Introduction to the World Englishes Debates, with 'Chinese Characteristics'

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Introduction

The debate over which varieties of English or 'Englishes' should be taught in different parts of the world has been going on for at least 30 years. The debate was highlighted at the British Council's 50th anniversary conference in 1984 when Randolph Quirk and Braj Kachru argued over which standard of English should be taught, the former being in favour of teaching to a standard English model in all contexts, and the latter in favour of a model related to how English is used in countries where English is not the mother tongue, i.e. a 'World Englishes' model (McKay, 2002, pp. 50–51).

Since that time the number of English speakers around the world has increased significantly so that there are now more non-native speakers than native speakers. In view of this, as Ferguson (2006) points out "[a]s an international language English can no longer be the exclusive property of its native speakers" (p. 175). Given that the English language is now 'owned' by non-native speakers as well as native speakers, some scholars question the assumption that standards for English learning should be set according to native English speaker (typically British or American) models.

This article aims to introduce the main World Englishes debates, that is which English should be taught and which teachers should teach it with particular reference to China.

Kachru's model of Englishes around the world

The usual model used to show the demographic distribution of Englishes, i.e. Englishes which are linked to a specific territory or culture, is that devised by Kachru in 1986 (see Figure 1). In this model he uses a three circle typology: **inner circle** Englishes are represented by mother tongue English speakers (ENL – English as a native language) from the mother country, the UK, and from the first migrations to countries such as North

Figure 1. Kachru's Concentric Circle of English (based on Kachru 1997, p. 213)

Expanding circle, e.g. China

Outer circle, e.g. India

Inner circle, e.g. UK, USA
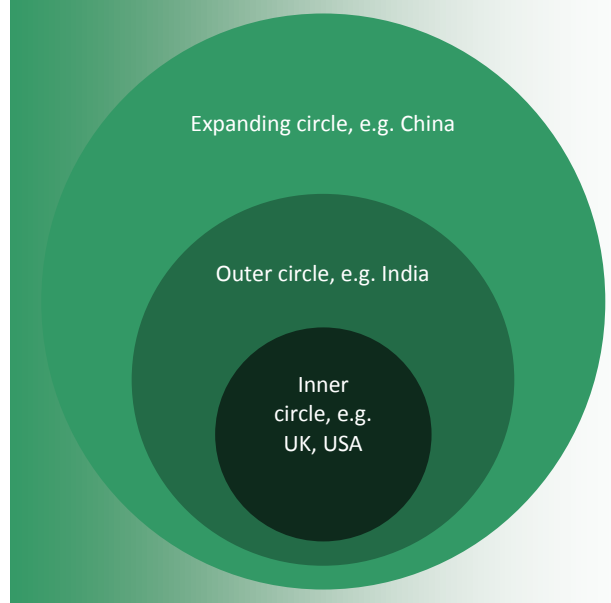
America and Australia. The latter Englishes have developed in different ways from British English due to the different sociolinguistic contexts in which the migrants found themselves, for example, vocabulary change through contact with indigenous peoples (Jenkins, 2009, p. 5).

Outer circle Englishes are represented by those countries which were colonised by Britain and where English has been or is learned as a second language (ESL). These countries include India and Nigeria. Some native speakers consider these Englishes to be 'interlanguage', i.e. learner language, where the native (inner circle) speaker target has not yet been reached.

Expanding circle Englishes are represented by countries where English is increasingly learned as a foreign language (EFL). English has never had an official role in these countries, but is being learned as a means of communication with native and other non-native speakers in the globalised world. The expanding circle is, indeed, where the number of English speakers is expanding the most rapidly, and includes China.

Kachru's model has been and still is extremely influential. For example, Crystal (2004) referred to it when he calculated that numbers of non-native English speakers (ESL and EFL) – in the outer and expanding circles – overtook numbers of native (ENL) speakers in the inner

circle somewhere between 1997 and 2003 (between his first and second editions of *English as a Global Language*). According to Crystal, this is a situation which is 'without precedent' (p. 29) for an international language. Crystal updated his 2003 calculations in 2008 and estimated that there could be as many as two billion speakers of English by that time (cited in Jenkins, 2009, p. 232). The numbers are shown in Figure 2.

