

○ TRANSLINGUAL ENGLISH

Alastair Pennycook, University of Technology Sydney
 Correspondence to Alastair Pennycook: Alastair.Pennycook@uts.edu.au

In their introduction to this special edition of *ARAL*, Michael Clyne and Farzad Sharifian have laid out a number of the general concerns we need to consider when trying to grapple with the global spread of English. There is much of value in their proposal for a more symmetrical understanding of the pluricentricity of English; for a focus on cross-cultural/intercultural communication, especially on pragmatic, discourse, and conceptual variation in English language classes; and for language policies that emphasise bilingualism and multilingualism. Their position nevertheless stops short in its exploration of the wider concerns raised by the global spread of English: While rightly critiquing the monolingual mindset that is blind to multilingualism and gives support to the use only of English, Clyne and Sharifian nevertheless fail to problematise the assumptions that underlie all these discussions around the global spread of English. It is not enough just to question monolingualism and argue for multilingualism, since both conceptions emerge from the same context of European-based thinking about language. As long as we still operate with the same epistemological framework of languages that emerged from the colonial/modernist context (Errington, 2008; Nakata, 2007), we will not be able to think our way out of the dilemmas posed by language and globalisation (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007).

WORLD ENGLISHES AND LINGUA FRANCAS

Central to this rethinking of language is a move away from locating diversity in national/geographic terms. The global spread of English very obviously lends itself to such a rethinking, and yet, quite remarkably, a considerable amount of work on world Englishes has reproduced precisely the epistemology it needs to escape. Once we open up an understanding of English as it is used across multiple domains, it is evident that there are very good grounds to move away from nations as the basis for our descriptions of English. From a World Englishes (WE) perspective it is common to chide other views of English for not accommodating sufficient accounts of diversity in their models. Kachru and Nelson (2006), for example, contrast a world Englishes approach with terms such as “world English” (Brutt-Griffler, 2002), “English as an International Language” (Jenkins, 2000), and “English as a Lingua Franca” (Seidlhofer, 2001) since all of these “idealize a monolithic entity called ‘English’ and neglect the inclusive and plural character of the

world-wide phenomenon” (p. 2). And yet, as James (2008, p. 98) observes, in an age of globalisation, of international mobility and communication, “a sociolinguistic consideration of New Englishes must accept such post-geographic Englishes as manifested in their lingua franca function, that is, as employed between/among language users who choose to employ English as their verbal means of communication and who by convention are ‘non-native speakers’ of the language in traditional terms”.

While it may appear, however, that there is an important distinction between a WE approach, with its centrifugal focus on local variation, and an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) approach with its centripetal focus on the development of regional varieties (European and Asian English), at another level, this is a matter only of relative scale. Although studies of Indian English, for example, would fall into the first camp, it is also clear that Indian English is more chimerical than this terminology allows. As Krishnaswamy and Burde observe, “Like Indian nationalism, ‘Indian English’ is ‘fundamentally insecure’ since the notion ‘nation-India’ is insecure” (1998 p. 63). Given the diversity of Indian languages and regions and the need to see India not so much as an imagined community but rather as an unimaginable community, it is unclear why Indian English itself should not be viewed as a lingua franca. To discuss an entity called South Asian English, which comprises varieties across India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is to talk in terms of a monolithic lingua franca English. Thus, when Braj Kachru focuses on “educated South Asian English” rather than “Broken English” (2005, p. 39), he is surely open to the same critiques that he and others level at the purveyors of monolithic English rather than world Englishes. As Parakrama (1995, pp. 25–26) argues, “The smoothing out of struggle within and without language is replicated in the homogenising of the varieties of English on the basis of ‘upper-class’ forms. Kachru is thus able to theorise on the nature of a monolithic Indian English”. Similarly, Canagarajah (1999, p. 180) observes that in Kachru’s “attempt to systematize the periphery variants, he has to standardise the language himself, leaving out many eccentric, hybrid forms of local Englishes as too unsystematic. In this, the Kachruvian paradigm follows the logic of the prescriptive and elitist tendencies of the center linguists”.

In order to address such concerns we need to get beyond questions only of pluralisation (English versus Englishes), since they leave unexamined issues of scale and ideology. This raises the question as to whether diversity in fact can be sought in the countability of world Englishes rather than the non-countability of ELF, or whether we need a more complex understanding here. By characterising and dismissing work that falls under the ELF rubric, critics fail therefore on the one hand to see that it depends very much what one is trying to do with ELF (whether this is an attempt to capture a core to international

English communication and teach it, or whether it is an attempt to account for the amorphous, ongoing, moment-by-moment negotiation of English that is actually its daily reality), and on the other hand, that work that falls under apparently different frameworks, such as WE, may in fact only vary along a narrow line of scope.

