Views on English as the Language of International Creative Literature

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Abstract

The present joint paper aims at presenting views on the nature and role of English in Asia, especially as the language of new literatures in English. The paper discusses the Asianization and Africanization of English with reference to Kachru's (1986) division of English into three concentric circles: the inner circle where English is a native language, the outer circle where it is a second language, and the expanding circle where it is a foreign language. We have divided the paper into five sections: introduction, the global diffusion of English, perceptions of the new varieties, the need for a broader pragmatics and conclusion, followed by references. The paper argues that the global spread of English has generated varying perspectives on the nature and functions of its acculturated varieties. Broadly speaking, the debate has divided scholars into two camps holding diametrically opposing views on the multiple versions of English as the language of international communication and of literatures in English. On the one hand, some scholars view variations as symptoms of linguistic degeneration and deterioration. This normative view stems, at least partly, from the problems the new forms of English pose in terms of international intelligibility. This has been a traditional trend. On the other hand, some scholars legitimize these deviations as inevitable manifestations resulting from the demands of the new cultural contexts. The argument of the latter camp is based on the premise that the new varieties require a broader pragmatic framework, because Anglo-centric or so-called universal pragmatics is inadequate to describe them satisfactorily. This is a relatively recent trend. This descriptive trend views the new varieties of English as legitimate mediums of creative literatures across the globe.

Key expressions: spread of English, adaptation of English, literatures in English, appreciation and criticism of new varieties of English and new literatures in English

Introduction

English has become an international language. There are other international languages such as Chinese and Russian, but we can say that English is more international than these languages. It is a language which can claim to have more varieties than any other major language such as Arabic and Hindi. English is one language into which a major chunk of world literature is translated every year. It is a language in which some creative literature is produced in almost every country. It is this international nature of English that enables it to set new trends thematically and stylistically. In this address, we are going to focus on two things. First, we will focus on the spread of English from its parental home to newer locations and its changed role as a medium of creative literature, which has led it to adapt itself to the demands of its new habitats and generate innumerable new varieties. Secondly, we will discuss the diametrically opposite perceptions of these new varieties of English. The traditional trend would prefer to look at the new literatures as being linguistically inferior to the so-called native variety literatures such as British and American literatures. The relatively recent trend would disagree with this normative view hold a descriptive view on the new literatures in English.

The Global Diffusion of English

The spread and indigenization of the English language has been the topic of several conferences and seminars in recent times. Undoubtedly, the "glossography" of English in the present world is both qualitatively and quantitatively unprecedented (Nayar 1994). It is common knowledge that English first spread to Scotland, Wales and Ireland; then to North America, Canada and South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. However, the spread of English to these countries is not our concern in this paper. Our focus is on the spread of the English language to countries that fall within the outer and expanding circles and resultant changes in the language at phonological, lexical, grammatical, and discourse levels.

Linguists had predicted this phenomenal diffusion and adaptation of English nearly a half century ago. For example, Halliday, MacIntosh and Strevens (1964) and Greenberg (1966) cited in Norrish (1997) had anticipated two changes. First, the ownership of the so-called native English countries and native English speakers would come to an end. Secondly, English would diversify, and consequently local varieties of the language would develop. To use Thumboo's (2001) words, the language would set into new habitations, and re-orientate itself to serve other cultures and, as a result, would acquire new names such as Indian English, Filipino English, South African English, and so on.

Obviously, the forecast has come true and the new varieties require fresh terms to designate the processes that characterize them. Therefore, it is no wonder that critical literature (e. g. Kachru 1983, Pandharipande 1987, Phillipson 1992, Crystal 1997, Pennycook 1997, Annamalai 2004, Phan Le Ha 2005) is replete with a whole bunch of expressions to describe the diffusion and nativization of English: pluralization, diversification, hybridization, localization, indigenization; decolonization, dehegemonization, liberation; globalization, internationalization, universalization of the English language, and so on. In this regard, it is worth considering the questions Horibe (2000) and McArthur (2004) respectively raise: "Is English Cinderella, a kidnapped or adopted

