

# WHAT ARE WORLD ENGLISHES?

## Introduction

The rapid proliferation of English as a global language has long been a linguistic phenomenon that receives attention from several scholars and researchers around the world. This brings about both benefits and inevitable drawbacks. This essay aims to summarize four topics in applied linguistics to demonstrate my understanding of several aspects and features concerning this specific topic.

## Definition of “World Englishes”

The author firstly defines the term “World Englishes”, addresses criteria that makes it “global”, the need to have a global language, its detrimental impact as well as circumstances that might assassinate the global status of English. In general, the book chapter covers thoroughly several aspects regarding the issue with very clear and informative explanation. The author also eliminates several untrue assumptions and provides convincing prospects related to the English language.

In order to be considered global, a language has to fulfill two pivotal criteria in order to have an important function for all countries. The idea that if more nations use English as their first language, it is more likely to become a global language is simply unjustifiable. There are around twenty countries employing Spanish as their first language compared to approximately ten countries with English as their mother tongue but English is still considered more global than Spanish. In fact, a language is regarded as global when it has a significant status in other countries as an official or second language. In other words, aside from their first language, English is used in the government such as in legislation and other formal or informal aspects of life. More than 75 countries recognize English as their special language (Nordquist, 2017). In addition, if the language is the most commonly taught as a second language in the countries' compulsory syllabus, it can gain its status as a global language. The fact that there are over 1.5 billion English users around the world has proven its special position in both aforementioned manners (Beare, 2018). In the context of my country Vietnam, over the past 20 years, English has rapidly gained its importance at any levels of education, from primary to higher education. In order to enter the next academic, almost all students are required to possess a certain level of English language proficiency aside from other subjects required for the major. For instance, all students who graduate from any university need to have at least 550 scores on their TOEIC and at least 6.5 for IELTS to graduate with English language major.

The connection between the supremacy of a language and its users' expertise in various aspects of life such as economy, military, politics and technology is prominent. This doesn't concern with the number of people who use the language. In fact, the power of the people who use the language will determine its global position. A prime example is Chinese, with 1.2 billion speakers globally, clearly exceeds that of English but is not considered a global language (McCarthy, 2018). Additionally, the linguistic characteristics of a language does not decide its popularity. That is to say, a global language does not need to involve complex grammatical structures with abundant vocabulary or its common usage in literature or arts. Since first language is successfully acquired all over the world, the fact that one language is easier to learn than others is unjustifiable. As mentioned earlier, how a language is set up, spread and maintained is pertained to the power in terms of military and economy of its users. Historically, when powerful countries conquered and colonized other small countries, their languages are brought to these places as a means for not only communication but also for missionary work. Take Spanish in the Philippines or English in India, Hong Kong and Chinese in feudal Vietnam as examples. Today, with the proliferation of the media, the internet or more specifically social networks, the significance of a language can even be elevated more quickly than ever before. American English is the most popular variation due to the power of the USA and how its movie industry and technology influence the world.

On the one hand, the spread of English as a global language has brought about an array of benefits. English can act as a bridge language between speakers whose first languages are different, in other words, a lingua franca. There is a need for a universal language in the world because of the establishment of several world organizations as well as economic and academic collaborations between countries. English as a global language can help alleviate the burden of interpretation and translation in those contexts.

On the other hand, the advantages of this phenomenon are also inevitably obvious. Firstly, English language as a global language increases the discrepancy among L1 and L2 users. Firstly, possessing advantages in terms of linguistics, native speakers of English are content at their language with their proprietorship. Therefore, they don't need to allocate their time studying English and focus on pursuing other work. Another point is that they don't feel the obligatory needs to study another language. By contrast, L2 users of English, depending on their level of proficiency, might have different viewpoints on that as their English level can be the key to their job opportunities or render them with less choices. In addition, L2 users might find that as English becomes more and more dominant, their mother tongue will be intimidated. Although Nakayama & Halualani (2013) claim that the rapid development of English may lead to the destruction or extinction of other languages, the author firmly rejects this idea. According to him, more than 600 languages will disappear over the next 100 years and English is definitely not the cause. In contrast, this global language can coexist well and even support the local languages for

the reason that the existence of a language depends on its country's economic and political status.