If an ELF approach is concerned only with devising an alternative non-native speaker (NNS) rather than native speaker (NS) standard, even if it is doing this as a pedagogical response to the need for something other than NS and WE models, it is certainly open to criticism for being potentially reductive and prescriptive. If, on the other hand, it is trying to capture the pluricentricity of ongoing negotiated English – or, as we might call it, the *plurilithic* as opposed to monolithic character of English, since an ELF approach may posit no centres at all – it may be more pluricentric than WE. As Rubdy and Saraceni put it, “In the end, the validity of the EIL/ELF proposal will probably depend upon whether or not it chooses to embrace a polymodel approach to the teaching of English or a monolithic one, whether it leads to the establishing and promoting of a single (or a limited form of) Lingua Franca Core for common use among speakers in the Outer and Expanding Circles, possibly stripped of any cultural influences, or whether it will be flexible enough to manifest the cultural norms of all those who use it along with the rich tapestry of linguistic variation in which they are embedded” (2006, p.13).

The problem for both frameworks, of course, is the impossibility of describing in any comprehensive fashion the ongoing negotiation of language. Descriptions of language, in this sense, have always been impossible, and have always relied on abstractions. The heart of the question therefore is this: Once we get beyond the accusations of monocentric and pluricentric models, in what ways is the research committed to a vision of diversity and in what ways to an attempt to systematise? While some proposals for ELF do indeed appear to have systematisation as their goal, others seem more interested in capturing the momentary negotiations of English. Kirkpatrick argues that an ELF model is preferable to native or nativised (inner or outer circle) models on the grounds that it becomes “the property of all, and it will be flexible enough to reflect the cultural norms of those who use it. In this it differs markedly from both native and nativised varieties of English, as native and nativised varieties must by definition reflect the cultural norms of their speakers” (2006, p.79). While for some this variety may need to be described and taught, for others, it is more a question of how “postcolonial speakers of English creatively negotiate the place of English in their lives” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 200).

TRANSLINGUAL PRACTICES

The next step, therefore, is to move towards an understanding of the relationships among language resources as used by certain communities (the linguistic resources users draw on), local language practices (the use of these language resources in specific contexts), and language users' relationship to language varieties (the social, economic and cultural positioning of the speakers). This is, consequently, an attempt to move away from nation-based models of English and to take on board current understandings of translingual practices across communities other than those defined along national criteria. The interest here is in "the communicative practices of transnational groups that interact using different languages and communicative codes simultaneously present in a range of communicative channels, both local and distant" (Jacquemet, 2005, p. 265). These transidiomatic practices, Jacquemet explains, "are the results of the co-presence of multilingual talk (exercised by de/reterritorialised speakers) and electronic media, in contexts heavily structured by social indexicalities and semiotic codes". For Jacquemet, such practices are dependent on "transnational environments", the mediation of "deterritorialised technologies", and interaction "with both present and distant people" (p. 265).

The changing cultural and linguistic worlds in which many English users live pose challenges for how we conceive of culture, ethnicity and language. As Maher describes it in the context of Japan, students are rejecting fixed ascriptions of cultural identity and instead playing with notions of metroethnicity: "Cultural essentialism and ethnic orthodoxy are out. In Japan, Metroethnicity is in. Cool rules" (2005, p. 83). Metroethnicity, he explains, is "a reconstruction of ethnicity: a hybridised 'street' ethnicity deployed by a cross-section of people with ethnic or mainstream backgrounds who are oriented towards cultural hybridity, cultural/ethnic tolerance and a multicultural lifestyle in friendships, music, the arts, eating and dress" (p. 83). People of different backgrounds now "play" with ethnicity (not necessarily their own) for aesthetic effect. Metroethnicity is skeptical of heroic ethnicity and bored with sentimentalism about ethnic language" (Maher, 2005, p. 83). As language learners move around the world in search of English or other desirable languages, or stay at home but tune in to new digital worlds through screens, mobiles and headphones, the possibilities of being something not yet culturally imagined mobilises new identity options. And in these popular transcultural flows, languages, cultures and identities are frequently mixed. Code-mixing, sampling of sounds, genres, languages and cultures is the norm.

In the realm of English language teaching, this understanding of translingual practice can help take us beyond the ugly and simplistic labels of grammar-translation versus

communicative language teaching that have reduced English to a language used and taught only in its own presence. The role of the language teacher, suggests Kramsch (2006, p. 103), “should be to diversify meanings, point to meanings not chosen, and bring to light other possible meanings that have been forgotten by history or covered up by politics”. Translation, argues Cronin (2003), plays a crucial role within globalisation, and there needs to be “an *activist* dimension to translation which involves an engagement with the cultural politics of society at national and international levels” (p. 134). From this perspective, we can view ELT as a form of translanguaging activism. Thus we can oppose the long history of translation eschewal, where the use of languages other than English is denigrated as old-fashioned, as causing interlingual interference, as the strategy of the non-native teacher who knows no better, as indelibly tied to the chalk-and-talk methodologies that focus on grammar. This is to oppose the many interests and complicities that have supported the use of English and only English in classrooms. It is to reintroduce translation in all its complexity into English language teaching, to open up and explore the many possible meanings that can start to flow in and out of languages in relation to English. In its focus on activism, it is to see this as political action, as a way of confronting the possible threats to diversity posed by English (Pennycook, 2008).

