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Review Essay

# *Research Developments in World Englishes*
**Alexander Onysko (ed.) (2021)**

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*Review by Shaila Sultana*

## A paradigm shift in World Englishes as addressed in *Research Developments in World Englishes*

### 1 Introduction

The term 'World Englishes' (hereafter WEs) refers to the varieties of Englishes in the world, from the regional Englishes of Britain to the variety of Englishes in the US, Australia and New Zealand, and in East and West Africa and many Asian societies. It is also the study of discourses and genres in those contexts where English is regarded as a second or foreign language (Bolton, 2008; 2018). WEs pay more attention to the 'non-native' varieties of English developed outside the countries/contexts where English is the native language. These Englishes are distinctly different from the native varieties of English because of their linguistic, semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic features. These features epitomise the historical, political, social, and cultural resources of the contexts where these Englishes have evolved and emerged anew as nativised varieties of English.

WEs, first coined and extensively researched later by Kachru (1965, 1992, 2005), have managed to draw the attention of academia and researchers. Kachru identified the nativeness of the localised Englishes in different parts of the world in the 1980s. He initially divided the concentric circle into groups according to the geographical locations and political histories and life trajectories of the English language in specific geographical locations: Inner Circle Englishes like

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British, American, and Australian Englishes, spoken in countries where English is the first language of a majority of the population; outer-circle Englishes like Indian, Nigerian, and Singaporean Englishes, spoken generally as a second language; or expanding-circle Englishes like those in China, Japan, and Russia where English is regarded as a foreign language (Kachru, 1992). The division was problematised later on in light of the locatedness of different WEs in the circles (McArthur, 2003).

Nevertheless, WEs give recognition to the fact that there are various models of Englishes existing in different cultures and that they are equally acceptable and have an equal status similar to the ones traditionally accepted as the native varieties of English in the Inner Circle. The nativised and localised variations meet the communication needs of the local contexts and are owned by the users of the nativised and localised variety. The varieties of Englishes are enriched with linguistic and cultural resources from the social and cultural contexts where they evolve and emerge. Kachru argued in favour of a paradigm that would recognise diversity, pluralism, and uniqueness in these nativised and localised Englishes both at the level of theory and practice. In addition, he challenged the native-speakerism associated with the native speakers and their languages in the Inner Circle, which put the non-native speakers and varieties at a lower rung of the hierarchy.

As a paradigm, the notion of WEs has flourished extensively since it initiated a paradigm shift from linguistic imperialism and research in favour of establishing WEs as legitimate languages has been carried out until today. Tupas and Rubdy (2015: 1) stated that 'there is no one English, but many Englishes. No one has exclusive rights to the language; anyone who speaks it has the right to own it'. As Kachru's predecessors, they also commented on the term 'native speakers' associated with the Standard English and countries in the Inner Circle as the term 'disenfranchise[s] the majority of English speakers today' (Tupas and Rubdy, 2015: 1).

WEs is vehemently critiqued too. According to Canagarajah (2013: 60), WEs tended to identify local varieties of English by frequent reference to SE, 'assuming a monolithic standard'. As the reference point was the norm-providing Inner Circle countries where English was spoken as a native language, this approach seemed to marginalise creativity in local languages (Pennycook, 2008). Methodologically, because of its language-centric analytical tools, WEs seems to be insufficient to address the sociocultural dynamics of language use. For example, even though Bhatt's (2010: 534) enriched sociolinguistic observations of the syntactic and pragmatic features of the Indian variety of English indicated the acts of resistance and 'new articulations of identity, values,

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power, and solidarity' of post-colonial people, the research failed to analyse the contextual realities and speakers' purposes, intentions, and meanings. Thus, it was concluded that WEs, because of their inadequate integration of contextual information, ideologies associated with linguistic forms, and individual intertextual references, provided a limited view of post-colonial contexts, language use, and post-colonial identity. In addition, the WEs movement ignores the existence and uses of English in different varieties even within one country (Parakrama, 1995). With reference to Kachru's work, Canagarajah (1999: 180) pointed out that, in his attempt to systematise the periphery variants, Kachru has to standardise the language himself, leaving out many eccentric and hybrid forms of local Englishes as too unsystematic. The Kachruvian paradigm follows the logic of the prescriptive and elitist tendencies of the centre linguists.