child, or Godzilla?" and "Is it world English or international English or global English, and does it matter?" Obviously, none of the labels listed above is wholly satisfactory and neutral. Each nomenclature has its limitations and its specific value, and serves a chosen purpose. Different scholars select different designations to support the perspective they adopt. Each label promotes its own construct, clusters of presuppositions, concepts and approaches that often determine the direction and type of exploration and conclusion. These descriptions mould our perceptions and generate world-views and images. Some of these labels connote a patronizing attitude and suggest a mono-centric approach, whereas others imply liberation from bondage and indicate a pluralistic approach. Strong compulsions have motivated scholars to rename the language. Two such compulsions are a need to respond to the postcolonial ambiguity about the globalization of English and a desire to shape a new pedagogical ideology (see Erling 2005).

In addition to the above terms, people describe the multiple new varieties of English as manifestations of a transplanted, indigenized, reincarnated language. In the present paper we call them "twice born varieties", because the language was transported from its native soil (the U.K.), transplanted into an alien soil (India, for example), and indigenized to perform culture-specific functions. Thus, English is a twice born language in the socio-cultural contexts that fall outside the inner circle. Such a language is reborn in the sense that it takes on new forms and functions to carry the weight of new cultural experiences. These so-called non-native varieties of English are characterized with socio-linguistic and pragmatic transfer. That is to say, the so-called non-native speakers

and writers transfer to English the rules of use and usage from their own speech communities. Scholars (e.g., Pandharipande 1987, p.155) have classified such transfers into two categories: unintentional and intentional. Thus, on the one hand, we have ESL/EFL learners who unconsciously transfer the rules and norms of use from their mother tongue and apply them to the other tongue. On the other hand, creative writers like India's Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and Khushwant Singh, and Nigeria's Achebe and Ojaide consciously deviate from the norms of the so-called native varieties of English. Thus, the adoption of English for literary writing is another instance of nativization, which extends the process to expressive domains (Annamalai 2004). The new users of English exploit the protein potential of English to satisfy their communicative needs. The creative users of English possess it, make it their own, bend it to their will, and assert themselves through it rather than submit to the dictates of its norms. They borrow it, and recreate, stretch, extend, contort, and indigenize it (D'Souza 2001, p. 150).

Needless to say, these linguistic changes are beyond the control of the linguist and the language planner. When English migrates to foreign countries, it diffuses and internationalizes, acculturates and indigenizes, and adapts and diversifies (Honna 2003). The new users absorb, re-orient, appropriate and transform it. They liberate it to embody the energies of their respective sensibilities. The linguistic, social and cultural contexts of Asia and Africa necessitate, initiate and propel the development of new varieties of English. Evidently, these speech communities share the medium, but not the messages. The various reincarnations of English share the medium but use it to express native and local messages. The

different dialects of English serve as acts of identity. In this view, English is no longer a Western language with Western canonicity (Kachru, cited in Prendergast 1998). The major varieties of English in Asia and Africa have broken the umbilical ties with the language. Thus there is a need to redefine terms such as "speech community", "native speaker", "norm" and "standard" (Kachru, cited in Prendergast 1998) and to question the concept of "native speaker" (Gupta 1999, p.59).

A logical parallel of the above deconstruction of the native variety myth is the justification of the hybridization of the language by non-native creative writers. It would be in the fitness of things to note how some African and Asian creative writers perceive the adoption of English for literary creativity.

The Nigerian writer Achebe (1965, p. 29) feels that it is neither necessary nor desirable for him to use English like a native writer does. Achebe (1975, p. 62) wants the English language to carry the weight of his African experience. Obviously, the native variety in its unchanged form is incapable of serving that purpose. To achieve that objective, it will have to be a new English, still in communion with its 'ancestral home' but altered to suit its new African surroundings. Ojaide (1987, pp. 165-167), another Nigerian writer, professes that the English that he writes and speaks is neither mainstream British nor American, and he cherishes this uniqueness. The sensibility that he expresses is African sensibility, which is different from Western and Asian sensibilities, though a little closer to the Asian sensibility. His writing, though in English, has its roots in Africa, not in England or North America. Being a cultural standard bearer of the African world, not of the British or Western world, he is free to manipulate English to his advantage. Soyinka (1993, p. 88) regards native English as a linguistic blade in the hands of the traditional cultural castrator, which black people have twisted to carve new concepts into the flesh of white supremacy. Sidhwa (2000), cited in Yoneoka (2002), sounds a similar note when he remarks, "the colonized have subjugated the English language, beaten it on its head and made it theirs, and in adapting it to their use, in hammering it sometimes on its head and sometimes twisting its tail, they have given it a new shape, substance and dimension".

