World English

A Study of its Development

Janina Brutt-Griffler

World English

A Study of its Development

Janina Brutt-Griffler

Glossary

CO	Colonial Office
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EIL	English as an International Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ENL	English as a National Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
IL	Interlanguage
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TL	Target Language
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language

Preface

I am an Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Everyone of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses,
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me . . .

(Kamala Das, 1997: 10)

Kamala Das captures the paradox of English in the world today. To some, English anywhere outside the mother tongue context is an alien language, perhaps even an imposed language. From this standpoint, English has a fixed identity, both political and linguistic. It represents something peculiarly English, or perhaps Anglo-American, but at all events certainly Western. English has become a world language because – and to the extent that – Anglo-American, Western culture has become hegemonic in the world.

To others English, although not their mother tongue, is nevertheless *their* language, an expression of their own unique identity. It is theirs because they have *made* it so – through their lived experiences in the language that have gained expression in the way they use English. In this view, English has become a world language to the extent that it has been stripped of any simplistic association with Anglo-American and

Western culture. World English has emerged because its users have changed the language as they have spread it. Of the many English writers from Africa and Asia who have addressed this topic, perhaps none has expressed the point so eloquently as Chinua Achebe:

> What I . . . see is a new voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experience in a world-wide language. . . . The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. . . . The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. . . . He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience . . . I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings. (1994: 433–4)

The first conception described has been well articulated by scholars working within, in particular, the framework of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). That conception of language spread makes use of notions such as linguicism, cultural and linguistic hegemony, and language imposition. Agency is invested in various representations of institutionalized power. In contrast, the speech communities acquiring the language figure as passive recipients of language policy (cf. Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2000). It is assumed that to have *political* control is to have *linguistic* control. The center-driven narrative of English language spread writes people residing outside the West out of their central role in the spread of English and their place in making the language we call English.

As Said (1993) has forcefully argued, in this narrative of the making of modernity, non-Western peoples barely appear at all, except insofar as they are oppressed by the irresistible forces of imperialism. After they free themselves, they remain subject to ideological control through *hegemony*, a vague force by which the former colonial masters continue to impose their will on their former colonies. Even in the present age this worldview chooses to emphasize the "colonial in the postcolonial," as Alastair Pennycook (1998) puts it. On the other hand, such a standpoint almost entirely ignores the *postcolonial in the colonial* – that is, the process by which the peoples colonized by European powers shaped the world in which we live, including their own independence, in profoundly significant ways.

A key contention of the present work is that English owes its existence as a world language in large part to the struggle against imperialism, and not to imperialism alone. Rather than dismissing the significance of evidence that shows the active historical role of non-mother tongue English speakers in the development of a world language, the theoretical framework developed here emphasizes their agency and historicizes their will. In this conception, World English is not simply made *through* speakers of other languages but *by* them.

In this book, I investigate the agency of non-mother tongue English speech communities in the two principal processes by which English has become a world language: language spread and language change. This account stresses that these linguistic processes cannot be studied in isolation from one another. Although the idea of combining the study of language spread with language change might appear overly ambitious, the failure to do so hinders the goal of understanding how a host of postcolonial writers from Asia and Africa, like Kamala Das and Chinua Achebe, can claim the linguistic space of English to express their experience. It offers an alternative to the notion that hundreds of millions of people around the world have set out to learn English because they are the passive victims of Western ideological hegemony, emphasizing instead their agency in (re)making world culture. The conception put forward tying language spread to its change holds that World English is a *phase* in the history of the English language – the phase in which most of its speakers do not belong to a dominant national speech community or even a few mother tongue speech communities. Instead, it is the historical phase in which the vast majority of English speakers belong to bilingual speech communities. I suggest that the proliferation of varieties of English are a necessary result of the development of World English, and not a temporary, unfortunate effect that we can expect to disappear in time. The conception developed in this book provides an historical and linguistic justification for first, second and foreign language users of English to claim their rightful place in the creation of the multicultural identity of English.

