

English in the World

Teaching and learning the language
and literatures

Randolph Quirk and H. G. Widdowson

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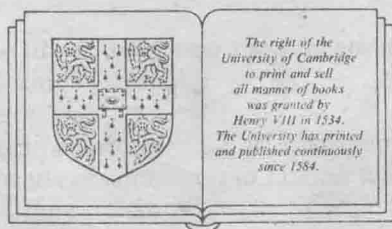
Teaching and learning the language
and literatures

Papers of an International Conference
entitled 'Progress in English Studies'
held in London, 17–21 September 1984
to celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of
The British Council
and its contribution
to the field of English Studies
over fifty years

Edited by

Randolph Quirk and H. G. Widdowson

Associate Editor: Yolande Cantù



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Foreword

The year 1934, when the British Council was founded, did not of course mark the beginning of the spread of our language and culture to other parts of the world. One might perhaps see the Pilgrim Fathers as the first British Council mission, or, as was suggested by an overseas delegate, Robinson Crusoe as the first English Language Officer. But 1934 did mark the start of a determined effort to promote an enduring understanding and appreciation of Britain in other countries through cultural, educational and technical cooperation. Our operational budget has increased – from £5,000 to over £180 million today – but our task remains essentially the same, based on the principles of reciprocity and mutual respect.

Over the same period the Council's involvement in English Studies has likewise grown under the encouragement and guidance of eminent scholars – from such renowned figures as Ifor Evans, Daniel Jones and J. R. Firth in earlier days, to such equally notable figures of today as Randolph Quirk, Henry Widdowson, and the many members of our English Teaching Advisory Committee.

To mark the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Council's active involvement in progress in English Studies, we invited forty-two leading figures from thirty-eight overseas countries, twenty from the UK and ten from our own ranks to spend a week together discussing major current issues in this field. It was felt that the event in itself was a fitting tribute to our achievements (although many delegates were kind enough to add warm verbal tribute as well). But it was also hoped that such a galaxy of experts might provide helpful insights into current problems and pointers to future developments.

There was always a risk of our attempting too broad a canvas, that such wide-ranging topics as information and educational technology, teacher training, methodology (including ESP), literature teaching and linguistic standards would split the participants into a number of small non-overlapping camps. And Professor Sinclair has drawn attention to some of the obvious omissions, with Dr Davies deploring the absence of a session devoted to teaching and evaluation. But the obvious genuine enthusiasm emanating from the many comments I have received from participants, orally and in writing, make it clear that the Conference was in fact overwhelmingly successful. This was due to a number of factors – the manageable size of the group, the uniquely high level of expertise for so small a gathering, and the academically admirable and convenient setting of the University of London Senate House.

Foreword

Some of the many important issues to emerge from the Conference were:

- 1 The need to bring a sense of realism to information technology, and to let a new and richer approach to classroom methodology lead developments in computer-assisted language learning.
- 2 The renewed emphasis on the *education* of teachers, as distinct from training, with *two* main papers referring to the INSET programme.
- 3 A strengthening of the move towards learner-centred teaching – how to get more out of the learner rather than how the teacher transfers ‘information’ to the learner.
- 4 The insistence on the plural form ‘English literatures’ – referring not only to what is produced in countries where English is traditionally the native language, but also where it has the status of second language.
- 5 The obvious will to remarry those divorcees, language teaching and literature teaching, who parted company on such bad terms in the sixties.
- 6 The fascinating ferment in the development of ‘Englishes’ world-wide (and the discussion of what Clifford Prator once called the British ‘heresy’), as countries which have adopted English look less and less to countries in which English is spoken as the native language for the setting of linguistic norms, and local variations like Indian English and Nigerian English are increasingly seen as underpinning national independence. And yet, paradoxically, the notion of ‘standards’ is vigorously if tacitly asserted: witness, as Professor Quirk points out, the common denominator of the BBC World Service of London; All India Radio of Delhi; the *Straits Times* of Singapore; and the *Japan Times* of Tokyo.

