aforementioned by looking into the number of English speakers around the world, how English is spoken and by who, what models of English exist and which of these, if any, best suit learners' needs.

1.1 A brief history of English,

(inspired by the BBC program: The adventure of English).

To fully understand the nature of English today, it is firstly paramount to look into its history. English developed in the British Isles from the 5th century AD. Preceding that period the inhabitants of the British Isles were Celts speaking Celtic languages (Welsh, Scottish, Gaelic and Irish). Throughout the 5th and 6th centuries, waves of invaders from what is now Denmark and North Germany, the Anglo-Saxons, settled in the British Isles. They spoke a variety of mutually intelligible dialects belonging to the Germanic branch of Indo-European languages. The 9th century marked the arrival of the Viking settlers to Britain from what is today Denmark and Norway. There was a high degree of comprehensibility in what they and the Anglo-Saxons spoke. One of the major results of the inter-communication of the two groups was a simplification of the morphological structure of English (the inflections or word endings).

One of the most important dates in the history of English is 1066 when William the conqueror landed on the south coast of England from Northern France. This has been referred to as the Norman conquest. William and his followers spoke

French which became for the next four centuries the language of the court, of government, law, high-society and the army. During that period, English survived as a vernacular language. A great part of the French vocabulary was originally Latin. By 1500, however, English was once more the language of the monarch but was different from the earlier Anglo-Saxon in that a tremendous amount of French vocabulary influenced its lexicon. The influence that French vocabulary had on the English language was unprecedented. After 1500 there were no further invasions of Britain but instead the British established their influence in other parts of the world which caused many items of vocabulary from the countries and peoples involved to enter the English language, see appendix A. Later, with the expansion of the British empire and the economic influence of the USA, English spread around the world and became the language of international business, technology and communication. Therefore, it can be said that English is a very mixed language Germanic in structure but heavily French/Latin in vocabulary with varieties of vocabulary from different parts of the world. It can be said to be receptive to new words, rich in vocabulary and very flexible. English is acknowledged to be a major-world language, if not the major-world language and has cultural associations which not everybody may approve of, for example, Western consumerism and capitalism. Conversely, some native speakers feel the language does not belong to them anymore and that English has lost a lot of its cultural associations.

1.2 The number of English speakers in the world.

Estimates accounting for the number of English speakers worldwide vary greatly depending on how literacy or mastery is defined and measured. Kachru, 1988 developed a model of circles of users of English around the world which is one of the most influential models for grouping the varieties of English, see appendix B. The first circle or inner-circle, shows the number of English users whose mother tongue and main language is English. Users in this circle as mentioned earlier are referred to as native speakers and are estimated to be between 325-450 million (Crystal 1997). All native speakers do not speak the language excellently however. Furthermore, they have to be taught how to read it and write it and some may enrol in courses to

learn how to speak it and write it effectively. This is very important as it suggests that effective language use is something that has to be taught.

The second circle, the “outer” or “extended” circle, accounts for speakers who use English for public or professional purposes while local languages are used at home and the market place. This form of English is referred to as second language or ESL because it is an official or second language. Estimates of such ESL speakers are 150-350 million.

The third circle or “extending” circle is the rest of the world. These countries will typically have a language of their own which they use for public and private matters. English in some of these countries might be a major subject at school and some might use it as a normal part of their job. However, when using English for business they are likely to be communicating with fellow non native-speakers. For example, an Italian doing business with someone from Japan or Sweden. This form of English is referred to as foreign language or EFL. EFL speakers are estimated to be as many as 1 billion (Crystal 1987,1997) which suggests that non native-speakers now outnumber native speakers by a ratio of 3 to 1.

2.1 Varieties of English

Randolph Quirk, in his article “language varieties and standard language” (Quirk,1990), introduces a taxonomy of varieties of English. He differentiates between varieties which are dependent on the use and those which relate to the identity of the users. Varieties according to users can be subsumed under the term dialect. They are generally based on ethnic grounds, geographical regions or social attributes. For example, African English can be seen as the English spoken in Africa, however, it can be of many different types depending on what part of Africa it is spoken, regional dialect, and by who, for example a scholar in a university or a labourer in a cocoa plantation, social dialect.

2.2 Regional differences

The majority of English speakers rapidly become aware of the differences between the two major forms of native varieties of English: British and American

English. There are, however, quite a number of regional variations within each, amongst other, London English, liverpudlian (Liverpool English), Texan English, New York English and further derivations such as Australian English, New-Zealand English, Canada English and so on.

The nations of the extended extending circles have their regional diversities as well which are influenced by local languages or the mother tongue of the country. Linguistic items from these languages might be likely to form part of their English speech, Crystal 1997. For example, a Japanese speaker of English may say, “let’s go to a *yatai*”, vocabulary item, even though he/she knows the word for *yatai* in English is stall, or may suggest to “go play together”, structural item, even though they know the much preferred and grammatically correct alternative “let’s hang out” or “go out together”. The above shows that distinction between the dialects can be found at any level of structure.. The easiest to notice, however, are at the level of pronunciation usually referred to as accents.