Raja Rao (1938) echoes the views voiced by Achebe, Ojaide, and Soyinka. In the foreword to Kanthapura he admits that "a language that is not one's own" is inadequate to express "the spirit that is one's own". He confesses that the various shades and omissions of certain thought-movements look maltreated in a foreign language. Perhaps it is because of this inadequacy that Dasgupta (1993, p. 201) labels English as an alien language, an aunt, not a mother. His contention is that even if Indians have been using and exploiting English, it has not got close to their hearts. It is not one of them although it is an important presence to be respected. Kourtizin (2000), cited in Lee (2005), holds a similar view of Japanese, which is not his first language: "English is the language of my heart, the one in which I can easily express love for my children; in which I know instinctively how to coo to a baby; in which I can sing lullabies, tell stories, recite nursery rhymes, talk baby talk. In Japanese, there is some artificiality about my love; I cannot express it naturally or easily. The emotions I feel do not translate well into the Japanese language…"

It is this inadequacy of the other tongue that prompts Raja Rao to use the English language innovatively to make it approximate the Kannada rhythm. In keeping with his theme in Kanthapura he experiments with the language following the oral rhythms and narrative techniques of traditional models of writing. He breaks the formal English syntax to express the emotional upheaval that shook the village of Kanthapura. The author's foreword to the novel almost spells out the postcolonial cultural agenda: "The telling has not been easy…. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect, which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it."

And this seems to be true of all non-native varieties. All non-native writers of English literature write with an accent, as it were, because they have to carry the weight of different experiences in various surroundings. We agree with Nelson (1985, p. 245) who observes," When one reads a non-native variety text or listens to a non-native discourse, it becomes clear that there are devices and elements that are not the same as those in a native variety text or discourse. From the level of vocabulary to that of stylistic features, discourse arrangement and speech functions, the text or discourse is "marked" as "non-native".

Perceptions of the New Varieties

We do not think any other language has earned so many descriptive labels as English has. It has acquired many names (Erling 2005) because it has many accents (Wells 1982). As we have said earlier in this paper, each designation carries a load of signification and value. For example, the term "Englishes" assumes that the language is not a monolith, but a group of varieties that are similar and different at the same time. Each nomenclature carries various perspectives: linguistic, cultural, and ideological (Prendergast 1998). On the one hand, when we adopt a descriptive point of view, we imply that all the varieties have an equal status; on the other hand, when we choose a prescriptive approach, we connote some sort of hierarchy. Like Phillipson (1992), Kachru (1998), cited in Prendergast (1998), feels that the second attitude suggests a kind of linguistic imperialism. He thinks that English language teaching has not yet got rid of the dominant colonialist culture, which has generated paradigms of dependence and marginality. He cites the "English conversation ideology" in Japan as an alarming example of colonial hangover. In his opinion, the Japanese idea of English conversation has two functions. First, it accords a high status to Western culture --- especially US culture. Secondly, it endorses the Western ownership of the English language.

The hegemony of native varieties of English finds nourishment from two sources: the mechanisms created by the West, and the self-nullifying attitude of the non-native speakers toward their own varieties. Native speakers have created certain mechanisms to perpetuate the dominance of native varieties. We can cite the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (Jet Program) as one of the strategies employed by some "inner circle" governments and their private agencies. The traditional owners of English manage to continue the empowerment of the native speaker model and the native English model through what Nayar (1994) terms as "quasi-diplomatic organizations like the British Council and the USIA" and through

