

## Englises in Multilingual Repertoires

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### Abstract

This article primarily discusses the ‘Outer Circle’ varieties of English: the spread that introduced English to sociocultural and historical contexts traditionally not associated with it, and in the process, of course, acquiring new—non-native—speakers. It is an attempt to underline the urgency with which we need to redefine the disciplinary discourses of abstract and theoretical dichotomies (language-interlanguage, standard-nonstandard, native-non-native, target-fossilized) to validate and incorporate the local hybridities.

**Keywords:** Outer Circle, World Englishes, linguistic creativity, linguistic hybridity, identity, multilingualism

### Introduction

This article deals mainly with the ‘Outer Circle’ varieties of English: the spread that introduced English to sociocultural and historical contexts traditionally not associated with it, and in the process, of course, acquiring new—non-native—speakers. The spread of English in non-native sociolinguistic contexts resulted in a new codification of it (Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008): The pluralization, Englises, disables a monolithic vision of English and replaces it with a pluricentric vision, which brings into clear focus variation and change in English in distinctive sociocultural contexts and language contact situations. The pluralization also has an ideological function: it represents an awareness of the sociolinguistic differentiation in the form, function and use of English; it legitimizes different voices English represents now; and it shows, *par excellence*, the effects of cross-pollination—code-switching/mixing and other

sociolinguistic forms of hybridity—with local linguistic forms in new cultural ecologies that English populates now. In other words, there is now a growing consensus among scholars that there is not one English language any more; rather there are many English languages (McArthur 1998).

The different English languages, studied within the framework of world Englishes, represent a paradigm shift: it rejects the dichotomy of US (the native speakers) vs. THEM (the non-native speakers) and emphasizes instead a WE-ness (Kachru 1992). This conceptual-theoretical shift has in fact extended the empirical domain of the study of English: English is regarded less as a European language and an exclusive exponent of Judeo-Christian traditions, and more as a pluricentric language, representing diverse sociolinguistic histories, multi-cultural identities, multiple norms of use and acquisition, and distinct contexts of function. The success of the paradigm shift, from the English language to world Englishes, was largely made possible by a certain politics of language variation and change, termed 'Liberation Linguistics', that focused on the forms of linguistic beliefs and practices that accent the socio-political dimensions of language variation rooted in contexts of social injustice—and attempt to transform these contexts radically in the interest of the speakers of the 'other tongue': the 'non-native' varieties of English (cf. Bhatt 2001; Canagarajah 1999; Kachru 1986). It is from this liberation linguistic-theoretic perspective that we are able to capture, understand, and discuss the creative linguistic potential of English language use worldwide. In the next section, I discuss precisely the different dimensions of creativity—in form-meaning pairings—that appear in routine linguistic interactions in non-native contexts.

## **Dimensions of Creativity**

### *Grammatical Creativity*

I begin by discussing some standard set of data that seem to exemplify non-native grammars. Consider the following set of English sentences:

1. Progressive aspectual forms with stative verbs  
I was knowing your face.
2. Variable use of definite article  
Oh the maths, the maths nowadays seems to be complicated.

3. Clefting, for marking *prominence/focusing*

It's looking for more land a lot of them are.

4. Inversion in embedded questions

McCloskey does not consider precisely what is the difference between standard English and Hiberno-English ...

The data above in (1)-(4) are paradigm examples of Belfast English (Henry 1996); these syntactic innovations also characterize the grammar of Indian English (cf. Kachru 1983, Trudgill and Hannah 1985). These innovations, (1-4) in Irish (and Indian) Englishes, are understood as part of the parameterized differences in English grammar; however, there are other innovations that seem to belong to the syntax-pragmatics interface. I discuss one such instance next: the use of 'only' in Indian English.

One of the most innovative diacritics, that makes English audibly Indian, is the use of the pragmatic particle 'only' that asserts the pre-suppositional structure of an utterance (Bhatt 2000). 'Only' in Indian English (only) appears immediately to the right of the presentationally (non-contrastively) focused constituent, carries a specific semantic reading of 'least likely' and performs the pragmatic function of indexical assertion, drawing the attention of the hearer to a particular part of the speaker's utterance. In (5), the particle 'only' appears after the object phrase, marking presentational focus: 'only' (a) expresses the unexpectedness, the 'least likely' component of the meaning, and (b) makes salient a part of A's utterance.

5. A : Why are these women dressed like that?

B : These women wear every day expensive clothes only .

Other world Englishes speakers have also introduced similar innovations as part of their English repertoire. The particle 'la' is the most common discourse-pragmatic particle used mainly by speakers of local Singapore English (Gupta 1992, Wong 2004), which occurs with a range of interactional functions such as requests, invitations, promises, suggestions, and so on, as long as the interlocutors share an element of solidarity.

