

MARIO SARACENI

WORLD ENGLISHES

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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World Englishes: A Critical Analysis

MARIO SARACENI



Bloomsbury Academic
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Inc

B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

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First published 2015

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-6235-6380-6

PB: 978-1-6235-6263-2

ePDF: 978-1-6235-6972-3

ePub: 978-1-6235-6452-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Saraceni, Mario, 1969–

World Englishes : a critical analysis / Mario Saraceni.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-62356-380-6 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-62356-263-2 (pb) –

ISBN 978-1-62356-452-0 (epub) 1. Language and languages–Variation.

2. English language–Globalization. 3. Critical discourse analysis

4. English language–Globalization. I. Title.

P120.V37S273 2015

420–dc23

2014027578

Typeset by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India

Printed and bound in Great Britain

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To Charlotte

Preface

I first began studying 'World Englishes' about 20 years ago, under the guide of John McRae at the University of Nottingham. I will always owe it to him for inspiring enthusiasm and passion that have never left me. With multilingual ease, he showed us that boundaries – between languages, sexes, nationalities, races, rules – only exist in the mind and are there to be trespassed. Englishes broke rules, and this was what made them intrinsically interesting. Before and above anything else.

In the last 20 years, I've learned a great deal about the subversive nature of Englishes. My ideas have evolved, become more complex, less naïvely certain. In a cliché sort of way, it is also fair to say that the world has changed a great deal, too. Globalization has brought about an unprecedented level of diversity – linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious and so on – within communities. To use a mathematical metaphor, while *addition* (one language plus another language plus another language and so on) used to be sufficient to understand plurality in the twentieth century, now *multiplication* is a better representation of the kind of intersecting and multi-layered diversity that characterizes especially urban areas. Languages don't just exist alongside each other, but merge, blend, mesh, coalesce into a symbiosis where traditional labels struggle to find a place.

Meanwhile, the nature of World Englishes has begun to feel less subversive and more comfortably, and therefore *uncomfortably*, settled into what seems to be a paradigm of permanently two-dimensional, harmless, plurality. Fundamentally, a trajectory can be traced from a point in which revolutionary ideas were put forward against the old notion of one monolithic English, and all the ideological baggage that came with it, to a point where those very ideas now need updating, revamping, modernized, perhaps changing, in order to continue to be relevant and equally revolutionary in the twenty-first century. In order to rekindle its anti-conventional, rule-breaking, paradigm-shifting ethos, World Englishes needs to catch up with developments that are taking place all around. There are signs that this might be happening.

In many ways, this book reflects that trajectory. The paradigm through which we understand English(es) has changed over the years, and this book traces the steps with which that paradigm has shifted, and continues to shift, more or less swiftly. It also reflects the ways in which my own ideas have

evolved over the years, through reading and reflection, as well as through teaching, experience, research and practice. Of course, through dialogues that I've had with many scholars whom I've been lucky to meet and who have inspired me, sometimes even with a couple of words. It would be futile for me to attempt to list everybody's names without inexcusable omissions, but I wish to mention at least the following individuals for the ways in which they have contributed to the development of my own understanding of World English: Ahmar Mahboob, Alan Maley, Alastair Pennycook, Andy Kirkpatrick, Henny Zacharias, John Joseph, Kingsley Bolton, Lubna Alsagoff, Rani Rubdy, SueWright, Suresh Canagarajah, Suzanne Hilgendorf. In addition, my students are a constant source of inspiration, challenge and healthy self-doubt and it is very much also thanks to them that my thinking continues to evolve.

Just as importantly, this book would not have been possible without the support of the Centre for European and International Studies Research and the School of Languages and Area Studies at the University of Portsmouth.

Finally, my thanks go to Gurdeep Mattu, for having believed in this project from the beginning.

