Language, society and the New Englishes: implications for the second language classroom

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Introduction

It is not uncommon to hear labels such as 'American English', 'British English', 'Indian English', 'Australian English', 'Singaporean English' and even 'Japanese-' and 'Chinese English' to refer to varieties of English used throughout the world. As English spreads, differentiation within the language has become accepted and the plural "Englishes" is often employed.　This article examines the phenomenon of the "New Englishes" (hereafter NEs), non-native varieties of English that have emerged as second languages (L2) in multilingual former colonies or possessions of Great Britain or America.　It describes NEs and explores what they tell us about language and society.　The roles and functions of NEs in the L2 classroom are then discussed and a teaching model for Singapore English is offered. Illustrations are drawn from multiple NEs, with a particular focus on the English of Singapore.

1. What are the New Englishes?

A quarter of the world's population speaks English to some level of competence (British Council, 2004).　Kachru (2004, cited in Graddol, 2006) suggested that in the mid-1990s, there were 533 million users of English in India and China alone. Many studies seek to explain the spread of English into various socio-cultural contexts and categorise the emergent varieties according to their methods of development, functions and features.　In a seminal article, Kachru (1985) offers a

clear framework to describe the spread and acquisition of English throughout the world.　This is illustrated as three concentric circles (Appendix A).　In the inner circle are the traditional bases of English, countries where English is the primary language of a substantial majority.　The outer circle represents multilingual nations where English plays an important second language role and has special status in their language policies.　Finally, the expanding circle includes countries that recognise the importance of English as an international language, but do not accord English special status.　Varieties of English used here are used as *foreign* languages.　This model provides a useful visual classification of societies in terms of language situation, but it is pertinent to note that languages and people's attitudes towards them are not static and therefore the classification of language varieties is never clear-cut.

If native English is defined as "the mother tongue of the dominant group and hence, the dominant language in the society" (Moag, 1982:13), there is no doubt that the Englishes in the inner circle are native varieties.　Other varieties of English can however be more difficult to classify.　In particular, the Englishes of nations that have recently gained political independence often defy neat categorisation.　The Englishes of Singapore and Malaysia for example could both be described as evolving out of the outer circle in which Kachru placed them. Foley (1988) has described Singaporean English to be very similar to the Englishes of the inner circle and indeed most people grow up in the Republic speaking English as their native language.　English in Malaysia, on the other hand, has moved in the both directions.　The National Language Act of 1967, which gave Malay sole official language status, and the introduction of Malay as the medium of instruction throughout the government school system caused English to take on more of a foreign language role in Malaysia (Albar, 2000;

Wong and James, 2000).   However in 2004, English was once again introduced as a medium of instruction in schools (for the teaching of science, mathematics and technology) and thus it is likely to fulfil more of a second language role again in the future.

The non-native varieties of English that fit the criteria for inclusion in the outer circle are referred to as "NEs"[1].   As English has begun to function in new surroundings, it has taken on new localised roles and has been subjected to what may be termed *interference* from the first language(s) and culture(s) of the users. The new varieties have developed characteristics distinctive enough from the inner circle varieties at a combination of lexical, syntactic, phonological, discoursal, semantic or stylistic levels, to earn them such titles as "Indian English", "Nigerian English" and "Singapore English" (Strevens, 1992:34).

The NEs may not seem so different from other *newer* (vis-à-vis British English) inner circle varieties, such as American or Australian English, in that they display lexical and phonological differences for example.   But it is the way in which the varieties developed that sets them apart.   Native Englishes are found in those countries that were settled by the British in high numbers and were for a long time dependent on Britain (Kachru, 1986; Platt, Weber and Ho, 1984), whereas the NEs have developed in various cultural and linguistic contexts as legacies of the colonial era.   Platt et al., (1984) have named four criteria which they consider a non-native variety of English should fulfil in order to be considered a NE:

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1   The terms "institutionalised" (Kachru, 1986), "nativised" (Kachru, 1986), "indigenised" (Moag, 1992) and "hybridised" (Whinnom, 1971) have all been used to refer to these non-native varieties, to reflect the extent of their acculturation into new contexts.