Different varieties of English, such as Baboo English, Cheechee English, Butler English, Bearer English, Box-Wallah English, Kitchen English, Hinglish (Hindi-English), and Guru English (Aravamudan, 2006) become subsumed under the umbrella term 'Indian English'. That is why Pennycook (2003) has defined the World Englishes approach as the heterogeny position, juxtaposing it to the homogeny position of the linguistic imperialism approach to English, an extension of the same position. In addition, various other approaches to English have been introduced to increase a newer understanding of languages and language practices, such as English as a lingua franca, lingua franca English, English as a local practice, and English as a translingual practice.

In summary, according to the critiques of WEs, too great a preoccupation with the systematic features of English in the local language – as evidenced by the research in WEs – seems to hamper the ability to grasp the social dynamics and complexities of the local contexts. Canagarajah also (2013) drew attention to the trends of linguistics research on WEs, English as an international language and ELF and identified that these approaches are more occupied with finding stable linguistic systems and language varieties or glossodiversity, paying little attention to the changes in meaning or semiodiversity. Considering the mobility of English through diverse spatiotemporal contexts, Canagarajah (2013) unravelled the semiodiverse nature of postmodern postcolonial translingual English, which is reinvented by newer meanings in these various contexts (for his notion of lingua franca English, cf. Canagarajah, 2007a, 2007b, 2013).

On the one hand, even though WEs has been highly critiqued for its language-centred analysis and unidirectional reference to Standard English, the edited volume of Alexander Onysko's *Research Developments in World Englishes* (2021: 5) seems to be a timely endeavour where the chapters address the concerns mentioned above and issues that would enhance 'synergic knowledge'. On

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the other hand, it raises questions about the role, use, and status of Englishes in the world. Most importantly, *Research Developments in World Englishes* presents research studies that seem to address some of the concerns raised by newer movements, such as language as local practices and as translingual.

## 2 *Research Developments in World Englishes* at a glance

The volume opens with the right kind of tone set in its introductory chapter, 'Where are WEs Heading to? An Introduction to the Inaugural Volume of Bloomsbury Advances in World Englishes', in which Alexander Onysko gives a historical perspective on the emergence of the field of WE over the several decades after Kachru's phenomenal introduction of the term to academia. The chapter also provides a critical reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the paradigm. The chapter is rightly followed by Chapter 2, 'Decolonizing (World) Englishes', by Mario Saraceni and Camile Jacob where they explain the necessity of 'decolonizing (World) Englishes' – a way to minimise the limitations in the WEs paradigm. The chapter provides a strategic framework of decolonisation with specific attention to demythologising, de-silencing, and decolonising Englishes.

Decolonisation, according to Mario Saraceni and Camile Jacob, is about engaging with colonial history to identify how it influences the past, present, and future. A critical engagement with colonial history results in an alternative form of political praxis. This seems to reflect the ethos of decoloniality in/as praxis of Mignolo and Walsh (2018). They state that reflection creates scopes of decoloniality in/as praxis. Reflection promotes decolonial thinking and people may unpack the idiosyncrasies of coloniality that may be seen as benevolent and noble but deceptively compromise human rights. Decoloniality in/as praxis is expected to create space, as Mignolo and Walsh (2018: 7) suggested, for 'thought-reflection-action', while drawing attention to decoloniality as a critical discussion of the human, classifications, and Eurocentrism with reference to modernity/coloniality/decoloniality. Decoloniality is the 'disruptor in the academy' since it raises questions that have been constructed and accepted as infallible in academia (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 106). 'Decoloniality in/as praxis' has been used to understand coloniality as lived and embodied. Similarly, the demythologising, de-silencing, and decolonising framework seems to create opportunities for questioning the ontology and epistemology of the WEs paradigm, while liberating them from the clutches of the presumably Standard English and Inner Circle.