Mario Saraceni, May 2014

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1

Introduction

1.1 What this book is (and isn't) about

The term *World Englishes* refers to a well-established academic field in sociolinguistics, whose main concern is the study of world (with a small 'w') Englishes, namely the varieties that emerged around the world largely as a result of British from the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. In turn, 'academic field' can be understood in a narrow sense or in a broad one. In the first case, the 'field' is institutionalized, typically via a professional organization, a journal and an annual (or biennial) conference. 'World Englishes' has all three and fits this description. This book is not directly concerned with this meaning. Nor is it concerned with providing an overview of world Englishes. It does, instead, examine 'World Englishes' in a broader sense, where 'field' is intended as the synthesis of scholarly activity that is conventionally named after an identifiable common theme and is driven by a common investigative and/or methodological impetus.

The analysis is not a neutral, detached one. The general premise to this entire book is that the field of World Englishes currently finds itself in a situation of 'crisis', as it faces some new, and old, challenges. A crisis, of course, can be a very productive process, favourable for a paradigm shift to take place and new ways of thinking to be put forward. So the core aim of this book is twofold: on the one hand, it presents what can be defined as 'traditional' concepts within the World Englishes framework; on the other hand, it highlights possible limitations that have been identified by various scholars and possible avenues for new directions and new conceptualizations of world Englishes. It is in this sense that the analysis is a 'critical' one, as the subtitle of this book promises.

1.2 Why another 'World Englishes' book?

The field of World Englishes experienced something very similar to a 'boom' in the first decade of the millennium. Books with *World Englishes* in the title went forth and multiplied at an astonishing pace, and some of them were even re-published in second editions. Textbooks, more theoretical treatises and edited collections chased one another, made their way into libraries and populated reading lists for university courses. Some of the better known publications with very similar titles are Brutt-Griffler (2002), Jenkins (2003, 2009b), Y. Kachru and Nelson (2006), Melchers and Shaw (2003, 2011), Kirkpatrick (2007), Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008), Wolf (2009), Nelson (2011), Schneider (2011), Seargeant (2012b) among the textbooks and monographs, and B. B. Kachru et al. (2006), Bolton and Kachru (2006), Rubdy and Saraceni (2006), Y. Kachru and Smith (2008), Saxena and Omoniyi (2010), Kirkpatrick (2010b), Seargeant and Swan (2012) among the edited volumes. We're now at a point where, clearly, the same pace couldn't be kept. Given the great quantity and quality of publications, one might be tempted to get to the conclusion that, perhaps, we may have now reached a point of 'saturation', where there isn't much left to say that hasn't already been said.

1.2.1 Expanding the scope of World Englishes

One fairly obvious response to anyone feeling this kind of lingering suspicion is given by the fact that there are still areas of the world whose Englishes are under-researched or not researched at all. The so-called Expanding Circle (see Section 3.2.3), namely world regions that were not part of the British empire but where the importance of English as an international (and, to an extent, intranational) language is obviously rising, is attracting a considerable amount of scholarly attention in this field. The main research aim, for scholars investigating English in these areas, is twofold: (i) to establish the extent to which English has acquired local forms and functions that are sufficiently stable as to constitute a distinct variety of the language and, if this is the case, (ii) to describe phonological, lexical, grammatical and discourse patterns that characterize such a variety.

China is probably the part of the world that has attracted the greatest amount of attention in this sense, undoubtedly because of its sheer size, but primarily because of the rapid and profound changes and developments that, in the space of only two decades, have made the country one of the largest economies and a key player in world affairs, fully involved in globalization not only from an economic point of view but also from a cultural one (despite certain restrictions imposed by the government). The presence and the importance of English have

therefore risen dramatically in the country. Statistics regarding the numbers of speakers of English are notoriously difficult to produce, the main obstacle being the difficulty in establishing who 'counts' as a 'speaker of English'. Yet, the suggestion that there are more learners of English in China than speakers of the language in the United States and the United Kingdom combined, which has been circulating virally in (para-)academic contexts for a number of years, reflects the undeniable growth of English in this 'new' territory. Hence, the attraction for scholarly research in World Englishes. Bolton's *Chinese Englishes* (2003a) was a milestone along this particular path.