Chapter 1 opens with a consideration of the nature of the subject matter: what is the meaning of *World English*? It is argued that the English language spread that has produced it requires primarily linguistic analysis rather than sociopolitical. In these terms, English spread appears not as the territorial expansion of the language but as second language acquisition by speech communities, or what will be called in this work *macroacquisition*.

Toward the development of this new understanding, Chapter 2 undertakes a reexamination of some methodological questions in linguistic

analysis. It suggests the necessity of a shift in the unit of analysis employed by linguistics from the individual idealized speaker/listener to the speech community in discussing questions of language spread and change. This paradigmatic refocusing from the linguistic individual to the linguistic social allows for the examination of second language acquisition processes that take place at the speech community level and that have ultimately produced new English varieties. The chapter also justifies the detailed empirical study of language spread in the former British Asian and African colonies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Chapter 3 examines the objectives of empire and the role of ideology versus economics in the formation of British colonial policy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The chapter finds that the formation of British language policy was not necessarily about ideology and ideology was not necessarily about spreading the language. The objectives of the empire involved a complex interplay of ideology and economics. The case of American rule in the Philippines in first third of the twentieth century demonstrates that ideological imperatives might have dictated language policy. In the British empire, however, economics took precedence. An examination of three key architects of British language policy reveals that attitudes toward language in colonial settings involved hitherto largely overlooked complexities.

The agency of speech communities previously viewed as passive recipients of language policy forms the focus of Chapter 4. It undertakes a detailed examination of historical documents spanning more than a century from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries relating to British colonial language policy to complicate the notion of English language imposition in Great Britain's African and Asian colonies. The empirical data suggest that British language policy is perhaps best characterized as *reactive* in its quest to limit access to English. The chapter connects access to English with the creation and preservation of social class stratification. Limiting access to English provided a means of social control over the working classes. Colonial authorities promulgated indigenous language education for the majority of the population and promoted local lingua francas. In the case of Southern Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe), the British engineered a new national language where none previously existed.

Chapter 5 details the extent to which English education was reserved for the colonial elite and kept safely out of the reach of the vast majority of the population of British colonies throughout the history of its colonial empire. Descriptive statistics show a heavy emphasis on providing indigenous language rather than English-based education. The chapter

also examines empire-wide institutional formulations of language policy to counteract the notion that mother language industrial education was a later development, brought about specifically by the intervention of an American educational commission in the 1920s (Phillipson, 1992; Berman, 1982; Clatworthy, 1971; King, 1971). The chapter includes an account of post-World War I imperial politics, which saw the British and the French clash within the administrative bodies of the League of Nations, the French calling for the teaching and use in the colonies of European languages and the British advocating indigenous.

If the emergence of World English is not a function of the linguistic imperialism of British colonialism, why has English rather than languages such as Chinese, French, Turkish, Spanish, Arabic or Portuguese become the world language? Chapter 6 offers an historical explanation. It demonstrates how the advent of non-settler colonies together with British dominance of the world market combined to inaugurate World English via the macroacquisition of the language in Africa and Asia. This process is distinguished from the mode of spread of English within the British Isles via speaker migration, which resulted not in bilingual speech communities but the adoption of English as a mother tongue. Four differentiating features of a world language are posited: econocultural functions, transcendence of the role of an elite lingua franca, stabilized bilingualism, and language change.

Chapter 7 develops the key new construct of macroacquisition, second language acquisition by speech communities, that links language change to its spread. That process involves the genesis of bilingual speech communities. Two forms of the development of bilingual speech communities are distinguished. In *Type A* macroacquisition, the process coincides with the development of *an entirely new speech community*. Type A macroacquisition takes place in a multilingual setting in which the acquired language serves as a unifying linguistic resource, the speakers otherwise belonging to separate mother tongue speech communities. *Type B* macroacquisition involves the transformation of a monolingual mother tongue speech community (or a section thereof) into a bilingual speech community. It takes place, in general, in a formerly predominantly monolingual setting – one in which one mother tongue dominates.