Let me stress that this volume should in no sense be seen as a valedictory Festschrift. The British Council has no intention of reducing its involvement in the promotion of English Studies. It will continue to do all it can to help those who wish to acquire a knowledge of the English language for a variety of purposes – to gain access to a world of new technology or the international market place; to help those who wish to develop English as the language, or one of the languages, through which their own culture and values can find expression, and through which we in our turn can get to know and understand them better; and to help those who wish to learn English in order to get to know *us*, our language, culture and literature.

In conclusion, I wish to say how greatly indebted I am to all those who worked so hard to make the Conference a success: the main speakers, those who chaired the sessions, the commentators, rapporteurs and reporters; the Vice-Chancellor of the University of London for allowing us to use his splendid premises; all the members of our English Teaching Advisory Committee, particularly its Chairman Henry Widdowson,

Professor Sinclair and Peter Strevens; the Bell Educational Trust for their generous contribution to the cost of the Conference; and to those members of my own staff responsible for its organization, the preparation of the papers and mounting the associated exhibition.

Sir John Burgh
Director-General
The British Council
October 1984

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Abbreviations

AUPELF	Association des Universités Partiellement ou Entièrement de Langue Française
CAI	Computer-Assisted Instruction
CALL	Computer-Assisted Language Learning
CDCC	Council for Cultural Co-operation (part of the Council of Europe)
CIEFL	Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (Hyderabad)
CILT	Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research
DTEO	Direct Teaching of English Operation (British Council)
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELC	English Language Centre
ELT	English Language Teaching (to speakers of other languages)
ENL	English as a Native Language
EOP	English for Occupational Purposes
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
EST	English for Science and Technology
ETIC	English Teaching Information Centre (British Council)
FLT	Foreign Language Teaching
GA	General American
GE	General English
INSET	In-service Teacher Education and Training
IT	Information Technology
L1	First Language
L2	Foreign or Second Language
LDC	Lesser Developed Country
LSP	Language for Specific Purposes
R&D	Research and Development
RE	Research English
RELC	Regional English Language Centre (Singapore)
RP	Received Pronunciation
TESOL	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (the organization)

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THEME I THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

a) The English language in a global context

Randolph Quirk

In this 'global context', I want to address the controversial issue of *standards*, so let me begin by recalling one of the best-known statements of a standard for English. In *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589, reputedly by George Puttenham who died in the following year), the creative writer is advised that one form of English is more highly regarded than all others. In consequence, one should follow 'the usuall speach of the Court, and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx. myles, and not much above'. No variety of English is 'so courtly nor so current'.

That view dates from the time when Shakespeare was a young man and when English was not in global use but only 'of small reach, it stretcheth no further than this lland of ours, naie not there over all' (Richard Mulcaster in 1582). The language was in those years known almost exclusively to native speakers and there were perhaps as few as seven million of them.

The contrast with the position of English four hundred years later is extraordinary: now in daily use not by *seven* million people but by seven *hundred* million – and only half of them native speakers of the language. No longer 'of small reach' but a language – *the* language – on which the sun does not set, whose users never sleep. For between 1600 and 1900, speakers of English pushed themselves into every part of the globe (more recently, to lunatic deserts far beyond the globe), so that at this present time, English is more widely spread, and is the chief language of more countries than any other language is or ever has been.

But that is only part of the contrast between the 1580s and the 1980s – and not the most striking nor, in the present connection, the most relevant. In the 1580s almost no one who was not actually brought up speaking English ever bothered to learn it. Now English is in daily use among three or four hundred million people who were not brought up speaking it as their native language. Most of them live in countries requiring English for what we may broadly call 'external' purposes: contact with people in other countries, either through the spoken or the written word, for such purposes as trade and scientific advance. They are people for whom English remains a foreign language (though usually the chief foreign language) whether they live in a country with a highly developed

Theme 1 *The English Language in a Global Context*

tradition of English teaching, such as the Netherlands or Yugoslavia, or in a country where English teaching is less well developed such as Spain or Senegal. We refer to these countries as *EFL* countries, and it should be noted that their use of English is in no way confined to contacts with English-speaking countries: a Korean steel manufacturer will use English in negotiating with a Brazilian firm in Rio.