what Kachru (1996) calls indirect and subtle "arms of codification" such as dictionaries, lexical manuals, pedagogic resources, media agencies, elite power groups, which generate language attitudes and psychological pressure, and instruments of evaluation. Talking about the instruments of language assessment, Pennycook (1997) remarks that the forms and processes of accreditation, the exams and tests of English, carry a huge institutionalized cultural and economic capital because a small difference on TOEFL can have tremendous implications for employment, study overseas, and so on. The native speaker teacher who is an ambassador of Nayar's (1994) "linguistic elitism" and Phillipson's (1992) "linguistic imperialism" is yet another mechanism created to perpetuate the native English myth. The dominance of the English of the "inner circle" countries is further consolidated through the discourse of ELT, which is a subtle form of advertising and selling their English (see Pegrum 2004).

Undoubtedly, the native speaker has been slow in recognizing and accepting non-native varieties of English due to their deviant phonological, lexical, grammatical, and discourse forms (Kachru 1982, p.43). Cultural and linguistic ethnocentrism has led to the description of these varieties as deficient. Thus, when people compare native norms with the norms of other speakers of English, they usually vote in favour of the former. Scholars such as Phan Le Ha (2005, p. 34) maintain that although native speakers seem to celebrate the global spread of English, they seem to oppose the initiatives to integrate and equate non-native varieties with native varieties. Nevertheless, the above viewpoint is just one side of the coin.

In our view, non-native speakers themselves are to blame, at least partly, because they help perpetuate the hegemony. In fact, quite often it is the case that native speakers are more tolerant of variations and deviations (surprisingly, some scholars, e.g. Bobda 2004, interpret this tolerance as a subtle way to perpetuate and promote linguistic apartheid) than non-native speakers are. Native speakers such as Crystal (2005) have spent their lives attacking language purists many of whom come from non-native backgrounds. Let us elaborate on this issue at some length. For example, most educational institutions all over Asia support the perpetuation of the dominant British or American form of English, thereby implying that their own varieties are "impure", "imperfect" or "substandard". A cursory glance at most English language teaching job advertisements (especially in the Middle East and Japan) will testify to this observation. Let us draw the readers' attention to the two important qualifications these advertisements demand. First, the prospective candidate should be a native speaker of English. Secondly, the applicant should have a diploma or degree from Britain, United States, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand. This means that many Asian employers still look at their own varieties through the glasses of British or American English and think of them as substandard, deficient, and inferior varieties. Moreover, it is an impression still fostered by the examining boards, which dominate teachers' mindsets.

To cap it all, dispassionate observers of language also assist in maintaining the hegemony. We agree with Crystal (1999) that even linguists complain about various usages they do not like. Some onus lies with teachers too. Unfortunately, many Asian teachers of English are pedagogical schizophrenics: they themselves speak and write in their own varieties (Indian, Japanese,

etc.) of English, but unrealistically expect their students to speak and write in American or British varieties of English. Kandiah (1991), cited in Yoneoka (2002), points out that attitudes among South Asian speakers to their own forms of English have always been self-annulling. For example, nearly sixty years after independence, Indian English finds it difficult to free itself from the weight of "Received Pronunciation". Chaudhary (1998) rightly observes that the ability to write by the rules of Wren and Martin, and Nesfield and speak by the norms of Daniel Jones is an essential qualification for a good job in India. Many teachers believe that they speak Queen's English or BBC English. In fact, they seem to be taking pride in this belief. We do not think teachers from other Asian countries are different. Honna and Takeshita (1998) observe that although the stigmatized view of non-native varieties is diminishing, most Japanese teachers and students equate the English language with American English and look down upon their own variety and other non-native varieties just because they differ from American variety. To cut the long story short, the dominant attitude among Asian public in general and in Asian academic world in particular is that American and British people are the owners of the English language and that their varieties are better than Asian varieties.