2.3 Social differences

Differences also exist in the forms of language used by the different social classes which can be defined according to historical dominance, education and economic power. The demarcation between the social classes is not always clear-cut and some non-traditional groups may have social influence causing others to imitate their language. Some good examples are rock, rap and jazz singers or athletes and comedians. Furthermore, certain tightly social groups with members being related to each other through friendship, marriage or work may develop their own special habits (Milroy, 1985). Members of these groups may prefer pronunciation, grammatical or vocabulary structures over others which act as a marker of identity of the group. It is noteworthy at this point to look into the differences in language use by women and men. Findings show that, above all but not always, women are more likely to use standard language than men and when making requests men are more likely to use short and direct forms whereas women use longer and indirect forms (Bergvall et al (eds.), 1996 ; Mills, (ed.), 1995).

2.4 Differences in use and idiolect

If we look at the uses to which individuals put language we notice that another set of systematic differences occurs whatever the speakers' dialect. These differences of use are often referred to as registers. Features such as field, tenor and mode are often attributed to register. The field is the topic of the speech or writing. The tenor or status is the relationship between the users, more formal or less formal. The mode is whether the language used is spoken or written. Individuals also have their personal and preferred style. For example, some speakers prefer to be always rather formal even in informal situations while other speakers are the opposite, rather informal, whatever the situation. Clearly, neither will operate a wide range in terms of tenor. Their linguistic choices will tend to be the results of their preferences or style using their favorite words for things. These are called idiolects.

3. Standard English vs non-standard English

Seen from the above, it is clear that there is a host of various dialects in the English-speaking world and that each of those dialects is appropriate for the needs of its users. However, certain dialects have more status than others. This is particularly true for British and American standard English. Standard English as Quirk, 1990, explains is the form of language which is taught at schools and has been extensively codified in terms of rules. He also refers to this form of English as "Institutionalised variety" and claims that only British and American standard English can be used as models and reference points. Other varieties, native and non-native are not used for educational purposes or to make prescriptive statements about usage. Mc Arthur (2003, 442) shares similar thoughts and suggests that standard English has at least three identifying characteristics: 1) it is easier to recognize in print because written conventions are similar worldwide. 2) It is usually used by news presenters. 3) Its usage relates to the speaker's social class and education. Mc Arthur (2003, 442) also suggests that standard English is generally considered "the variety most widely accepted, understood and perhaps valued within an English speaking country".

Not everybody, however, shares the same opinion on the matter. Tolleson

(2002), argues that teaching standard English may have negative consequences for the learners claiming that standard English is a native-speaker model which makes it unattainable for many second language learners. Tollesfon (2002, 150) goes on explaining that teaching standard English may also promote discrimination in the workplace, discriminating against speakers of other forms of English and that discrimination based on the form of English or accent used can even be considered a form of racism. Similarly, Kachru (1985, 14) proposes that English today is part of “a unique cultural pluralism, and a linguistic heterogeneity and diversity”. Therefore, there needs to be greater acceptance since many varieties of English are regular and systematic. He refers to all varieties of English as world Englishes (see appendix B) and maintain that standard English is an example of one norm of the English language and not the norm. Furthermore, as Widdowson (1994, 381) likes to remind us, standard English “is not simply a means of communication but the symbolic possession of a particular community, expressive of its identity, its conventions, and its values”. Comparably, a great number of speakers of world Englishes use English in their own way to express their identity and their cultural values because language “is a major means of showing where they belong, and of distinguishing one social group from another” (Crystal 2003, 22). This raises the important question of what to teach and what is acceptable to teach since a particular variety of English may be unintelligible to speakers of another variety. Take for example, the form of English spoken in Japan sometimes referred to as “Jinglish”

- . absence of plural marker, “ wait seven minute”
- .absence of possessive inflection, “my brother bicycle”
- .use of borrowing, “it’s very kawaii !”
- .use of particle, “ you call me , ne ?”
- .mispronunciation of certain phonemes, “ I like lost beef” for “I like roastbeef”

Clearly, those features of English spoken in Japan would be understandable for speakers of the same variety but teaching these features will undoubtedly limit the learners’ ability to speak with other speakers of English.