1. It has developed in an area where a native variety of English was *not* the language spoken by most of the population.

2. It has developed through the education system.

3. It is used for a range of functions *among* those who speak or write it in the region where it is used.

4. It has become 'localized' or 'nativized' by adopting some language features of its own.

<div align="right">Adapted from Platt et al., 1984:2-3</div>

Examining the first two criteria as development and the second two as functions and features will give a more complete picture of NEs.

1.1. Development

Platt et al. (1984) name three situations against which NEs developed: in areas were English-based pidgins, English-based creoles or where local languages (including non-English lingua francas) were spoken.　In all cases a NE has emerged as a result of the introduction of English into the school system, either as a subject or, as in most cases, as the medium of instruction.　Schools were established in former colonies such as India and Singapore when administrations found the need for English-speaking locally recruited employees.　Learners began to acquire a type of English that was already different from that of the British or American native speakers as the opening of more schools meant that locally educated non-native speakers of English were employed as teachers.　In some areas, teachers were also brought in from colonies where English was already established, thus exposing learners to various non-native varieties.　These varieties too influenced the development of the NE, as can be seen in the English of the Malay peninsular, which has many Indian characteristics (Platt, 1984).　As people became literate in English, it took on the role of a lingua franca superseding the pidgin or local language as a means of intra-cultural communication and its range of functions increased.

1.2. Functions and Features

The use of English as a language of informal communication in non-native contexts led to the development of features which distinguished it from the English of the colonialists.   Firstly, lexical items from the local culture, for which there were no native English equivalents, were adopted.   Secondly, in the absence of a model for expressing local communicative norms, grammatical features were transferred from the local languages (Moag, 1992).   This creation of a stylistic variant for informal purposes is a major feature of the stabilisation process of NEs as, at this stage, they are capable of expressing a range of functions, from formal interaction with the government to colloquial everyday use.   The formal and informal varieties of a NE can be viewed as forming the upper and lower ends of a speech continuum, which represents the varieties within the NE that a speaker may utilise according to the speech event.   The legitimacy that NEs are accorded depends however upon the attitudes of society towards them.

2. Language and Society

The very existence of NEs demonstrates the complex inter-play between language and society.   It would not seem strange if nations who achieved independence at the end of a period of political colonisation rejected the language of their colonisers in a surge of nationalism.   However, rather than a rejection of English in many African and Asian countries, the post-colonial period brought with it merely a reassessment of the roles and functions of English (Kachru, 1986). English has, because of its global status as a symbol of modernisation, been given the position of official language[2] or at least plays an important role in language

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2   In Singapore, the Philippines, and India for example.

planning[3] in these nations. Yet, the forms that English has taken in the outer circle countries do not mirror accepted native nor, if one exists, a standard international variety. The emergence of the NE can be viewed in terms of a conflict between the recognition of the socio-economic value of English and the resistance to English as a threat to identity.

2.1. The Socio-Economic Power of English

English is, on the one hand, accorded status in outer circle nations as it may be the only language that can serve as a lingua franca or is seen as a neutral language of communication in a particular country. On the other hand, there is no escaping the international power of English and the doors it opens in the business and technological worlds. In fact, it has been argued that the most important factor influencing language choice is economic (Paulston, 1986). Singapore provides an example where economics are a powerful motivator for the use of English; Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong reminded the nation on National Day in 1999 that "We [Singaporeans] learn English in order to communicate with the world…Parents send children to English language schools…because they hope the children will get jobs and opportunities when they grow up" (Goh, 1999). Thus, it is logical that English has become accepted by both policy makers and society.

2.2. The Need for Identity

Language plays an important role in building solidarity (Anderson, 1991). As new multi-ethnic nations search for stability, and people within those nations search for group and individual social identities, they will use language to express those

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3   In Malaysia for example.

identities (Fishman et al., 1968).   Lim (1986) has ascertained different types of identity that are manifested through NEs: national, ethnic and interpersonal.