The situation in China

The recent history of English in China has been somewhat chequered. After the Communists took power in 1949 English was the language of the enemy. In 1952, there were only eight HE institutions teaching English in China (Chang, 2006, p. 515). In the early 1960s, after China broke off relations with Russia (Russian was the first foreign language taught at that time), an official decision was taken to make English the first foreign language in secondary schools. However, English was then banned during most of the cultural revolution between 1966 and 1976 and only reinstated in a small way at the higher education level when China resumed its membership of the United Nations in 1971 and after President Nixon visited China in 1972 (Feng, 2009, p. 86). From 1978 onwards, English became an essential ingredient in China's modernization programme, the 'Four Modernizations', which refers to the modernization of industry,

Figure 2. Trends in the growth of English (based on Crystal, 2003, p. 67–69)

English as a global language	First edition (1997)	Second edition (2003)
Inner circle (mainly ENL)	320 – 380 million	320 – 380 million
Outer circle (mainly ESL)	150 – 300 million	300 – 500 million
Expanding circle (mainly EFL)	100 – 1000 million	500 – 1000 million
Global estimates	**First edition (1997)**	**Second edition (2003)**
L1 speakers of English	337 million	329 million
L2 speakers of English	235 million	431 million
L1 and L2 speakers of English in 2008		2 billion

agriculture, national defense, and science and technology (Feng, 2009, p. 86) along with its 'open door' and reform policies. Thereafter English language teaching in China rapidly increased.

In 1982, the Ministry of Education in China stipulated that English should be designated as the first foreign language to be taught in secondary schools and as the preferred foreign language to be taught in higher education institutions (Chang, 2006, p. 516). English degree courses have played an important role in China's development according to Chang (2006):

Supported by national foreign language policy, [China] is enjoying a period of unprecedented development against a background of accelerating globalisation and the rise of English as a global language (p. 518).

English has also become a high status language, which can be demonstrated by the fact that many parents, particularly in the wealthier areas, are prepared to invest in expensive bilingual education from an early age; e.g. in Harbin in 2005 the annual cost of bilingual kindergarten was 2300 US dollars, well above average family income for that year (Feng, 2009, p. 93). By 2003 there were bilingual kindergartens in major cities, 200 million children learning English in Chinese medium schools and 13 million at universities. By 2006 there were 350 million learners of English in China (Pan and Seargeant, 2012, p. 62).

Currently, the teaching of English usually starts when children are nine or ten years old and they study English as a compulsory subject for nine to ten years, although an important point to note is that the provision of English greatly varies between regions. For example, inland and remote regions have far less access to English than the coastal regions and economically wealthy areas (Feng, 2009, p. 92).

Which pedagogical model – Standard English or China English?

The accepted model for teaching English in China is that of standard British or American English. However, with over 350 million Chinese learning English the question is why they should be learning English according to

these standards, rather than a home-grown China English standard.

Several linguistic features of China English have been identified by China English scholars. He and Li (2009, pp. 72–74) list them according to the four levels of phonology, lexis, syntax and discourse pragmatics and believe that these features may be more useful to Asian learners of English than British or American norms.

- **Phonology**: e.g. replacement of θ with *s* and ð with *d*
- **Lexis**: e.g. *four modernizations*
- **Syntax**: e.g. the null subject parameter, where subjects are required in English sentences but are optional in Chinese
- **Discourse pragmatics**: e.g. in standard English texts, the main topic comes first followed by supporting material, while in China it is the other way round

Until recently standard varieties of British and American English were promoted as the only acceptable pedagogical models for English language teaching. Reasons for this are, among other things, because the standard language has prestige, while non-standard language forms are stigmatised. A language needs to be codified, that is the 'correct' forms of grammar and orthography need to be written down in order to achieve legitimacy. Once codified, any variations on these established norms are considered to be 'errors'. The main way to spread new words and linguistic forms is through dictionaries and grammar books, the authoritative works on standard usage. The new forms are then spread through education in the standard language.

Englishes which deviate from the standard, such as the English varieties in the outer and expanding circles which have non-standard features in spoken and written forms, are considered by some scholars in inner circle countries and, in fact, by some teachers in outer and expanding circle countries, to be non-legitimate, or an attempt to justify an inability to learn the standard language. For example, new linguistic forms such as *teacheress*, an example of Indian English, would most likely be marked as an 'error', according to the standard English model, but an 'innovation' for a World Englishes model.