This is a path that has continued to be trodden. Hadikin's (2014) study on Korean English is, at the time of writing, the latest effort to document a 'new' variety of English in the Expanding Circle. His work makes use of methodological opportunities offered by corpus linguistics, something which, in itself, constitutes a relatively new avenue of investigation. The ability to store large amounts of authentic language, spoken and written, in digital datasets allows researchers to study varieties of English more systematically and with more precision. The International Corpus of English (<http://ice-corpora.net/ice/>) is a project that has been active for a numbers of years and has precisely these aims.

1.2.2 *A slight impasse*

However, despite their importance and value, these developments are relatively marginal, and there is a sense that, on the whole, the field of World Englishes may have reached something like an impasse. Indeed, although each one of the books listed earlier – and many more – makes a very useful contribution to the field, sometimes one feels that things may not have progressed as much as the volume of publications suggests, especially considering the way the main World Englishes tenets are re-iterated over the years.

World Englishes began very much as an anti-establishment, revolutionary philosophy, which opposed old, traditional, anachronistic, stale and unrealistically monolithic ideas about English, and proposed new, fresh, modern ideas that would take into consideration the diverse sociolinguistic realities in which English had relocated. Now, the novelty is somewhat wearing off. One of the latest textbooks, for example, states that the time has come to look at English in a different way:

... in the modern world, the language needs to be viewed not as a single, monolithic entity, but as something that has multiple varieties and forms. The use of this term [*Englishes*] is motivated by an attitude which argues that it is no longer accurate to say that there is just one 'English' in existence around the world – but that instead we need to begin our investigation that

diversity is the norm, and that the multiple forms the language takes are, each and every one, both linguistically and sociolinguistically interesting. (Sergeant, 2012b, pp. 1–2)

The need to view English not as a single entity is undeniable, but this has been *the* core principle which has formed the foundations of the entire World Englishes ethos for decades now. Braj Kachru and Larry Smith explained the meaning of ‘Englishes’ and the significance of the plural *-es* in 1985 in the editorial of the first issue of the newly named *World Englishes* journal:

The term ‘Englishes’ is significant in many ways. ‘Englishes’ symbolizes the functional and formal variation in the language, and its international acculturation, for example, in West Africa, in Southern Africa, in East Africa, in South Asia, in Southeast Asia, in the West Indies, in the Philippines, and in the traditional English-using countries: the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The language now belongs to those who use it as their first language, and to those who use it as an additional language, whether in its standard form or in its localized forms. (B. B. Kachru & Smith, 1985, p. 210)

If, nearly 30 years later, we’re still advocating the need to *begin* to favour plurality against singularity, one could be excused for feeling that, perhaps, there *may* have been a certain amount of ‘congestion’ in the field. Where do we go from here?

There’s a sense that the field might be to an extent lagging behind advancements that have taken place in sociolinguistics since the beginning of the millennium. In particular, the World Englishes framework has been feeling ‘pressure’, as it were, from two separate fronts of scholars: on the one hand, those who have been engaged with research aimed at providing insights into the forms and functions of English as a lingua franca (ELF) (see Section 4.5); on the other hand, those who have concentrated their attention on phenomena related to globalization, such as ‘super-diversity’, language ‘hybridity’, ‘translanguaging’, ‘metrolingualism’ (see Chapter 5). In some ways, it could be said that both ELF and the sociolinguistics of globalization have ‘eroded’ some of the scope of World Englishes.

1.2.3 New challenges

1.2.3.1 English as a lingua franca

ELF research is primarily interested in the ways English is used internationally as a shared language by people in the Expanding Circle. This field of

investigation began to be established towards the turn of the new century and has since gained considerable ground. Research findings are disseminated in a dedicated annual international conference, in monographs and in articles which, more recently, have begun to appear in a journal entirely dedicated to this particular research area: the *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*. As I mentioned earlier, this is also a direction in which World Englishes is expanding its scope, but ELF seems to have 'claimed' this space more resolutely.