4. Acceptability: what to teach?

It seems that a sensitive approach to teaching English encompassing the teaching context of the learners and target of instructions (Mc Kay 2002) based on that context as well as preparing the learners for international English encountered by exposing them to other varieties of English (Masuda 2003) is for many the best approach. The variety of English taught should be based on the learners' educational and cultural needs (McKay 2002). For example, in a class of learners studying in preparation to enter a school or work in an inner circle country, teachers will have to teach standard British or American English or at least a native variety of English. It will be a total different matter, however, if the learners are learning English for global communication. The point is for teachers to choose the model based on context and learners' needs. What is more, further considerations should be taken to help the learners understand that their own English is valuable even though it is different from what is presented in class or spoken in the inner circle countries. This could be achieved by exposing learners to different varieties (Masuda 2003) by selecting samples of varieties on the internet through world newspapers or YouTube programs to name just a few. For example, this could lead to the type of activity through which the students watch programs from different countries several times, note down vocabulary and pronunciation differences between the speakers and present them to the class. Possible websites to use, amongst other, for this activity are:

- India: www.ndtv.com
- Ireland: www.rte.ie/live/index.html
- New-Zealand: <http://tvnz.co.nz>
- Singapore: www.channelnewsasia.com

Teachers could then follow up by focusing on teaching both strategic and intercultural competence skills which will help learners "to adjust their speech in order to be intelligible to interlocutors from a wide range of backgrounds, most of whom might not be inner circle native speakers" (Jenkins 2006, 174). Strategic competence skills help learners negotiate for meaning in a communication breakdown and comprises such skills as slowing the rate of speech and articulating clearly or

asking the interlocutor to slow down, to repeat, or to wait while the student chooses the appropriate word (Petzold 2002). Intercultural competence skills on the other hand would help interlocutors overcome sociolinguistic differences (Alptekin 2002; El-Sayed 1991). Learners would learn to talk about the sociocultural norms of their own cultures “so that sociocultural convergence can be negotiated within the ad-hoc speech community” (El-Sayed 1991, 166). For example, Japanese learners could learn to explain that being humble and silent is considered polite and is highly valued in Japanese culture. Allowing learners to maintain and explain their cultural differences will decrease misunderstandings because it will foster greater tolerance for the uniqueness of human cultures and will prepare learners for the intercultural interactions that are likely to occur in the existing global village (Jenkins 2006). As Jenkins (2000-2006) argues, with the expansion of English as a global language all learners of English need to be prepared to communicate with speakers of varieties of English different from their own.

5. Conclusion

I started this article by pointing at a number of questions on the birth and evolution of English as well as the implications it may have for teachers. I hope it is now clear that English stemmed from various linguistic influences and there is a myriad of ways to speak it depending on social status or geographical location. It therefore can be said that the latter makes English a flexible and adaptable language since new words enter its lexicon and new ways of speaking it develop all the time. Consequently, considering the forms of English in the world today as well as some learners' needs to communicate globally, it is appropriate and sensitive that teachers consider all varieties, native and non-native and not just British or American standard English in order to prepare learners to communicate at a global level. It is also paramount to lead learners to understand that their own English is as important and valued as any other form of English. To promote the latter teachers can implement a sensitive approach encompassing the teaching and learning context as well as the learners' values. This in turn will help to prepare learners for future interactions

with speakers of different varieties of English and therefore present a more accurate model of real world interactions.

EXHIBIT A

The following English words are examples of words which originated from various places around the world.

Bungalow: This derives from Hindi, meaning something from Bengal.

Concerto: This is Italian. Two plural form are found in English: The Italian form: concerti and the English form: concertos

Yacht: This derives from Dutch

Robot: This derives from Czech

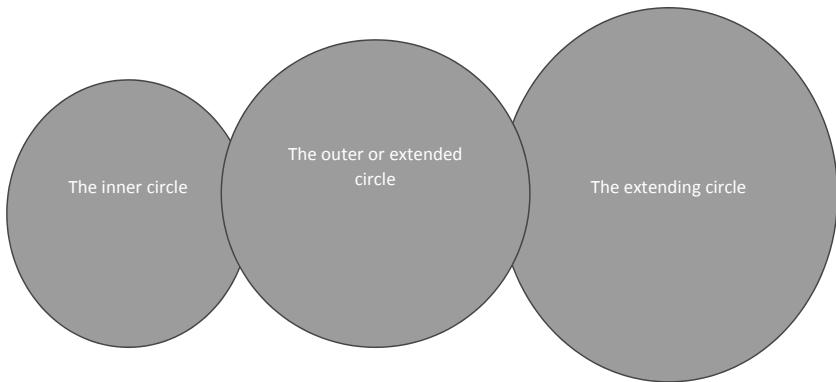
Karaoke: This derives from Japanese

Go-down: This derives from the British experience in India

EXHIBIT B: A reproduction of Kachru's circles of English

From Kachru, B., 1988. *The sacred cows of English*. Kachru refers to all varieties of English as world Englishes.

- It is important to say that although some figures presented by Kachru at the time are probably very different today, the main idea that the extending circle comprises the most users of English still holds true in 2017.
- Some countries but not all countries, for reasons of space, representing each circle are listed below with estimates of the number of speakers in each circle. Crystal 1997.



Countries

USA	Bangladesh	China
UK	Ghana	Egypt
Canada	India	Indonesia
Australia	Kenya	Israel
New Zealand	Malaysia	Japan
	Nigeria	Korea
	Pakistan	Mexico
	Philippines	Saudi Arabia
	Tanzania	Zimbabwe
	Zambia	

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