2.2.1.   National Identity

The use of language to express national identity is illustrated in the oft-quoted words of Tommy Koh, Singapore's former representative to the United Nations:

> "...when one is abroad, in a bus or train or aeroplane and when one overhears someone speaking, one can immediately say this is someone from Malaysia or Singapore.   And I should hope that when I'm speaking abroad my countrymen will have no problem recognising that I am Singaporean." (Quoted in Tongue, 1979:17).

Tay (1979) states that this desire to be recognised as a Singaporean accounts for the vocabulary, stress and intonation patterns that characterise Singapore English and distinguish it from other well-established varieties of English.   However, she maintains that the educated Singaporean will "...aim at a standard indistinguishable from Standard British English in the area of syntax..." (ibid:94), presumably for socio-economic reasons.   Richards (1982) relates the nativisation of English and rejection of external (foreign) norms to the concept of Language Ego (put forward by Guiora in 1972); "The use of a standard or informal variety of Singapore, Nigerian, or Filipino English is thus part of what it means to *be* a Singaporean, a Nigerian, or a Filipino" (Richards, 1982:235).

2.2.2.   Ethnic Identity

The NEs also serve as an important symbol of ethnic group identity.   Moag (1982) points out that NEs are often divided along communal (mother tongue) lines.   Sub-varieties of Indian English e.g. Bengali English and Tamil English,

appear to be regionally distributed, but are actually influenced by the mother tongue. This is evidenced by the fact that such differences exist in other nations where communities have no regional base. Moag (1982) cites Fiji and Malaysia as countries where ethnic Indians, Chinese and natives (Fijians/Malays) exhibit distinctive varieties of English. Interference from the mother tongue could of course be the primary reason for ethnic-based language variation; however, Lambert (1977) demonstrates that second language learners sometimes intentionally maintain a strong ethnic accent in order to preserve their ethnic identity. Lim (1986) observed this phenomenon in Singapore, and stated that Singaporeans may at times feel closer to their own ethnic group than to fellow Singaporeans. This is despite a high level of national integration in Singapore which would perhaps be expected to encourage linguistic homogeneity.

2.2.3. Interpersonal Identity

Individuals can express interpersonal identities in a NE in a way that they would not be able to in a native variety of English. Richards (1982) discusses the accepted norms for formal and informal speech in NE-using-communities and states that NEs are markedly different from native Englishes. In NEs interpersonal relationships are expressed by an individual's use of the different speech styles available to him from the continuum of speech varieties that exist within a NE. Tay (1979:98) exemplifies this by explaining how a Singaporean teacher of English will use the highest variety of English he knows in the language classroom, but may drop to the basilectal variety outside of the classroom in order to establish a rapport with the students. This lect shifting is different to the shift from a formal to informal style in a native English. Platt (1977) suggests that a speaker of native English would use a different functional sub-variety from *within his own social dialect* to communicate in informal and formal situations. A speaker of a non-native

variety may on the other hand put to use the whole range of functional varieties *of the NE*, depending on the type of interaction.

2.3. English as a Divisive Force

English has, in the form of the NE, become a vehicle for expressing the cultures and identities of its users, whilst at the same time providing multi-lingual nations with a means of intra- and international communication.   However, sometimes NEs help to accentuate divides within the societies in which they operate. Bamgbose (2003) points out that in Nigeria, as in other outer circle countries, English is acquired through formal education.   However, most children do not have access to formal education and thus social stratification affords those with English skills access to jobs, social status and power.   Speaking about Singapore, Rubdy (2001) demonstrates that the government's desire to create "a global city...that can hold its own in the forefront of information technology" (ibid:350) has created a "language-based social hierarchy" (ibid:344).   Educational streaming according to learning ability occurs at an early age in Singapore and so children who come from homes where little English is spoken may find themselves struggling to achieve a worthy position in the hierarchy.   This could lead to a widening of what former Singaporean Prime Minister has called the *Cosmopolitan and Heartlander* divide (Goh, 2000), the divide between those who generate wealth and those who form the core of Singapore's social values (Rubdy, 2001).   It is possible that government policies designed to encourage globalisation[4] might force the Cosmopolitans to speak a more standard variety of

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4   Such as the 'Speak Good English' movement, this was launched in 2000, and re-launched in 2003, in order to promote the use of Standard English among Singaporeans to increase the country's competitiveness in the global market (Rubdy, 2001).