Chapter 8 uses of the two types of bilingual speech community to explain the degree of stabilization of language change as new varieties. Bilingual speech communities of Type B have available a versatile and flexible mechanism for the communication of culture bound knowledge or meaning in the form of code-switching. In the case of Type A, on the other hand, without a common medium to express culture bound knowledge,

language change is far more likely to stabilize. This is particularly true when the new variety becomes tied to expressing a national identity that has no other linguistic expression to fall back on – as might be the case in certain postcolonial settings. To illustrate macroacquisition, the book discusses the development of new varieties of English, with a section devoted to the South African case.

As Chapter 8 discusses the tendencies toward the proliferation of varieties of English within World English, Chapter 9 takes up the question of why the language has maintained its essential unity. The explanation focuses on the emergence of a world language speech community. The resultant centripetal force spawns a process of world language convergence, a center of gravity around which international varieties revolve.

The final chapter suggests that the field of English applied linguistics is inherently tied to the history of the language. The construction of applied linguistics is in large part linked with the spread of the language, including the prominent role of non-mother tongue English-speaking teachers. Chapter 10 suggests the need to *reclaim* the role and contributions of non-mother tongue teachers of English within the international history of English. It argues that an imperialist ideology has not been at work in the spread of the language but in the attempt to ground English applied linguistics in "Center"-driven conceptions of methodology.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to all of my colleagues in the English Department at the University of Alabama. Salli Davis and Catherine Davies deserve a special thank you for their ongoing support and arranging for an additional research assistant while I was completing the manuscript. Sharon O'Dair, Celia Daileader, Gary Taylor, Peter Logan, and Robert Young have all contributed to this book in ways of which they are probably not even aware. My linguistics program colleagues Catherine Davies and Lucy Pickering deserve thanks for being wonderfully supportive colleagues and friends.

I want to express my appreciation to everyone at Ohio State University who contributed to this work, most importantly my good friend and collaborator Keiko Samimy. Without her guidance and faith in this project, it never would have materialized. Special thanks go to Diane Belcher as well, who has always been a valued colleague for her support, encouragement, and constructive input.

Elizabeth Bernhardt provided the initial impetus for me to explore this topic and merits gratitude for many other contributions to its progress as well. I not only owe thanks to Terry Wiley for his ongoing interest in my work but also for putting me in touch with Multilingual Matters. Others to whom I want to express my gratitude for a multitude of reasons include: Rakesh Bhatt, Suresh Canagarajah, Russel Durst, Charles Hancock, Alan Hirvela, Susan Jenkins, Braj Kachru, Yamuna Kachru, Alamin Mazrui, Lupenga Mphande,Terrence Odlin, Alastair Pennycook, Barbara Seidlhofer, Carmen Silva-Corvalan, Manka Varghese and Henry Widdowson. Keith Neltner designed the cover illustration and Reata Strickland the appendices; I thank them for their many hours of creative work. Special appreciation is due to my research assistants at the University of Alabama, Kelli Loggins and Jasmine Hodges. I also want to thank Mike Grover and the staff at Multilingual Matters for all of their assistance, efficiency and friendliness. They greatly eased the process of completing the last stages of the manuscript.

One debt I can never hope to adequately acknowledge is also the first I incurred: to my family. The final thank you is reserved for Keith Griffler, to whom this book is dedicated.

Contents

Images of World English: Writing English as an International Language

Defining World English

It might appear that nothing should be easier than to define the subject matter of a book about English. Given that the book is written in the medium of its topic, English, the author might reasonably operate on the tacit assumption that this is one subject, at the least, about which she and her reader have a shared knowledge. It is, after all, the language of their communication.[1] Thus, while this is certainly not the first book to investigate the (international) history of English, it might be the first to begin by questioning the subject of the investigation.

In what does the shared knowledge of English consist? Just what is it that we know about this language? Perhaps, the answer to those questions is suggested by its name: English, a language born in England, the language of England. That notion locates the language in a particular nation, or more accurately, a particular people. It is their language, to spread, to change, to share or withhold from the world. By that view, World English is the means and results of the spread of English from its historical (perhaps even natural) boundaries to its current position as the preeminent global means of communication.

