The Expanding Circle of Non-Native Englishes: A Challenge for Business Communication

Shubhada K. Deshpande

Abstract

The business world has broadened its horizons across the globe. The spread of English, patterns of acquisition and functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages have become an essential aspect of business communication today. English, spoken in 60 countries, has become a global medium with local identities and messages. The spread makes it imperative to know about the three concentric circles of world Englishes.

With the global spread, the language's cultural ownership had shifted from England to other countries. Keeping pace with the rapid language change is a big challenge with the new slang entering, thus enriching English. Further, the challenges include exposing students to variations, preparing them to encounter forms different from the Received Pronunciation (RP), and making them realize that variation need not be penalized. Teachers need to develop an adequate sensibility, keeping intelligibility of the language as the main criterion of acceptability. However, the context and relationship between the speakers play a primary role here.

Keywords: Non-native Englishes, multiplied ownerships, blend names, intelligibility of conversation

The Concept of Global Communication Competence

Technological innovations have quickened and simplified conveying messages across national borders. The concepts of national economies and markets transcend national boundaries and reshape themselves depending upon international/global economies.

Adler's (2002) concept of a global company expects an organization to widen its horizons by understanding the needs of clients across the globe and satisfying these through internationally accepted and appropriate products and services. The work environment at the global level represents a 'fragmented workforce' lending itself to cultural diversity and new dimensions of employment relationships. A unique and innovative set of human resource development tools and managerial skills must be developed globally to handle such a diversified workforce.

Thus, as Belay (1993, cited in Chen, 2005) puts it, global communication competence forefronts itself as an essential quality that will help individuals in developing an 'ability of tolerance and mutual respect for cultural differences' (p.3), enlightening them as global citizens manifesting this accommodative approach at various levels of future human society. *Global communication competence* is an ability developed and enhanced by promoting a sense of empathy in socialization (Weinstein, 1969, as cited in Chen, 2005).

The purpose of dealing with the concept of global communication competence here is to emphasize a need among teachers of Business Communication and of the English language to accommodate the varieties of English spoken in different parts of the world and to develop abilities and skills among learners as per the requirements of the multicultural global society. It will make them communicate with people from different cultures and linguistic groups with ease, comfort, and confidence without a feeling of inferiority against the superior features of the native English variety.

It further leads to the below-given typology of non-native Englishes and the theory of concentric circles of non-native Englishes propounded by Kachru (1985).

- The Inner Circle represents the traditional bases of English, the regions where it is the primary language (for example, countries like the UK, USA, and Australia).

- The Outer Circle comprises a large speech community with greater diversity and distinct characteristics—bilingualism or multilingualism. English is pivotal in language policies (e.g. countries like India, Malaysia, African countries, and Singapore).

- The Expanding Circle consists of regions with a history of

colonization by the inner circle people. According to Kachru, this circle is expanding rapidly. (e.g. countries like Canada, China, Russia, and Japan)

English thus becomes a global medium with local identities and messages. It is spoken in 60 countries of the world. With this global spread, terms like variation and impurity keep haunting teachers across the globe. It would be very apt to mention Kirkpatrick (2007), who refers to the long history of the English language, saying, "Age doesn't bring with it superiority in the context of varieties of English" (p. 6), while advocating the cause of intelligibility of non-native varieties.

Schneider's (2003) model explains the shared processes all the New Englishes have gone through (a) Foundation, (b) Exonormative stabilization, (c) Nativization, (d) Endonormative, (e) Stabilization, and (f) Differentiation.

- During the first stage, very few people in the new country begin to speak English regularly, and the indigenous languages do not influence English.

- The exonormative stabilization witnesses an acceptance of the external norm of spoken and written English as used by educated people as a standard reference. There also begin some structural and phonological transfers.

- Nativization sees a New English constructing its own identity different from the native variety.

- Endonormative stabilization is a phase characterized by a gradual adoption and acceptance of an indigenous linguistic norm supported by a new locally rooted self-confidence. An example of the endonormative stabilization of English in India is marked by English mingling with the local hue of indigenous languages, establishing a new identity.

- The Differentiation phase is characterised by revolutionary traits wherein the identities start narrowing down from the national to the communal scale. New varieties of English emerge, which are furthermore different from the earlier new variety, which happens to carry the identities of these new groups.

A paradigm shift can also be observed in the motivation for learning English among Indians from instrumental to integrative. The language

initially introduced as the 'colonizer's tool' gradually began to be accepted by the locals as they realized its importance in integrating with native people. After independence, though the British left the country, the language remained on this soil, exerting even more influence on the people from all strata of society. The advent of science and technology added to this. The process of globalization further made people in non-Western countries realize the power of English in reaching a maximum number of people in business, technology, and academics.

The Emergence of Non-Native Variety of English

Moreover, with this background, the English language we find around us is thus an amalgam of various Indian languages and native English and two or more cultures. One can call it the acculturation process wherein both languages reciprocally impact. The intertwining of two cultures and languages leads to a third altogether different reality called the non-native variety of English. For example, nouns like '*uncle*' or '*aunt*' are never prefixed with the adjectives '*maternal*' or '*paternal*' in British English as the complexity of family relationships is not very important in Western society. However, Indian society being family-oriented makes it necessary to specify these distinctions underlined by family ties. One comes across a similar distinctive use of prefixes before the noun "*marriage*"–'*love marriage*' and '*arranged marriage*' in Indian usage of English as the role of parents or family in tying matrimonial knots is crucial in India. A term like '*co-sister*' is like an acculturated expression, especially in South Indian English.