But there are many millions of people who live in countries where English is equally not a native language but where English is in widespread use for what we may broadly call 'internal' purposes as well: in administration, in broadcasting, in education. Such countries range in size from India, struggling with economic development of a huge and various population in a huge and various territory, to Singapore, tiny by contrast, and economically thriving. By reason of the sharply different and much wider role of English in these countries, where the language is usually designated in the constitution as one of the 'national' languages, along with indigenous ones, it is inappropriate to regard English as merely a foreign language. The practice has grown up of referring to English in these circumstances as a 'second' language and to the countries concerned as *ESL* countries. That great Indian university institution in Hyderabad, which specializes in training expert language teachers, interestingly proclaims this distinction in its official title: CIEFL – the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages. Not, we notice, English and *other* foreign languages. English is not a 'foreign' language in India, though the proportion of the population making competent use of it is in fact far smaller than that in several advanced *EFL* countries such as the Netherlands.

Finally, in contrast with these *EFL* and *ESL* countries, we can complete a terminological triad by marking off those countries such as the UK, the US, Australia, and South Africa, where English is a native language: the *ENL* countries. And, it may be remarked, English is a global language in each of these three categories: there are *ENL*, *ESL*, and *EFL* countries all round the world.

But the coming into existence of this threefold manifestation of English by no means completes the list of essential distinctions between the 1580s and the 1980s. When there was only *ENL* and that for only seven million people, it was possible – as we have seen – to recommend a single model or standard. And in specifying it as he did, the author of *The Arte of English Poesie* went on to say that in this 'we are already ruled by th'English Dictionaries and other bookes written by learned men'. Few today would suggest that there was a single standard of English in the world. There are few enough (not least among professional linguists) that would claim the existence of a single standard within any one of the *ENL* countries: plenty that would even deny both the possibility and the desirability of such a thing. Recent emphasis has been on multiple and variable standards (insofar as the use of the word 'standard' is ventured): different

standards for different occasions for different people – and each as ‘correct’ as any other.

Small wonder that there should have been in recent years fresh talk of the diaspora of English into several mutually incomprehensible languages. The fate of Latin after the fall of the Roman Empire presents us with such distinct languages today as French, Spanish, Romanian, and Italian. With the growth of national separatism in the English-speaking countries, linguistically endorsed not least by the active encouragement of the anti-standard ethos I have just mentioned, many foresee a similar fissiparous future for English. A year or so ago, much prominence was given to the belief expressed by R. W. Burchfield that in a century from now the languages of Britain and America would be as different as French is from Italian.

As it happens, I do not share this view. We live in a very different world from that in which the Romance languages went their separate ways. We have easy, rapid, and ubiquitous communication, electronic and otherwise. We have increasing dependence on a common technology whose development is largely in the hands of multi-national corporations. Moreover, we have a strong world-wide will to preserve intercomprehensibility in English.

It so happens that when Burchfield made his prediction I chanced to be reading a book by that great Oxford linguist Henry Sweet, who had made precisely the same prediction just a hundred years ago: ‘in another century . . . England, America, and Australia will be speaking mutually unintelligible languages’. Sweet’s forecast (which, given the circumstances and received knowledge of his time, had a greater plausibility than Burchfield’s) proved dramatically wrong because he overestimated the rate of sound change.

We can err, likewise, if we unduly emphasize a difference between the present and the 1580s in respect of variation within English. Variety and variability were well acknowledged in Shakespeare’s time (and they are certainly well attested in Shakespeare’s own writing). In part, the problem has been the failure to make explicit which aspects of English were to be regarded as susceptible of standardization. Gradually, it came to be felt that individual lexical items could be dubbed ‘standard’ as opposed to, say, dialectal (though Caxton’s hesitation between *egges* and *eyren* was to be paralleled for many a generation of printers); that there was a standard grammar (though *writ* and *wrote* could both for long be of it); that above all there was a standard spelling (though this admitted a wide range of variation until fairly recently and even now embraces such things as both *judgment* and *judgement*).