Finally, whether English could or could not be replaced as a global language is controversial but the likelihood is dubious. Nevertheless, it is not unsensible if English loses its position to technology in the form of automatic translation. Nowadays, a considerable number of softwares and tools have been vastly developed and distributed to help translate directly between languages. Thus, this development is thought to pose as a decent substitution for English. The author discards this concern as he believes English language will have been irreplaceable by the time these softwares become more accurate and efficient. As an ESL teacher who has to employ these tools such as Google translate or TFLAT dictionary, I personally believe that the prospect as mentioned is not impossible. Recently, these softwares and translating tools have become more and more reliable and accessible with the help of smartphones. Furthermore, most smartphones now incorporate virtual assistants such as Siri of Apple and Bixby of Samsung or Google Assistant. These are constantly developed and now are able to perform impressively impeccable tasks based on users' voice.

### **Key Sociolinguistics and Linguistics Concepts**

British, American and Australian English are usually regarded as "native" whereas other varieties which are used in places where English does not originate from and with more prominent local cultural and linguistic factors are seen as "nativised". This viewpoint is clearly controversial due to a number of reasons. First, a language variety is considered native if it has been established for a long time up to the point that it can influence other varieties. In this case, British English is probably the only "native" variation since it contains both of these features. Thus, it is not wrong to say that American English is nativised since it was established much later with heavy influence from British English. However, American English is not regarded as "nativised". Second, a variety is also considered native or nativised based on people's preconceptions of its users. There is a tendency for people to associate native varieties with white people but this is certainly not true. In fact, a lot of native speakers are of different races such as black or native American. Additionally, native varieties are thought of as being more refined but this is a misconception due to the fact that old variations of English often consist of several words and features borrowed from Latin, German and French. Lastly, as a language variety undoubtedly reflects its local and cultural attributes, considering American English purer or more native than Indian English is merely unjustifiable.

People use language to communicate, form identity and express their cultures. Forming identity and expressing cultures might be prioritized over one another in different contexts. One more fact about varieties is that each of them consists of other varieties. As a result, although people of

an area can intelligibly understand a common, universal variety, each of them possesses various distinctive features in their language.

Aside from these concepts, pidgins and creoles are also worth mentioning. A pidgin is a grammatically simplified form of language, born when two or more languages come into contact. When this pidgin turns into the mother tongue of a newer generation, it becomes a creole. The problem with these two is that due to prejudice or stereotypes, they are often discriminated for being inferior. The author carries on presenting some research to demonstrate how people associate one's accent with their power or intelligence. This, along with the fact that whether a variety is considered native or nativised as mentioned previously, is determined primarily on prejudice. Therefore, it can be inferred from the author's point of view that no variety is inferior or superior to each other.

All learners of English usually have to face the problem of its inconsistency. Indeed, consonants, vowels and other clusters might be differently pronounced without any solid rules. Consequently, it is not guaranteed to pronounce a word correctly in English when looking at its spelling only. For instance, the word "cough" and "though" have clearly different pronunciation even though the spelling is only slightly different. Different pronunciation features in English language can also set its varieties or accents apart. A prime example is the usage of rhotic "r" sound in American English in words such as first, car, important, etc compared to non-rhotic varieties like British English. The author emphasizes that when it comes to studying English, it is not suggested that one should strictly follow one variety such as Received Pronunciation or Standard American accent. In fact, when studying English as an L2, the speaker's mother tongue also comes into play, or what Ellis (2015) calls "transferring". Singaporean speakers of English might stress all words at the ending syllable no matter where that word is supposed to be stressed, leading to their distinctive features in their accent. Another example is with Vietnamese learners, especially those whose proficiency is still low. Because Vietnamese is a tonal language with no such thing as "ending sounds", they tend to possess a very Vietnamese intonation to their English and often forget to pronounce endings such as "s", "es" or "t". Thai learners of English often prolong the pronunciation for every word, so there's no difference with short or long "ee" sound for example. In addition, different grammatical rules are employed in different varieties. An example is with present perfect and past simple tense. British speakers usually distinguish these two tenses while for American speakers, past simple is way more likely and naturally employed to talk about something that happened in the past. If the time in the past is not mentioned or unclear, British speakers will use present perfect tense, but for American users, past simple is totally acceptable in both cases. One more thing is that one word in English might have different meanings. Words borrowed from other languages have become acceptable and incorporated in dictionaries, such as "tsunami" from Japanese, "pho" from Vietnam or "baguette" from French. That means, aside from language features, cultural characteristics also determine how people utilize a language.