English and the Heartlanders to identify themselves with the basilectal varieties of Singapore English or even to give up speaking English altogether (ibid).

3．The Role of New Englishes in the Second Language Classroom

Users of a NE wish to "be fluent and be understood when they communicate in English…yet be themselves and identify with their own sociocultural environment" (Goh, 1993:18).　This poses a problem for language planners and teachers in non-native environments.　Should they aim for a widely recognised native variety such as British or American English, or should they allow a local NE to become the standard for teaching?　The fact that there is no organised agency that provides a model for a standard variety of English, as in the case of French or Spanish for example, adds to the dilemma (Kachru, 1986).　American and British Standard English are still the foci of the General Standard English that has been established "by a gradual process of consensus among users" Gupta (1988:31).　The decision to opt for an established native variety, or a general standard based on native varieties, would neutralise the social-identity benefits of a NE.　However, if NEs are allowed to proliferate in schools unchecked, countries like Singapore could end up speaking a type of English that the "rest of the world will find quaint but incomprehensible" (Goh, 1999).　The decision to introduce NEs into the classroom is affected by three things: the problems of description of the NEs, attitudes of the non-native speakers themselves towards NEs, and intelligibility.

3．1．Factors Affecting the Use of New Englishes in the Classroom
3．1．1．Describing New Englishes

For a NE to be acknowledged as a possible pedagogic model, it needs to be codified. However, NEs are still evolving and their diverse forms and functions have yet to be fully documented.　Teachers need an authoritative focal point by which to determine

what is right and wrong in a language, and so grammars and dictionaries are essential (D'souza, 1993).   For a NE to be standardised, descriptions of the language must be based on the language of a NE speaker who has command of the NE for a whole range of functions.   D'souza (1993) maintains that studies of NEs too often regard the utterances of any NE speaker as acceptable, and consequently do not draw the distinction between usage that is Standard NE and "non-standard-in-any-variety" (Bloom, 1986:433).   He therefore calls for data for linguistic description to be taken from a *proficient* speaker.   Platt et al. (1984) similarly argue that a standardised NE should be based on the speech of an *educated* speaker. Criteria for defining these speakers however, still have to be determined.   Existing descriptions of NEs are also inadequate because they imply deficiencies in the non-native varieties.   The descriptions use the differences between the NE and standard native varieties (usually British English) as a means of defining the NE and as long as NEs are placed in a continuum with a native English at the top, the legitimacy of the NE will be undermined.

3.1.2. Attitudes

The attitudes of the non-native speakers towards NEs are an important factor in determining the acceptance of a NE as a standard teaching model.   Moag (1982:32) states that:

> "It is widely acknowledged that the speakers of the new Englishes are loath to recognize the distinctive character of their English and, rather, insist that they speak one or another of the major ENL (English as a native language) varieties".

Statistics do not quite show such conviction on the part of NE speakers, but nevertheless show positive attitudes to native varieties.   In 1979, Kachru discovered that graduate students and faculty members at Indian universities

considered British English to be the preferred model for teaching English and that 31.69% of the students surveyed believed they were speaking a native variety.　In Singapore, the attitudes towards native Englishes have shown to be quite similar: Shaw (1983) found that nearly half of the Singaporean undergraduates surveyed thought that Singaporean educated speakers spoke a native variety of English. 53.3% of these students thought they should learn to speak a native variety.