In order to capture how language is used in such contexts, we need to incorporate the idea of communicative repertoires: Individual language knowledge should be defined “not in terms of abstract system components but as communicative repertoires – conventionalised constellations of semiotic resources for taking action – that are shaped by the particular practices in which individuals engage” (Hall et al., 2006, p. 232). This view insists that language is not so much a system that we draw on in order to communicate but rather a social activity, one of whose outcomes may be communication. Practices are habitual activities that occur in social and cultural spaces. As Baynham remarks, “investigating literacy as practice involves investigating literacy as ‘concrete human activity’, not just what people do with literacy, but also what they make of what they do, the values they place on it and the ideologies that surround it. Practice provides a way of linking the cognitive with the social, opening up the possibility of an integrated approach to the study of literacy in use” (1995, p. 1). To look at language not as a system but as a practice brings our attention down to the local, to “discursive activity in opposition to structuralist, semiotic, and poststructuralist conceptions of it as structure, system, or abstract discourse” (Schatzki, 2001, p. 1). From this point of view, language knowledge is “grounded in and emergent from language use in concrete social activity for specific purposes that are tied to specific communities of practice” (Hall, et al. 2006 p. 235).

Canagarajah (2007) makes a related point in his discussion of Lingua Franca English (LFE). This distinction between English as a lingua franca and lingua franca English is an important one, since the former tends towards an understanding of a pre-given language that is then used by different speakers, while the latter suggests that LFE emerges from its contexts of use. According to Canagarajah, “LFE does not exist as a system out there. It is constantly brought into being in each context of communication” (2007, p. 91). From this point of view, “there is no meaning for form, grammar or language ability outside the realm of practice. LFE is not a product located in the mind of the speaker; it is a social process constantly reconstructed in sensitivity to environmental factors” (p. 94).

This is consistent with the argument I have been making for the need to escape the predefinition of a language user by geographical location or variety and instead to deal with the contextual use of language. Put another way, if we adapt a *translingual* model of language (cf. Pennycook, 2007; Pennycook, 2009) to look at English use, the relationship to be understood is among interlingual resources (what language resources people draw on), colingual relations (who says what to whom where) and ideolinguistic implications (what gets taken from what language use with what investments, ideologies, discourses and beliefs).

This is no longer therefore about whether count nouns get pluralised, local language terminology enters English, tag questions become fixed, verb tense and aspect are realised differently, or different English users share different pragmatic and cognitive orientations. By starting with the possibility of transidiomatic practices rather than language norms, we can incorporate variety as well as speaker locality, and thus raise questions about access to varieties “which will still be largely determined by one’s proximity to education and, for that matter, all other related symbolic goods in the social market” (Tupas, 2006, p. 180); about the contextual linguistic capital of language users, which as Lorente (2007) shows in the context of domestic workers in Singapore, is not just about varieties of English but rather is a far more complex struggle over linguistic capital and ideology; and about the ways in which our language desires are produced in the global marketplaces of English, where “English emerges as a powerful tool to construct a gendered identity and to gain access to the romanticised West” (Piller and Takahashi, 2006, p. 69). This approach to language no longer treats difference as epiphenomenal variegation, with language users, culture and history peripheral to the similarity at the heart of English; and it overcomes “the inability of linguists to give primacy to language speakers and to the history of a language that remains a fundamental limitation to this day” (Nakata, 2007, p. 39).

TRANSLINGUAL FRANCA ENGLISH

I have been trying here to explore an understanding of language that seeks neither national nor international framings of English but instead incorporates the local, agency, and context in their complex interactions. The crucial question is not one of pluralisation – English or Englishes – but rather what language ideologies underlie the visions of plurality. To argue for a monolithic version of English is clearly both an empirical and a political absurdity, but we need to choose carefully between the available models of pluricentric Englishes, and might be better off thinking in terms of plurilithic Englishes. This notion can avoid the pitfall of states-centric pluralities that reproduce the very linguistics they need to escape in order to deal with globalised linguascapes. This can help us escape from the circles and boxes based on nations that have so bedevilled world Englishes and linguistics more generally.

Instead we can start with an understanding of translingual franca English, which is taken to include *all* uses of English. That is to say LFE is not limited here to expanding circle use or NNS-NNS interactions, but rather is a term to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all English use. In this field, English users all over the world draw on various resources in English. And in this sense, “in its emerging role as a world language, English has no native speakers” (Rajagopalan, 2004, p. 112). We then need to think in terms of language use not so much as using a language in context (with a pre-given notion of language being deployed in the under-theorised notion of context) but rather as a local practice. Language speakers come with language histories, and means of interpretation – the ideolinguistic dimension where English is one of many languages, a code useful for certain activities, a language connected to certain desires and ideologies. As Canagarajah (2007) reminds us, lingua franca English does not exist outside the realm of practice; it is not a product but a social process that is constantly being remade from the semiotic resources available to speakers, who are always embedded in localities, and who are always interacting with other speakers.

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