However, the practice of English in all circles "is always embedded in local cultures and is always influenced by the previous linguistic habits of the new speakers" (Mufwene, 2010, p. 47) and is continuously subject to variation and change, as is evident from the many varieties of Englishes. As Mufwene (2010) points out, "the notion of a global English with uniform structural features all over the world is a utopia we may soon forget about" (p. 47).

One of the findings of He and Li's (2009) study into student perceptions of China English was that participants felt that linguistic features of China English, such as those above, "cannot be avoided in the English learning process and thus ought to be a legitimate part of the local English curriculum" (2009, p. 86). China English, according to Qiong (in Jenkins, 2009) is a language:

> ...which is as good a communicative tool as standard English. The pronunciation is close enough not to be too much of a problem; there may be some syntactic and grammatical differences attributable to the influence of Chinese; and the lexis may occasionally differ, reflecting cultural differences... (p. 216).

These cultural differences are reflected by some linguistic features where it is not possible to find English equivalents, such as the 'four modernizations'. According to He and Li (2009, p. 85), this alternative English, which has standard English as its core but with some of the above Chinese linguistic features, would give Chinese teachers feelings of empowerment knowing that their 'Chinese-accented English' was recognized institutionally. This brings us to the question of which teachers should be employed to teach English in China.

Native or non-native English speaking teachers?

Any suggestion that a suitably qualified non-native English teacher is not an appropriate person to teach English stirs the blood of your average applied linguist. For example, quite recently, a job advertisement appeared on the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL) mail list. The job specified that the institution concerned required a 'native English speaker'

to teach English in Spain. This sparked a spirited chorus of indignation against the institution, which had chosen so unadvisedly to place its advertisement on BAAL's mail pages. The opinion of many applied linguists is that it is a fallacy that native speaking English teachers are 'better' teachers than non-native English speakers (Phillipson, 1992, p. 126; Cook, 1999). Indeed many researchers have striven to demonstrate the benefits to be had from being taught by non-native English speaking teachers, who so clearly understand the difficulties in learning English (Medgyes, 1992; Seidlhofer, 1999; Richard-Amato, 2003). In China, however, there are higher education institutions which seek specifically to employ native English speaking teachers, particularly as regards oral English (Stanley, 2013). He and Miller (2011) carried out an investigation into whether Chinese students in China, who were studying non-English majors, preferred native English speaking teachers or Chinese teachers of English. They found that students believed they could benefit from both types. In reality, Chinese speakers of English are likely to have to communicate with a variety of other non-native English speakers.

Alternative pedagogical models

One idea for an alternative pedagogical model is for an English containing English as a lingua franca (ELF) forms. These are linguistic features which are common 'errors' with all learners of English globally, such as uncountable nouns with the plural 's', e.g. *informations*, the omission of the 3rd person singular *s* or *es* of regular verbs, and use of the wrong article or omission of articles, none of which have an adverse effect on understanding (for more information on the nature of ELF, see Jenkins, 2009, pp. 143–150). One limitation of Kachru's model is that it cannot show the location of ELF speakers, because ELF speakers cross boundaries between the circles (Ferguson, 2007). ELF, Ferguson asserts, is a 'deterritorialised' variety because it is a formulation of globalisation, occupying academic, administrative and political domains.

Another model could be the speaker's own variety of English, such as China English, "the English used by Chinese people in China, being based on standard English and having Chinese characteristics" (Wang, 1991 in He and Li,

2009, p. 71).

However, unless these models acquire prestige through being codified in dictionaries and grammar books, they are unlikely to be adopted by policy makers. As Spolsky (2004) remarks, "[o]ne of the views of the standard variety is that it is a conspiracy of the elite establishment to maintain power" (p. 27). As long as power remains in the hands of standard English speakers, then this is the variety of English that English learners globally will strive to attain. Ferguson (2006) points out that there is little enthusiasm in Singapore or India for example, for a standard Indian or standard Singapore English. This has implications for China English, as 'high level political endorsement is surely necessary if a local variety, however sociolinguistically valid, is to find adoption as a teaching model' (p. 171).

Conclusion

This article has constituted a very brief overview of the main debates in World Englishes: which English to teach and which teachers should teach English. If China becomes the country with the highest number of English speakers in the world there may be a justification to standardise China English. However, whether this happens will depend upon political will as well as attitudes of Chinese learners and their motivations for learning English.

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