Every language has its history, real or imagined – or, perhaps, real *and* imagined. English was *not* precisely "born" in England. It was transported there from another place, or more exactly, it traveled there together with the Anglo-Saxon migrants to the island. That is why we call it a Germanic language. And there is another consideration. Those Anglo-Saxons who first made the trip across the English Channel would be utterly at a loss to understand the English of the fourteenth century, that of Chaucer's day. For in the intervening centuries, the language was irrevocably altered by the Norman Conquest in 1066, which Latinized the Germanic language of the Angles and Saxons.[2]

Perhaps recognition of those two caveats solidifies the common notion of English. For certainly the final result is an English language suitably distinct from the Germanic languages that gave rise to it. The language was, after all, all the more English for its specifically English history and thereby all the more at home in the British Isles, or more exactly, the non-Celtic portion of them. Then again, does not that history immediately call to mind the other inhabitants of those islands, who spoke various Celtic languages amongst others? Did their languages not inhibit the islands first, and was English not an interloper in their midst, just as were, initially, the Angles and Saxons who migrated there (or invaded)?

What should be made of the fact that the process by which the English language became a distinctively English product involved the subjection of the English people at the hands of a French-speaking people, the admixture of the two languages, a change so dramatic that the language had become incomprehensible to its forbears? In a crowning irony to the attempt to associate the language with a land, a nation, and a people, English became associated with all three precisely because its history was so mobile, its context so transnational, and the people who made it so diverse: Germanic, Celtic, French and Nordic.

Of course, all of that might be said to belong to the prehistory of the language, just as every social phenomenon must have roots in some more remote past. Perhaps the investigator need not trace the language back quite that far. The discussion might be confined to a more recent period, what is often called "the modern world." If so, how is it to be decided what constitutes the proper frame of reference for English between our own day and the aftermath of the Norman invasion some nine centuries ago? Should we split the difference – say, some 450 years or so, or approximately the time of the English Renaissance? Already by that time, however, English was not confined to its earlier "natural" (or is it "historical"?) boundaries: within the British Isles it was, or was on the verge of, spreading to Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. It was, moreover, making transAtlantic voyages to the "New World," opening up vast new territories for itself. And it was soon thereafter to begin its world historic *tour de monde* – Asia, Australasia, and Africa. Nevertheless, it continued to belong to the English, who, after all, had the longer claim on it.

At the least, if a consideration is carefully delimited to a brief historical window, some few centuries in the middle of the past millennium, it seems justifiable to claim English as the language of England, and so return to the comfortable notion, the imagined history, with which textbooks on the history of English begin. Or is it? What makes those few centuries so special in the history of English? What sets them apart from

the other centuries of English's development? Why should those centuries and those peoples be privileged over others? And just who were those peoples? Were they really Anglo-Saxons? Or were they not also Celts, Norse French, and others? So just what, then, are we so sure about that we do not question what we mean by English?

There is another problem with this familiar, commonsense, interpretation of the history of English. It may suggest a conception of stages in the history of English, a *prehistory* (linguistic origins), a *developmental* stage, and a *finished product* – presumably an unalterable linguistic entity that we stamp with the name *English*. Implicit in this notion is a teleological and normative view of language development in which the language as process gives rise to language as final product, its whole development leading to that point. Prior to some arbitrary point in time (perhaps the English Renaissance), the language was incomplete. Now it is complete. It is *English*.

The same, however, holds true for any language at any stage in its development: insofar as it exists, is spoken, it is a language and not a stage in the development of some future language. To measure it by a fixed standard ("modern English") applies a subjective standpoint, just as surely as when we divide history into the pre-Christian (or pre-Muslim, or pre-Hindu, or pre-Buddhist) epoch as opposed to "ours." Those who spoke the language of Beowulf did not view themselves as speaking "old English." They did not view their language as a developmental stage of some future language, any more than we do so today. And yet the one is no more justified than the other.

That idea suffers from an obviously presentist flaw: that what has gone before is history, but what is now is removed from time, space, and development. This conception privileges the language as we know it – or, rather, as we imagine it.