A corollary of this negative attitude towards non-native varieties is a similar self-abnegating perception of creative writing in English. To cite just one case, Indian writing in English has aroused diametrically opposing attitudes and approaches. Nemade (1985, p. 31) discusses it as a rootless phenomenon. He argues that it will never receive international readership because it falls short of magnificence. Criticizing it as a "parrotry" (p.33) and "mimicry" (p.36) and describing the foreign medium as "suppressive" (p.33) of the natural talent in the Indian writer, he prophesies that no Indian writer in English can ever enjoy the position of eminence because his writings lack national culture and national language. Nemade's viewpoint finds support in Patke's (1986) review of Jussawalla's "Family Quarrels: Towards a criticism of Indian writing in English" in which he is little optimistic about the Indian writer's global recognition because English is not the language of his intellectual and emotional make-up. These critics whose views demonstrate lack of solidarity and loyalty toward their own variety maintain that Indian writers can produce works of first order only in their mother tongues. They hold the view that Indian literature in English is "parasitic" and hence can never reach the excellence of vernacular or regional literatures. Patke (1986, p. 317), although hopeful of finding a good Indian writer in English, argues that the Indian writer in English has no tradition and heritage of the English language, either diachronic or synchronic, to manipulate, and therefore his literary style remains rootless. This view finds an echo in Ezekiel's poems such as The Railway Clerk and Goodbye Party for Pushpa T S wherein the poet deliberately uses prominent features of Indian English such as use of the present progressive in place of the present simple, the invariable question tag, omission of articles, and so on.

Incidentally, the above objections could be easily refuted. First, it should be remembered that English was and is used for national integration in countries like India. Secondly, the classics of Joseph Conrad (who felt that if he had not written in English, he would not have written at all), Samuel Beckett, and Vladimir Nabokov testify to the fact that a non-native

writer can write in English as efficiently and effectively as a native writer.

However, a sympathetic and understanding attitude to Indian English and Indian English literature has developed over the years. The world wars led to cultural and linguistic tolerance. People began to accept and recognize new varieties of English and new literatures in English as vital contributions to the mainstream of English language and literature. Kandiah (1991), cited in Yoneoka (2002), feels that speakers of Indian English are now gradually coming to accept their usage as more respectable. Xiaoqiong's (2005) and Jin's (2005) research corroborates this optimism. Xiaoqiong's investigation into Chinese English teachers' attitudes to both the internationally coveted varieties and Chinese English reveals that majority of Chinese teachers think that China English will eventually become a standard variety. Similarly, Jin's inquiry into Chinese undergraduate students' preferences shows that Chinese English as a standard variety will stand alongside American English, which is a current national favourite.

This trend is due at least partly to efforts of academics and writers to promote Indian English as a valid and legitimate variety. Walsh (1973a, p. ix) describes Indian literature in English as having a past, a present, and a promising future, and he (1973b, pp. v, 1-27) acknowledges the contribution of Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan as "significant". Iyengar (1983, p. 3) calls Indian English literature "one of the voices in which India sings". For example, in recent years some Indian authors in English have found a place among the best authors in English (King 1980, p. ix). This recognition was anticipated by some of the literary and critical prophets like Jean Rhys, Claude McKay, Henry Handel Richardson, and Katherine Mansfield (King 1980, p. x). The large number of critical articles and journals on Indian literature in English is another proof that it is "an independent entity deserving serious critical attention" and not a "sporadic, adventitious, abnormal or invalid" phenomenon (Chindhade 1983, p. 251).

Need for a New Pragmatics

Levinson (1983) refers to (i) a universal pragmatics and (ii) a language-specific pragmatics. Thumboo (1994) suggests that there is a room for a varieties-specific or variety-specific pragmatics, and (iv) a comparative pragmatics. The varieties of English, and the literatures in them, pose problems and challenges, and offer opportunities for pragmatics. Their settings are so different that it is a daunting task to deal with them. Almost all these varieties are invariably part of a bilingual or multilingual setting. Many of them have not been analyzed yet. We need to describe their grammar, lexicon, syntax and phonology. Obviously, doing that is much easier than developing a pragmatics of each one of these varieties. Needless to say, the pragmatics of the native varieties cannot adequately describe the new varieties. As Thumboo (1991) remarks, they require a much broader pragmatics. It would be fallacious to apply one language-pragmatics, based on one semiotic. The differences in usage between varieties such as Filipino English and British English are more glaring than those between British and American English. As the new varieties grow, the existing paradigms become inadequate. Hence it would not be very fruitful to apply the pragmatics of English to all varieties of the language across the world.