Always least liable to be categorized as standard or non-standard was pronunciation: reasonably enough, since standardization was predominantly occasioned by the need to provide long uniform print-runs of

books and papers on which pronunciation had no bearing. But with the advance of mass broadcasting in the 1920s, managers of the new medium were faced with the oral analogue of the issue that had confronted Caxton and others in the late sixteenth century. And an analogous decision was taken: there would be generalized use of a single accent, assumed to be admired by or at any rate acceptable to the greatest number of the most critical section of the public. In the US an educated Midland was selected which came to be referred to as 'network English': in the UK the minority voice of the public schools ('RP') was selected and this came to be referred to quite often as 'BBC English'. In fact, in each case, it was something more: by having been thus selected for nationwide broadcasting, each was implicitly regarded in its respective domain (American or British) as the *standard* pronunciation.

But broadcasting did not merely thus dramatically extend the scope of potential standardization: it also made overt that there was indeed more than one single standard of English. Of course, it had always been known that Americans spoke differently from the British (just as Yorkshiremen spoke differently from Cornishmen); but this knowledge did not of itself raise the question as to which – if any of these – was standard. Moreover, since in neither the US nor the UK was the selected accent that of anything like the majority of speakers (though more nearly so in the case of network American English), there was a further implication: the standard language is inevitably the prerogative of a rather special minority. This last aspect has of course had its own reverberations: in the US, a competitor for the rank of standard in accents has been New England ('Harvard'), and this has been far more obviously a minority mode of speech than 'network'. We shall come to other reverberations below.

Meanwhile, the early twentieth century also saw the rise of another development: the professional teaching of English world-wide to those for whom it was not a native language. I adopt this cumbersome periphrasis so as to embrace the peoples of both the EFL and the ESL countries as we now (but did not then) distinguish them. At first this was almost entirely (as it remains predominantly) a British activity. The accent that John Reith adopted as the voice of the BBC was the one already identified by Daniel Jones as the 'Received Pronunciation' appropriate to teach to non-native learners. Textbooks rapidly disseminated this standard, together with the congruently hieratic lexicon and grammar, on a world-wide basis. Unchallenged for more than a generation, certainly till long after the recognition at home in the ENL countries that at least one other standard existed (and in a far more populous and wealthy country), America's dramatically extended involvement after 1945 both in West Europe and the Orient rapidly confronted foreign learners with what seemed like a sharply polar choice. The fact that the choice is neither sharp nor polar (especially in the hieratic lexicon and grammar), that the

differences between American English and British English are smaller than the differences within either, is understandably obscured for the non-native learner by the national necessity for the government agencies concerned to package the language teaching with clearly distinguished cultural, institutional, regional, and political support-components, British or American as the case may be. Our own *Grammar of Contemporary English* and associated books are still in a minority in demonstrating that a single educated and universally acceptable variety of English can be described as a unity, yet catering for the features which lie to a greater or lesser degree outside this common core.

But the reluctance to speak of, still less command, a single standard of English is not merely sensitivity to the proclaimed institutionalization of at least two major standards, British and American. As I indicated earlier, the very notion of standard has itself become suspect: most signally within the educational establishment of the ENL countries. The printed announcement for a book published this summer on *The Art and Craft of Lexicography* (the publisher is Scribner, the author Sidney Landau) states that among the topics considered are 'Such vexing questions as what constitutes "standard" English', and the writer's acknowledgement that this question is indeed vexing is betrayed by putting sceptical quotation marks around the word *standard*.

There are in fact good historical, even good linguistic reasons for reaction against the whole received notion of standards in language. In the hands of narrow, unimaginative, unsympathetic, authoritarian teachers, the wielding of a heavy standard has been known to bludgeon a natural (and surely desirable) self-respect and local pride into a snobbish self-contempt. Such insistence on standard English is suspected of stifling creativity in whatever particular variety of language is most natural to a particular youngster. Moreover, the academic linguist – with the whole spectrum of a society's language activity in his field of vision – has been at pains to explain that there isn't a single all-purpose standard for language any more than there is for dress. Linguists have of course been known to go further and to cock a snook at fashionably unfashionable élitism by implying (or even stating) that any variety of language is as 'good', as 'correct' as any other variety. And with the linguist's preoccupation in the last couple of generations not so much with written as with spoken language (where standardization is particularly recent and particularly controversial), it is the rich variety – even personal-variability – of speech that has seemed naturally enough the aspect of language that is in need of contemporary emphasis.