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Chapter 3, '"The Communicative Event" in International English(es) as Social Practice: Adducing a Tricodal/Trimodal Theory of the Linguistic Structuring of Social Meaning', by Allan James, seems to counterargue the age-old language-centric analytical framework associated with WEs. A threefold typology of social meaning (identification, representation, and action as modes) is developed. This framework represents a significant advancement in the discipline because it emphasises WEs as social practices and events. The framework also seems to support the ethos of language as a local practice (Pennycook, 2010; Sultana, 2015) which he suggested as a counterparadigm of WEs.

Chapter 4, 'Extending the Scope of World Englishes: Interactions across Englishes in Post-Protectorates and at the Grassroots', represents a research topic that may give a crucial direction for further study in WEs: non-elitist uses and forms of Englishes at the grassroots. In this chapter, Christiane Meierkord focuses on unexplored research contexts – former protectorates, League of Nations mandates, and United Nations trust territories – the Maldives and Uganda with a specific focus on speakers of different WEs. She talks about the state of English in the Maldives and Uganda and explores the non-elitist uses and forms of grassroots Englishes. Similarly, Chapters 5, 6, and 7 deal with the emergence of WEs in different multiple linguistic ecologies, such as the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Africa. Special attention is paid to languages in multilingual cultures and multilingual repertoire of speakers. Chapter 5, 'Contact, Asia, and the Rethinking of Englishes in Multilingual Ecologies', brings out the importance of less well-known typologies, such as tone, particles, usage, and mixed codes in new media for understanding WEs. Chapter 6, 'Multilingualism and the Role of English in the United Arab Emirates, with views from Singapore and Hong Kong', evaluates the position of WEs in Dubai, UAE, Singapore, and Hong Kong with reference to other WEs in these countries and to Kachru's Circle Model and Schneider's Dynamic Model.

In addition, in Chapter 7, 'The History of English Language Attitudes within the Multilingual Ecology of South Africa', Bertus van Rooy and Susan Coetzee-Van Rooy explore the history of language attitudes towards English in Afrikaans and other languages in South Africa. The importance of linguistic attitudes in nineteenth-century South Africa was outweighed by other factors, such as political freedom, economic success, and access to high-quality education, according to a careful examination of historical records in the Black South African English corpus. Thus, these chapters reveals how language typology, language policy practices, supra-segmental features and mixed code, and the historical presence of other languages, other varieties of Englishes, and other socioeconomic factors play a crucial role in Asian Englishes.

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In Chapter 8, 'Transnational Dialect Contact and Language Variation and Change in World Englishes', Rebecca Lurie Starr's study provides a crucial variationist sociolinguistic perspective. Referring to three waves in variation studies in sociolinguistics, she analyses internal variation within Englishes which have the potential to lead to changes in how Englishes are used. She also presents a strong case for the ability of specific linguistic traits to index a range of social meanings. The relationship among linguistic variations, indexical meanings, and social realities, such as mobility and migration, is succinctly presented. While Chapter 8 emphasises media consumption, international mobility, and institutional exonormativity as significant sources of dialect interaction, Chapter 9, '"I Don't Get It": Researching the Cultural Lexicon of Global Englishes', refers to the role of local cultural metaphors in various WEs. The chapter draws our attention to the growing idiomatic use of English in various countries and the possible impact the localised metaphors may have on the taxonomical organisation of English lexicons. David Crystal in this chapter proposes an encyclopedic taxonomical method that would produce a thorough and comparative record of terms with cultural roots in various varieties of English.