These views may not be quite so true in the present day, given the sense of identity and social cohesion that NEs provide speakers with, and the support, both academic and popular[5], that NEs increasingly draw.　However, some, particularly those involved in language planning, still believe in the superiority of Standard English.　In his 1999 National Rally Speech, Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong emphasised the importance of speaking "…a form of English that is understood by the British, Americans, Australians, and people around the world". He stated that Singaporeans should "nurture the next generation to have higher standards of English than ourselves" and spoke of the Ministry of Education's plan to revise English language syllabuses to strengthen the teaching of grammar as a means of achieving that goal.　The Prime Minister was expressly referring to the burgeoning use of Singlish – basilectal/mesolectal Singapore English – in his nation and his mandate did not condemn the use of standard Singapore English. However, given the lack of recognition by the Singaporean government of the *linguistic* details of this form of English (Gupta, 1988) and the words of Senior

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5　Kachru, 1979, 1986, 1992, is well known for his support of and encouragement for non-native Englishes.　In the Singaporean case popular support for colloquial Singapore English ('Singlish') can be seen with the development of such groups as the S.P.A.S., the Society for the Preservation of Authentic Singlish (www.talkingcock.com).

Minister Lee Kuan Yew (1999), who said that:

> "The better educated can learn two or three varieties of English and can speak English English to native Englishmen or Americans, standard English to foreigners who speak standard English, and Singlish to less-educated Singaporeans"

it can be assumed that in Singapore at least, teachers are expected to teach an established Standard English.

3.1.3. Intelligibility

The most basic concern when choosing a model for the English classroom is intelligibility.   Of course, intelligibility can be defined on a local and international scale, and if the use of English is to be confined to the intra-national level, NE usage will be more acceptable.   However, if English is to be used to compete on the international level, the words of Tay and Gupta (1983:183) hold true; "It would be immoral and irresponsible to recommend a local standard which went beyond the bounds of tolerance of the international Standard English-speaking community".   This view has been taken to an extreme in the work of Prator (1968) and Quirk (1991) who promote the teaching of a native standard of English.   Quirk is of the opinion that as L2 learners are learning English to be understood in the wider English-using community, they should not be permitted to "settle for lower standards than the best" (Quirk, 1991:173).   Intelligibility is not only determined by linguistic considerations, communication is often impaired when the speaker and hearer convey and interpret a speech act through different conventions.   Imposing a native variety on L2 learners as a model for teaching would do little to ease this problem, as the non-native speakers would still apply their own cultural outlook to the situation.

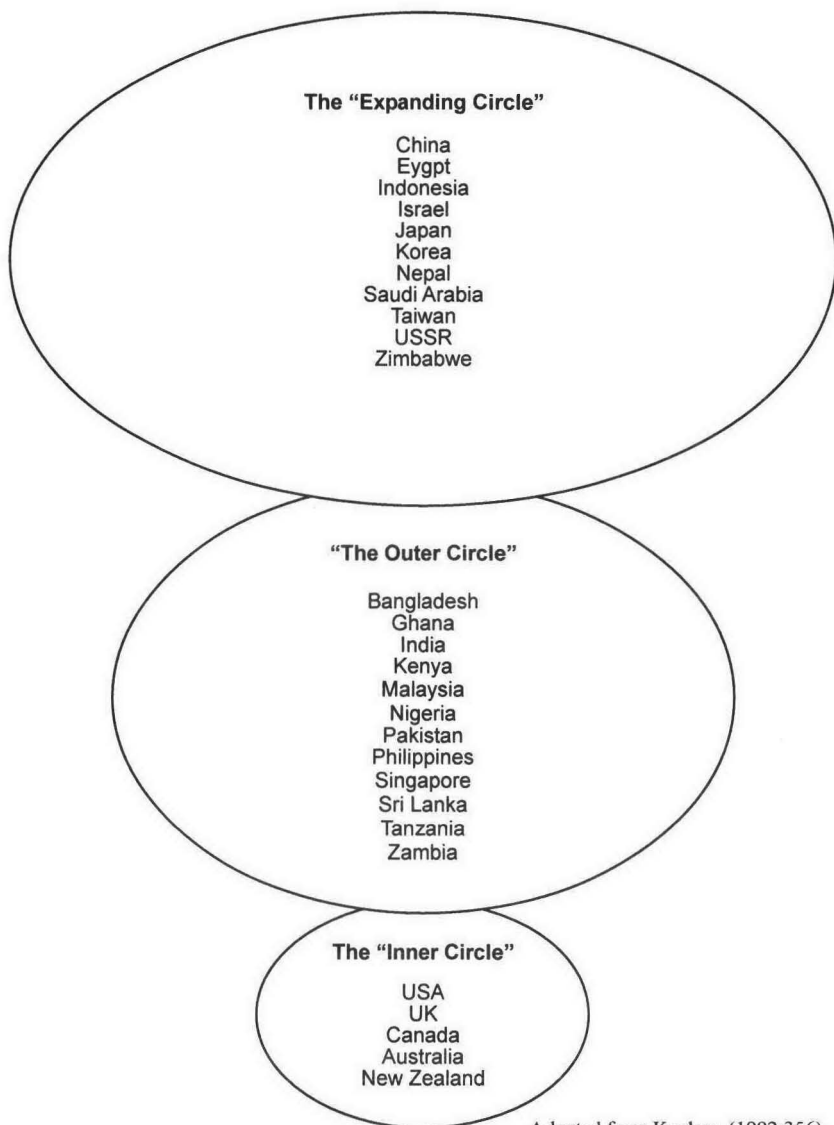### 3.2. New Englishes in the Classroom: A Model for Singapore