Nonetheless, understandable as all this is, I hold that the stated or implied orthodoxy of regarding the term 'standard' as fit only for quotation marks is a *trahison des clercs*. It seems likely, indeed, that the existence of standards (in moral and sexual behaviour, in dress, in taste

generally) is an endemic feature of our mortal condition and that people feel alienated and disoriented if a standard seems to be missing in any of these areas. Certainly, ordinary folk with their ordinary common sense have gone on knowing that there are standards in language and they have gone on crying out to be taught them. And just as certainly, the *clerks* themselves are careful to couch even their most sceptical remarks about standard language in precisely the standard language about which they are being sceptical. Disdain of élitism is a comfortable exercise for those who are themselves securely among the élite.

I believe that the fashion of undermining belief in standard English has wrought educational damage in the ENL countries, though I am ready to concede that there may well have been compensating educational gains in the wider tolerance for an enjoyment of the extraordinary variety of English around us in any of these countries. But then just such an airy contempt for standards started to be exported to EFL and ESL countries, and for this I can find no such mitigating compensation. The relatively narrow range of purposes for which the non-native needs to use English (even in ESL countries) is arguably well catered for by a single monochrome standard form that looks as good on paper as it sounds in speech. There are only the most dubious advantages in exposing the learner to a great variety of usage, no part of which he will have time to master properly, little of which he will be called upon to exercise, all of which is embedded in a controversial sociolinguistic matrix he cannot be expected to understand.

The English language works pretty well in its global context today: certainly the globe has at present no plausible substitute. But let me underline my main point by giving four examples of English working best in the global context. They are the BBC World Service of London; All India Radio of Delhi; the *Straits Times* of Singapore; and the *Japan Times* of Tokyo. They represent oral and printed media, and they represent ENL, ESL, and EFL countries. And there are several outstanding features in common to these and to the scores of analogous examples that might have been selected. They all use a form of English that is both understood and respected in every corner of the globe where any knowledge of any variety of English exists. They adhere to forms of English familiarly produced by only a minority of English speakers in any of the four countries concerned. And – mere accent alone apart – they observe as uniform a standard as that manifest in any language on earth.

Commentator 1

Graeme Kennedy

There is a delicious irony in Professor Quirk's clear, forthright and stimulating paper. In 1968 Clifford Prator published a paper in which he lambasted what he called 'The British heresy in TESL', arguing that the acceptance and encouragement of local varieties of English by the British was detrimental to global communication. The heresy he criticized has since, of course, become widely orthodox and is probably now the conventional wisdom, especially among those who study the nature and use of language. Professor Quirk's paper reflects, in many respects, the position Prator advocated, namely, the desirability of a global standard. However, since the orthodoxy has changed, it might be argued that Professor Quirk articulates a new British heresy. You simply cannot win.

The issue of standards in countries where English is a native language is fundamentally an attitudinal and especially an aesthetic one. The standard or standards which emerge are those of the groups which have power and prestige in the economy, entertainment, the media, the arts and so on. In a global context, however, the question of intelligibility comes in. It is very easy to use English internationally and not be understood. In fact, one sometimes wonders how the putative number of speakers of English throughout the world is arrived at, particularly when one goes beyond the bounds of familiarity with an extremely limited range of functions. As a speaker of ENL I have had enough experience of communicative difficulties in other countries to find myself in considerable sympathy with Professor Quirk's argument for the recognition of a global standard.

What I am less sure of, however, is whether that is within the bounds of the possible. In particular, I would take issue with him over the statement that there is 'a relatively narrow range of purposes for which the non-native needs to use English (even in ESL countries)'. Whenever there has been careful research on the use of English in an ESL context, an organic complexity has been revealed in functional range, use and purpose. Singapore is one example. Surely it is what the users of the language do, not what a small élite would like them to do which counts in the end.

Since English is so much the world's language, international popular culture may be a more powerful determinant on norms than so-called standards, whether or not they have official or educational sanctions. I suspect that in the final analysis, the vast majority of users of English tend to adopt local varieties, regardless of the admonitions of English teachers. As Professor Quirk has suggested, even in the case of ENL countries, such