The use of undifferentiated tag questions in Indian English is another instance of how local English-language users subvert the standard form of tag to honour the grammar of local culture (see Bright 1968, Hymes

1974, D'souza 1988, Bhatt 2001, 2005). In standard varieties of English, tag questions are formed by a rule that inserts a pronominal copy of the subject after an appropriate modal auxiliary. A typical example is given in (6) below.

6. John said he'll work today, didn't he?

Tags express certain attitudes of the speaker towards what is being said in the main clause and in terms of speech acts and/or performatives. Functionally, tags in English generally behave like epistemic adverbials such as 'probably,' 'presumably,' and the like – as shown in (7) below.

7a. It's still dark outside, isn't it?

7b. It's still probably dark outside.

On the other hand, undifferentiated tag questions, such as in (8a) and (8b) subvert the colonial codifications of use to express local identities (compare Bhatt 2001, 2005).

8a. You are going home soon, isn't it?

8b. You have taken my book, isn't it?

The meaning of the tags in (8) is not the one appended to the meaning of the main proposition; it is usually constrained by cultural constraints of politeness, by the politeness principle of non-imposition. In other words, such tags serve positive politeness functions (Brown and Levinson 1987), signalling deference and acquiescence. The evidence for functional difference can be found in the contrast between Indian English tags in (9) and British English tags in (10).

9. *Unassertive/Mitigated*

9a. You said you'll do the job, isn't it?

9b. They said they will be here, isn't it?

10. *Assertive/Intensified*

10a. You said you'll do the job, didn't you?

10b. They said they will be here, didn't they?

The perceptual–interpretational contrast between (9) and (10) is revealing: Indian English speakers find the undifferentiated tag expressions in (9) as non-impositional and mitigating, while tags in (10) appear to them as assertive, direct, and intensified (Bhatt 1995, 2001, 2005). This claim is more clearly established when an adverb of intensification/assertion

is used in conjunction with the undifferentiated tag; the result is, predictably, unacceptable (shown in the starred sentences below) to the speakers of different varieties of Indian English.

(9a\*) Of course you said you'll do the job, isn't it?

(9b\*) Of course they said they'll be here, isn't it?

In a culture where verbal behaviour is severely constrained, to a large extent, by politeness regulations, where non-imposition is the essence of polite behaviour, it is noteworthy that Indian English speakers replace English canonical tags with undifferentiated tags. Variants of this undifferentiated tag are common in other world Englishes. In Hong Kong English, they are often used when seeking confirmation and involvement (see Cheng and Warren 2001), in mainly local positive politeness functions. Similarly, speakers of colloquial Singapore English (Singlish) use either the tag 'isn't it' or the tag 'is it' (Pakir 1994, Alsagoff and Lick 1998) mainly to signal local solidarity. Bamiro (1995) and Bokamba (1992) have discussed the case of West African English speakers using undifferentiated tags ('isn't it,' 'not,' 'no') to express deference in local interactional contexts. Such linguistic expressions of agency and identity can also be seen in the use of the modal auxiliary 'may' (see Bhatt 2001, 2005)—as a polite softener 'may' replaces 'could' among Black South African English speakers (Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008), whereas Singaporean English speakers use 'would' as a polite form, as a tentativeness marker, and as a marker of the irrealis aspect (Alsagoff and Lick 1998).

### *Discoursal Creativity*

The creativity at the discoursal level in world Englishes is best exemplified by the now often cited Chinua Achebe's (1965: 29) example (11, below) from *Arrow of God*, where the chief priest is telling one of his sons why it is necessary to send him to church:

11. I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something then you will bring back my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well, you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying 'had we known' tomorrow.

Achebe, then speculates, 'supposing I had put it another way. Like this for instance:'

12. I am sending you as my representative among those people — just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret the lack of foresight.

The first passage (11) expresses the local rural sensibilities — the use of local proverbs and other culture-bound speech patterns — expressing a local Nigerian discursive identity. Achebe concludes that though the material is the same, 'the form of the one (11) is in character, and the other (12) is not' (*ibid*).

The difference, ultimately, between the two contrastive samples above, (11) and (12), has more to do, as Kachru (1986) pointed out, with the use of native similes and metaphors, the transfer of rhetorical devices, the translation ('transcreation') of proverbs and idioms, the use of culturally-dependent speech styles, and the use of syntactic devices. These rhetorical structures and stylistic devices are also employed in contemporary, non-literary texts, as evidenced in (13): the text of an e-mail sent to me requesting advice on a specific issue (the text below is reproduced as it is, with the exception of deleting possible identifiers).