There has also been a certain degree of slight academic attrition between some World Englishes and ELF scholars, the main source of it being cases of purported 'misconceptions' and 'misinterpretations' of ELF research and its aims (see, e.g. Seidlhofer, 2006; Jenkins, 2006a, 2007; Cogo, 2008). However, despite this, it is also quite clear that the two areas of research shared a general common de-centralized and pluralistic view of English but were more complementary than in competition with one another (Seidlhofer, 2009b). As Cogo and Dewey (2012, p. 8) state:

WE is concerned with the empirical study of *nativized* (also often referred to as *indigenized* or *institutionalized*) varieties of English in Kachru's *Outer Circle*. By contrast, *ELF* is a term used to describe the use of English in settings where it is spoken as a contact language by speakers of varying linguistic backgrounds for whom there is not usually another shared language available.

1.2.3.2 The sociolinguistics of globalization

As regards the sociolinguistics of globalization, the position of World Englishes is slightly more complicated. It is in this area that the framework is beginning to show its 'age', so to speak. It's no longer simply a matter of investigating English in certain parts of the world rather than in others. More profoundly, the challenge relates to a re-conceptualization of language and communication that new trends in sociolinguistics are bringing to the fore:

Over a period of several decades . . . there has been ongoing revision of fundamental ideas (a) about languages, (b) about language groups and speakers, and (c) about communication. Rather than working with homogeneity, stability and boundedness as the starting assumptions, mobility, mixing, political dynamics and historical embedding are now central concerns in the study of languages, language groups and communication. (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011, p. 3)

This is more of a 'problem' for World Englishes. As the field has always been driven by an innovative impetus to promote plurality over singularity, and has

therefore seen itself as proposing a paradigm shift in the way we understand English, it may now be struggling to come to terms with the fact that another paradigm shift has been under way for some time which destabilizes the very concept of plurality. The realization that what was new for decades may now be getting 'old' can be uncomfortable. Particularly so given that the World Englishes paradigm has been explicitly critiqued for being somewhat 'stuck' in positions that are beginning to show signs of ageing.

The main critique has been that it is 'too tied to the linguistics and politics of the twentieth century and ill-equipped to deal with current modes of globalization' (Pennycook, 2007a, p. 12) and 'doesn't go far enough in pluralizing English or reflecting the dynamic changes in communicative practices' (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 58). The limitation that some scholars have identified lies in the fact that plurality is, in itself, unable to capture the kind of diversity brought about by globalization, and ends up producing 'pluralization of singularity' (Makoni, 2011, p. 683). Positing the existence of different, discrete varieties of English presupposes that these varieties are relatively homogeneous, stable and bounded systems but struggles to take account mobility and mixing as fundamental traits of language as social practice. As Otsuji and Pennycook (2010, p. 251) point out:

... a world Englishes focus reacted against the homogenising tendencies of scholars, textbooks, industries and language policies that sought to belittle the diversity of English, and produced a model based on pluralisation: where there had been one (or a few) Englishes, now there would be many ... Yet clearly, as with emerging critiques of multilingualism, there need to be alternative ways of understanding diversity other than pluralisation (making English into Englishes and monolingualism into multilingualism).

This is an era where global cultural flows, unprecedented mobility and new modes of communication made available by technology are revealing forms of language practice, especially in urban settings and in online social networks, where linguistic amalgams are so pervasive as to force us to reconsider and challenge traditional precepts about language as divided up into separate systems. The kind of diversity that we are now dealing with in the twenty-first century has been called 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007), in order to signify the fact that societies aren't simply characterized by the addition of many cultures (multi-cultural), many ethnicities (multi-ethnic), many languages (multi-lingual) and so on, but by an interplay of different and layered variables that can be configured in very complex ways (see Section 5.4).

As far as the use of language is concerned, this produces situations where the boundaries between different languages have become increasingly fuzzier or even irrelevant. Accordingly, the concept of 'varieties of English' has