The UK and USA have also witnessed a considerable increase in the use of non-native English varieties, symbolizing a shift towards recognizing these non-native varieties. Americanism has infiltrated into British English, especially vocabulary. Words like *backwoods, beeline, belittle, cloudburst*, etc., or recent borrowings like *cafeteria, cocktail, and filling station* are commonly accepted in British English vocabulary.

Back to the Indian scenario, expressions where a question is formed without inversion of the subject and verb, like "*Why you are saying that*?" or an invariable question tag like "*We are meeting tomorrow, isn't it*?" are common examples. Stative verbs are often observed in progressive forms like "*He is knowing English well*". Verbs like 'think' and 'remember' are used in progressive form. The iconic trendsetter McDonald has used the

famous Indian expression "*I'm lovin (g) it*" as its tagline (Crystal, 2013).

English, thus, has no longer remained the monopoly of elite classes. Cultural ownership of the language had long shifted from England to other countries. In the case of India, it is no longer confined to the educated elite class—other strata of society are willing to make it their 'own' language.

Crystal (2004) considers English to be a pluricenetric language to represent its multiple ownerships. English belongs to all who use it. Therefore, Business Communication and English teachers must register that English is a pluricentric language. According to him, forgetting the notion of 'only one correct' language is necessary. The dictionaries of various varieties of English will provide thousands of words that learners of Received Pronunciation (RP) must be familiar with. To illustrate, he describes how he was astonished to know that 'robot' in South African English means "traffic light" while travelling in South Africa.

Impact of Technology on English

Equally important to note is the impact of technology on the language. Technological advancements have visibly influenced media and contributed to language variety and change. The variety of English language based on linguistic abbreviation, in the form of text messaging, is an example of such a change. New linguistic forms are introduced more rapidly and universally to public attention than the traditional way of mouth publicity. Crystal (2001) coined the term '*Netspeak*' to symbolize the language used on the internet. The term '*netizens*' is gifted by this new technology to the ever-accommodating English language. Crystal believes that emails, synchronous chat rooms and other such web-based texts mark a movement of the English language into 'new stylistic directions.

A linguistic expression like "*I'll sms you*", typically representative of such media-initiated English language variation, is rarely heard since smartphones and WhatsApp replaced mobile phones. Instead, one frequently hears "*Please text me*" or "*I'll WhatsApp you*". Words like 'emoticon' can also be attributed to the influence of ever-advancing media technology.

Crystal (2004) differentiates between the older New Englishes and the newer New Englishes. The former is identified by blend names symbolic

of mixed-language characters, such as Singlish (Singaporean English, a blend of English and Chinese) and Tex-Mex (English and Mexican Spanish in south-western USA). The latter is considered an autonomous variety, such as Indian English.

Implications for Teaching English

All this makes the teaching fraternity and the educational policy makers realize the responsibility to be shouldered in the future, i.e., to herald this change. As Crystal (2004) rightly terms it, the pragmatic approach to language teaching widens the scope of linguistics to develop an awareness and acceptance of variation and change as "normal features of linguistic life demanding recognition and respect" (p. 524). According to him, this approach is against the 'Dogmatic' approach and instils an awareness that variation and change are typical features of linguistic life demanding recognition and respect.

It certainly poses a massive challenge to teachers of English across the globe who have learnt RP and are even trained and used to teach English based on their RP schooling. However, it is worth referring to the eye-opening predictions by Crystal, who says that moving away from 'an institutional prescriptivism' to a 'more egalitarian linguistic era' is possible only when other social institutions are involved in the process. According to him, the social process has already begun in the form of BBC accommodating regional speech through local radio and television stations. The business management has realized the importance of speech variation as one can hear regional varieties on telephones in the call centres. However, it is a very long process. At least the last generation of officials and managers in various organizations and establishments who have been the product of prescriptive teaching keep influencing their subordinates with their linguistic preoccupations. Nevertheless, it is a matter of time before the new linguistic tolerance era begins.

Keeping pace with such a rapid change in the language is a vast challenge for teachers of English. Their students will know far more new English words that originated on Facebook and Twitter than their teachers. Social networking sites make a new word popular among thousands of subscribers within minutes. It becomes necessary, though challenging, for teachers to keep pace with new slang and expressions entering and thus enriching the English language.

So, teachers of English need to make it their duty to expose students to this variation and realize that variation should not be penalized and ridiculed. It is necessary to improve their reading and listening comprehension. Students need to be taught varieties of English like Chinese, South African, Indian, American, and Japanese, just as they are taught RP. If there are 100 varieties, the teacher should decide which of those to choose and introduce to the students depending upon which variety they are likely to encounter as they start their careers.

Teaching English varieties will sensitize them to the differences, making them prepared to encounter anything different from the normative concept of RP. Teachers need to develop an adequate sensibility, and intelligibility of the language should be the main criterion for acceptability. This criterion does not mean dilution or total non-acceptance. The context and the relationship between speakers are critical.

However, a clear demarcation must be drawn between the setting of examination/test and teaching-learning in the classroom. Allowing some extent of Indianization in the classroom is always advisable. It is also necessary to maintain certain specific linguistic standards. The students should undoubtedly have clarity in speaking as well as in writing. They should also learn to develop a style of their own and be able to adjust their language/expression to contextual needs.

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Shubhada K. Deshpande *teaches Communication Skills in English and Business Communication at Vikas College of Arts, Science & Commerce, Mumbai. Her PhD is in Communication and Interactional Skills.*

shubh.deshpande73@gmail.com