13. *Respected Sir,*

*Handfolded Namaskar!*

Hope this e-mail of mine will find you in a good mood and sound health.

We met in Delhi at the Press Club of India some time back and I hope you will recollect that meeting with Kashmiri writers and scholars.

To me as a student of literature interacting with you was a fascinating and memorable experience. I am sure you also must have enjoyed that interaction. I believe you must have concluded your research by now and must be preparing to compile the findings.

I and all other writers whom you met send you *AAHI* and wish you good luck.

Sir, I have a *little* request. I am to speak at a seminar at Delhi on Wednesday next and my topic is '[xxxxxxx.]' In my paper I am

certainly to argue against certain points raised by Sh. X, in favour of his claim that 'xxxx.' I do not agree with him.

Sir my request to you is just to kindly let me know, if you may, whether you also think and believe as Dr. X believes or you have a contrary view after touring the 'Language region.'

Sir, you as a professional linguist have a very deep understanding of the subject and your opinion is certainly more considered, valid and authentic and it is definitely going to add a new dimension and authenticity to this subject of great importance.

Sir, This is a scholarly urge which I hope you will respond to in a positive manner.

With very warm regards.

[XXX]

The structure of this email-letter follows a rather standard pattern in world Englishes (cf. Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008): The salutations initiate the discourse, followed by what Scollon and Scollon (1991) have called 'facework', followed by the reasons and justifications for the 'request', and finally the actual request. From the perspective of world Englishes discourse, several points are noteworthy here. First, one notices the transfer of discursual and rhetorical norms of the first language, Kashmiri, in the use of the 'greeting', *Handfolded Namaskar*, and conveys 'blessings' from others using the culturally appropriate Kashmiri form, *AAHI*. The capitalization of *AAHI* is presumably a textual cue to the reader of its special status, a Kashmiri word code-mixed for the special purpose of conveying 'blessing' at once establishing solidarity in an English text. Second, the use of the form *Respected Sir* in the salutation section presents an asymmetric relationship between the writer and the intended reader. This strategy is often used in local cultural contexts to minimize threat to face and to express polite behaviour, as noticed elsewhere in Nigerian English by Bamgbose (1992). Furthermore, the 'no-naming' strategy is part of a structured system of 'expressing respect' in the South Asian context (cf. Jain 1973, D'souza 1991). Third, the actual 'request' is made after considerable facework is done, and reasons and justification for the request are presented. Finally, the palliative forms, *a little* and *just*, are used precisely when a 'request' is mentioned in a bid to minimize the illocutionary force of the speech act.

In sum, world Englishes discourse provides evidence of a new linguistic etiquette, one in which the linguistic interactional norms faithfully follow—are shaped by—the grammar of local culture; and in doing so, we notice an extension and expansion of the indexical potential of English.

### *Sociolinguistic Creativity*

Finally, I discuss the dimension of sociolinguistic creativity in world Englishes, which is also observed in ‘native’ contexts but rarely highlighted in discussion of English language variation. Let me illustrate this dimension by using an example from the native context to foreground my discussion of sociolinguistic creativity in world Englishes. In the exchange below (14), PBS show host Tavis Smiley interviews Pam Grier and asks her about her controversial role as a lesbian in the show *The L Word*, eliciting her response to those in the Black community critical of her role in that show (Britt 2012):

#### 14. Code-switching from Standard to African American English

Smiley: You know as well as I do that gayness, homosexuality, lesbianism, still very much a taboo subject—not as much as it used to be, but still very much a taboo subject inside of black America specifically

Grier: Oh, espe- yeah.

Smiley: And black folk love Pam Grier. Everybody loves Pam Grier, but black folk especially love Pam Grier. What do you say to black folk who say,

*Now, Pam Grier you done got caught up in it. Now you done gone too far.*

What is surprising about this excerpt is that precisely at the moment where Smiley brings up the concern to Grier about the Black community’s negative response to the show, he switches from his normal method of speech (Standard English) to the dialect of the critical group (African American Vernacular English) to distance himself from them, in much the same way that an author switches to a speaker’s specific vocal patterns to make a clear division between the *narrator* and the *character*. In other words, Smiley singles out that group, people to whom that dialect is specific, so that Grier understands that it is only the one group saying



these things. The switch, in voicing, is thus strategic in its sociolinguistic function: distancing the narrator from any responsibility of ownership of the message.

Speakers of world Englishes also switch between different English identities available to them to perform different sociolinguistic functions. Mesthrie (1992: 219), for example, discusses the case of downshifting in the use of the mesolectal variety of South African Indian English by a young Indian attendant at airport security in South Africa to a passenger of the same ethnic background, as shown in (15) below.