## **Models of World Englishes**

For English learners and teachers, a very common way to classify English is associated with its three groups of users, in which English is used as a native language (ENL - UK and USA), a second language (ESL - India, Singapore) and a foreign language (EFL - Vietnam, Japan). This model is praised for its simplicity, which serves as a means for analyzing incentives to learn English. However, this model is not free of weaknesses. Firstly, the fact that certain varieties are regarded as “native” will cause misconception, leading to an idea that ESL learners should follow “native” varieties. Second, the impact of English on certain countries like Japan, China or Korea varies depending on each area. In particular, people living in big cities where education is more developed will be exposed more to English, thus classifying these countries as EFL might not always be appropriate.

The most prominent model of the spread of English is Braj Kachru’s three circle model. In this model, the dispersal of English language is illustrated as three concentric circles: the inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle. With this model, the shortcomings of the aforementioned ENL, ESL and EFL model are mitigated by a number of advantages. First, English is now acknowledged as having different types so it should be “Englishes”. Next, no variety of English is superior than the others. Lastly, English now possesses multicultural identities. Within this model, the way English spreads in a country depends on the colony where it is located. In places where trading flourishes, pidgins develop to satisfy the need for communication. In contrast, a shortcoming is observed in this model and that is the constant change of the influence of English in the expanding circle which makes it very hard to be precisely estimated. For instance, English in Vietnam is becoming rapidly significant not only in education but also in most fields of work.

Another prominent model is Schneider’s Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes. In this model, the author does not solely based his categorization on geographical and historical approach, he implements sociolinguistics concepts as well. Five phases of English proliferation are detailed: Foundation, Exonormative Stabilization, Nativisation, Endonormative Stabilization and Differentiation.

Other models are also carefully addressed. The first one is Gupta’s, which focuses on categorization based on monolingual and multilingual characteristics related to ancestry, education and contact. Strevens (1980) outlines English spread in the form of a map with a tree-like structure, where American English and British English are placed at the top of the tree. The next one is by McArthur’s circle of World English, which illustrates the spread of English in a

circular diagram. Finally, Modiano’s model of English categorizes English into three circles, each with distinctive characteristics.

Aside from the models, developmental cycles of various varieties are also worth investigating. These are distinguished as Exonormative model which relates to the type of English brought by settlers and Endonormative model which refers type that has existed before in the local area. The developmental cycles are classified differently by three scholars, which will be demonstrated in the summary as follows.

Figure 2: Developmental cycles of new varieties of English

Scholar	Phases				
Kachru	1 non-recognition	2 co-existence of local and imported varieties		3 recognition	
Moag	1 transportation	2 indigenisation	3 expansion in use	4 institutionalisation	5 (decline)
<i>Schneider</i>	1 foundation	2 exonormative stabilisation	3 nativisation	4 endonormative stabilisation	5 differentiation

Additionally, a phenomenon known as linguistic imperialism is also mentioned. It can be understood as the transfer of a dominant language to people. An example is the Americanization and homogenization of world culture. Finally, Kachru also mentions the shifting from “monomodel” to “polymodel” approach due to the variability of English such as with Singaporean or Indian English.

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