The usual approach to the history of English consists precisely in privileging this brief portion of the history of English since the English Renaissance and calling it the "true" history, the essential history, the defining history. For the development of any language is a continuous process, and boundaries that we mark in that process are only more or less arbitrary and *convenient* (in both senses of the word) breaks in the continuous flow of the language as process. Taking a non-teleological approach, it is just as possible to divide the history of English as follows (cf. McArthur, 1998):

(1) Germanic roots; development in Northern Europe by Germanic peoples (prior to *c.*500 AD);

(2) Period of development in the British Isles by Jutes, Angles, Saxons, Celts, and others, prior to the Norman Conquest (*c*.500–1150);

(3) Period of development subsequent to the Norman invasion under the influence of the English, French, Celts (to whom the language continuously has spread), Danes, etc. (*c*.1150–1450);

(4) Period of development that accompanied the consolidation of a "people" and a nation out of the heterogeneous elements of the earlier phase, often called the "Early Modern" period of English (McArthur, 1998: 87) (*c*.1450–1700);

(5) The epoch constructed as "Modern English," which featured the continued change of the language within the British Isles, where it continued to spread, joined by other outposts of English speaking communities, in particular in North America and Australia;

(6) Period of development in the world, as English continuously spread around the globe, jointly developed by the English, but also by Asians, Africans, and others.[3]

The identification of the first five periods of the history of English more or less corresponds to the common view, one reproduced in most texts on the history of English. Where this approach differs, following scholars like Graddol *et al.* (1996) and particularly McArthur (1998), is in not regarding Phase 5 as a finished product, but one that, like its predecessors, gives place in turn to a new "stage" in the history of English, that is, the continued development of the language. Following this demarcation of the history of English, this study takes the last period as encompassing the subject matter of the field of World English. The topic of this work is the phase of the development of English that has taken place on the world scale.

This account regards the English language that has spread globally not as a finished product but a continually developing language, conceiving its international spread as part of that further development. Defining World English as a *phase* of the process of development of English necessarily historicizes the question. That is, it grounds the subject matter in the definite sociohistorical conditions or contexts in which English has evolved.[4]

Writing World English

The first five periods of the history of English have long been subjects of scholarly inquiry. Yet, while the English language has been spreading beyond the confines of the British Isles for some three centuries, World

English as a field of study has only recently emerged. Closely identified with the globalization of English Language Teaching (ELT), and arising out of its scholarly tradition, the understanding of World English has pivoted not so much on theoretical linguistic questions but on practical and even ethical issues of English spread.

Conceptions of World English

Smith (1976) provided an early account of World English under the term *English as an International Language* (EIL).[5] Smith operationalized the term *international language* as a language other than one's mother tongue – that is, a *second language* – "which is used by people of different nations to communicate with one another" (p. 38). As such, he distinguished it from the more traditional *auxiliary language*, one used for internal communication in a multilingual society. In these functional terms, English in the Philippines, for example, constitutes an *auxiliary* language, whereas English in Brazil represents an *international* language.

In conceiving this definition by domain of use, Smith (1987) was concerned with raising practical questions, those pertaining to English usage among speaker from mother tongue and non-mother tongue contexts. Smith found through his (and others') long practice a sense of "ownership" of English on the part of its mother tongue speakers. They seemed to feel instinctively that since the language was theirs it fell to them to dictate the terms of use of English when its speakers met in the international realm, a modus operandi that Smith found to hinder international and intercultural communication.

Smith (1987) delineated several essential characteristics of an international language:

(1) It implies no essential relationship between speaking the language and assimilating an associated culture. There is no necessity for second language speakers to internalize the cultural norms of behavior of the mother tongue speakers of a language to use it effectively.
(2) An international language becomes denationalized. It is not the property of its mother tongue speakers.
(3) Since English as an International Language plays a purely functional role, the goal of teaching it is to facilitate communication of learners' ideas and culture in an English medium.

The core of Smith's (1987) argument is that a non-mother tongue user does not need to "become more like Americans, the British, the Australians,