15. You haven't got anything to declare?

The unmarked choice in this context would normally be the formal acrolectal equivalent, 'Do you have anything to declare?,' that closely approximates the standard. As Mesthrie notes, although the security guard and the passenger were strangers, the speaker was tacitly defusing the syntax of power (acrolect) in favour of mesolectal, ethnic solidarity, while still doing his duty.

Such switching and mixing often result in the development of a new, hybrid code offering multilingual experiences of cultural difference as well as a sense of the entanglement of different cultural traditions. In Bhatt (2008), the following evidence of this linguistic hybridity is presented (taken from *Times of India news-brief*, [www.timesofindia.com](http://www.timesofindia.com), October 12, 2001):

16. There have been several analyses of this phenomenon. First, there is the 'religious angle' which is to do with Indian society. In India a man feels guilty when fantasizing about another man's wife, unlike in the West. The *saat pheras* around the *agni* serves as a *lakshman rekha*.

In this bilingual English-Hindi mode of news-feature presentation, the Hindi idiom is left untranslated. Such untranslated words, according to Ashcroft et al. (1989: 53), 'do have an important function in inscribing difference. They signify a certain cultural experience, which they cannot hope to reproduce but whose difference is validated by the new situation. In this sense they are directly metonymic of that cultural difference which is imputed by the linguistic variation.' The code-mixed Hindi items in (14), rooted in the most important historical narratives (Vedas) and the great Hindu epic (the *Ramayana*) of India, realizes an important sociolinguistic function: these words serve as vehicles of cultural

memory, animating simultaneously with the global-colonial a local-indigenous identity. Code-switching between English and Hindi thus yields a hybridity that makes the semantic possibilities more flexible, movement between global-colonial and local-indigenous identities more manageable, and the goal of decolonization and democratization of English more realizable.

The subtle code-switching in everyday interactions, as discussed above, exemplifies the capacity of world Englishes speakers to mobilize various complexes of nuances of meaning possible only through hybridity; we find recognition and acceptance of this linguistic hybridity in local, popular print-news media. Das (2001), for instance, commented on Indian English in the following manner:

17. We are more comfortable and accepting of English today, I think, partly because we are more relaxed and confident. Our minds have become decolonized and 'Hinglish' increasingly pervades our lives. For a hundred years the upper middle classes have mixed English words in their everyday talk, but the present media argot is the creature of the new satellite and cable channels. Zee, Sony and Star, supported by their advertisers, have created this uninhibited hybrid of Hindi and English. Avidly embraced by the newly-emerging middle classes, this new popular idiom of the bazaar is rushing down the socio-economic ladder. (*The Times of India*, November 18, 2001, p. 14)

The sociolinguistic creativity in world Englishes also helps to subvert the symbolic domination of standard English, as it creatively indexes local indigenous identity, yielding a polyphony of voices. On the subject of this polyphony, Green (1998: 111) observes that English remains varied and wonderful, and concludes, quoting Anthony Burgess, that English is:

18. [A] whole language, complete with the colloquialisms of Calcutta and London, Shakespearean archaisms, bazaar whinings, references to the Hindu pantheon, the jargon of Indian litigation and shrill Babu irritability all together. It's not pure English, but ... the language of Shakespeare, Joyce and Kipling—**gloriously impure**. (emphasis added)

## Coda

The 'gloriously impure' Englishes present the possibility of understanding the limitations of our disciplinary discourse that has so far produced incomplete, and often misleading, understandings of the phenomena of the spread, functions, and acquisition of Englishes worldwide. To capture the complexity of linguistic hybridities associated with plural identities, as discussed above, our disciplinary discourses of the global use and acquisition of English must bring into focus local forms shaped by the local logics of practice. This shift in the disciplinary focus, as I have discussed elsewhere (Bhatt 2005), has larger theoretical aims: on the one hand to enable a more nuanced analysis of the globalization and localization dialectic and, on the other, to invert the tyrannical imposition of the universal (cf. Lyotard, 1984).

This process of inversion requires, in the context of the observations of hybridity in Englishes, a reevaluation of disciplinary discourses of standard language, native speakers, and intelligibility. The evidence of hybridity—linguistic, discursive, and sociolinguistic—confronts the limited and entrenched knowledge these constructs offer and demands that they be replaced with a knowledge that is faithful to linguistic difference and to the global realities in which the difference obtains. The evidence presents the urgency with which we need to redefine the disciplinary discourses of abstract and theoretical dichotomies (language-interlanguage, standard-non-standard, native-non-native, target-fossilized) to validate and incorporate the local hybridities.

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