Despite problems of codification, attitudes and intelligibility, there is a role for NEs in the classroom. This role may differ for different countries, depending on their socio-economic goals. In Singapore, the deliberate establishment of an endonormative standard in schools would not be acceptable, given the government's desire to promote Singapore as an English-speaking nation. However, despite the current use of textbooks which promote a general Standard English in Singapore, Singapore English is presently being taught as a *de facto* standard in Singaporean schools through the teachers' spontaneous usage (Gupta, 1988). Mckay (1991) discusses a model that could also be suitable for Singapore. She encourages teaching language awareness rather than language standards and states that teachers should teach the variety of English they speak and teach a generally accepted form of written English. This should be done in a way that helps students to realise the complexity of language and the need to use it appropriately according to context. To teach only General Standard English would deny Singaporeans the depth of meaning and range of functions that their own variety affords them, but to let Singapore English run unchecked may lead to the linguistic isolation of a small nation dependant on outside trade. Pakir (1995) suggests that schools be orientated towards an international standard, whether it be British, American or Australian, but consideration should be given to Singapore English. She states that "formal, explicit and deliberate use of language should be clearly distinguished and distinguishable from informal, implicit and unconscious use of the language" (ibid:9). In other words, teachers should encourage awareness of the correct forms to use according to the formality of the situation, the participants involved and the medium of communication.

Conclusion

NEs are the varieties of English that have developed in multilingual nations where English has an important second language role.   The emergence of these varieties can be seen as a conflict between the socio-economic power of English and the search for identity in fledgling states, and this poses a dilemma for language planners and teachers.   Problems of codification, attitudes towards the NE and intelligibility also hinder the introduction of a NE to the classroom. Nevertheless, a NE functions as marker of solidarity and identity and deserves recognition in education.   One solution would be to encourage language awareness in the L2 classroom.   With increased awareness, students of English will find that they have a whole speech continuum available to them, and that they can complete in the international arena without losing the depth of meaning that their own NE affords them.

Appendix A

Kachru's Concentric Circles

The "Expanding Circle"

China
Eygpt
Indonesia
Israel
Japan
Korea
Nepal
Saudi Arabia
Taiwan
USSR
Zimbabwe

"The Outer Circle"

Bangladesh
Ghana
India
Kenya
Malaysia
Nigeria
Pakistan
Philippines
Singapore
Sri Lanka
Tanzania
Zambia

The "Inner Circle"

USA
UK
Canada
Australia
New Zealand

Adapted from Kachru, (1992:356)

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