Thus we need to develop a pragmatics of Indian English, Japanese English, Filipino English, Vietnamese English, and so on. Then, we can compare how, for example, politeness strategies, speech acts, and the maxims of conversational cooperation operate in the different varieties. These are tall orders. These are long journeys. Some scholars (Kachru 1983, 1986, 1998, 2004; Platt, et al. 1984; Parasher 1991; Gorlach 1991, 1995, 1998; Dasgupta 1993; Greenbaum 1996; Mehrotra 1998; McArthur 1998; Enokizono 2000; Thumboo 2001; Bolton 2002; Jenkins 2003; Stanlaw 2004; Melchers and Shaw 2003; Robertson, et al. 2005) have travelled a few miles. The first author of this paper has travelled a few steps in this direction (Patil 1989a, 1989b, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2005a, 2005b). The woods are lovely, dark and deep, and we have thousands of miles to go before we fully explore the pragmatic avenues.

Speech functions, which are specific to speech communities, are a prime area of study for pragmatics. The various speech acts such as apologizing, inviting, requesting, and so on, derive their uniqueness from the socio-cultural norms of the people participating in interaction (Kachru 1996, p. 127). There are important cross-cultural differences in the way speech acts are performed. Different cultures have different ways of doing things with words. Asians, for example, have their own ways of saying and meaning things in English. Ma (1996, p. 257) cites an interesting observation: a General Motors manager once expressed his frustration in these words: "I don't understand you Asians. You say "no" when you are supposed to say "yes", and say "yes" when you are supposed to say "no".

There are no common ideals, no common criteria, of politeness for all societies and all languages. For example, the "power principle" operates differently in Europe and America than in Asia. Gumperz (1970, p. 20) illustrates how strategies such as complimenting differ from society to society. For instance, in American society compliments are very brief and concise whereas in Japanese culture complimenting is a prolonged activity involving several exchanges of praise and ritual denials. To the Japanese it seems impolite to accept a compliment with a mere 'thank-you'. This cultural difference between American brevity and Japanese prolixity might sometimes cause, to use Crystal and Davy's (1969, p. 5) words, "general confusion, probably criticism and embarrassment as well". Complimenting in Indian English differs from complimenting in British and American English. Unlike compliments in the two native varieties, compliments in Indian English are two-dimensional. The person who offers a compliment maximizes praise of the hearer and simultaneously maximizes dispraise of self or at least minimizes praise of self. Patil (1994) has dealt with some aspects of the pragmatics of Indian English.

Apologizing in Japanese and American cultures, for instance, differs in certain ways (see Lingley 2006). Yet another case is that of complimenting. Complimenting is a more prolific and prolonged act in Japanese than in many other languages. Another significant aspect of Japanese linguistic politeness is its indirectness. Japanese is an incredibly indirect language. Westerners, known as "straight-shooters", "speak their minds", "make things clear"; but this forthrightness is considered a bit rude in Japanese culture. The real art of Japanese communication lies in being subtle in just the right way. To be indirect is to be polite. People

usually steer the conversation without being obvious about the topic of conversation. Requests are also often made indirectly. For example, "I would like to use the phone, but…" is preferred to "Can I use the phone?" another characteristic of Japanese conversation is avoidance of disagreement at all costs as group harmony is highly valued. It would be interesting to see how Japanese speakers of English iron out disagreements.

The gist of the preceding discussion is that theories of politeness, speech acts, and conversational cooperation should include socially conditioned aspects of language use and reflect cultural variability.

Conclusion

The present paper is a critical review of the various issues surrounding the use of English as the language of an international literature. It has attempted to capture the salient features and role of English in Asia and Africa, and drawn into focus some of its significant aspects such as its universal spread and subsequent formal and functional deviations, which have led to concerns about its intelligibility in the global context on the one hand, and a need to develop a wider pragmatics to accommodate its culture-specific functions on the other hand. As you can perceive, the general illocutionary force of the paper is that of an admonition to accept and promote the legitimacy of the evolving varieties as mediums of creative expression.

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