Chapter 10, 'Colonial Cultural Conceptualizations and World Englishes', seems to be a significant contribution which I believe researchers and academics will find enlightening, engaging, and worth reading. By focusing on texts of colonial history with a specific reference to the discursive construction of others, the chapter gives a nascent and in-depth understanding of how British colonisers used Western conceptual frameworks to make sense of language policies and practices, religious norms, ideologies, and practices, individual and collective sexual orientations and identities, and the sociocultural practices and realities of sub-Saharan Africa and India. Key programmatic writings detailing the tenets and goals of colonial policies, such as Lugard's Dual Mandate, League of Nations publications, reports commissioned by colonial authorities, and legal texts are among the text categories selected for analysis. A cognitive-cultural and cognitive-sociolinguistic perspective about these texts demonstrates that the Western interpretations led to instances of interference in the colonial societies that have left lasting marks up to the present day. The first attempt in the field of WEs to use the cultural-conceptual framework is done efficiently, and 'the zeitgeist in which second language varieties of English emerged' during the colonial period is revealed in the chapter.

While Chapter 10 deals with texts from the colonial era, Chapter 11, 'Individual Lives in Collectivist Faces: On Social Norms in a Radio Show', focuses on the interaction with young mothers in a radio show in the postcolonial context of Cameroon. Eric Anchimbe uses the case of Cameroon English

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and the postcolonial pragmatic framework to explore the conversations between a radio host and young mothers in a radio show transmitted on a weekend prime-time broadcast. His research demonstrates how the collective cultural framework that permeates Cameroonian culture is actualised at the discourse level and used to assess various circumstances in conversations. Thus, the chapter lays down the role of WEs in communicating regional cultural norms.

The only chapter in the volume dealing with WEs and language teaching, Chapter 12, 'Teaching (About) World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca', by Andy Kirkpatrick focuses on a different persistent issue in the field of WEs: how the widespread practice promotes a few standard varieties in the teaching of English; how the promotion of a few standard Englishes may be globally reversed; and how language teaching may be aligned with the global reality of Englishes and the various requirements for local and global communication. In this chapter, Andy Kirkpatrick begins by reexamining Kachru's six fallacies in this regard, then gives a concise account of the academic discourse from the past to the present, putting forward some specific strategies that may put WEs and English as a lingua franca into practice.

Chapter 13, 'Documenting World Englishes in the Oxford English Dictionary: Past Perspectives, Present Developments, and Future Directions', deals with the Oxford Dictionary of Englishes, OED: an active and adaptable lexical database for research on the lexica of different WEs. Danica Salazar identifies the OED as an excellent resource of lexical data from WEs. She suggests that the collection is becoming a representative and reliable dataset that may aid researchers in answering a range of questions about how English is used by various communities throughout the world.

### 3 *Research Developments in World Englishes*

One of the main concerns against the WEs paradigm is its preoccupation with language – the English language itself. The inaugural volume of Bloomsbury Advances in World Englishes, *Research Developments in World Englishes*, with its 13 chapters, seems to overcome this age-old criticism of WEs. The volume identifies more inclusive analytical models for labelling and describing features of WEs from a sociolinguistic perspective, understanding the relationship between WE and local culture and the discursive construction of individual and collective identities and identifying the emergences of newer forms of WEs with reference to globalisation, mobility, multilingualism, translingualism, and linguistic ecology. Each chapter introduces newer ways of exploring WEs, starting from WEs as social practices (Chapter 3) to the historicity of WEs (Chapters 5

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and 10) to metaphorical innovations (Chapter 9) and so on. All these different analytical frameworks in the volume show the necessity of reducing the dependence on the English language and culture as the point of reference in WEs research.

The theoretical engagements in different chapters in the volume are varied. Attempts at decolonising WEs by demythologising, de-silencing, and decolonising (Chapter 2), the inclusion of translanguaging conception of code-meshing and heteroglossia (Chapter 3), the consideration of interactions across Englishes through sociolinguistics of globalisation framework (Chapter 4), focus on multiple dimensions such as the historical, typological, and sociolinguistic contexts with another approach such as translanguaging (Chapter 5), corpus analyses of English writing done by indigenous Black South African people from 1867 until 2010 (Chapter 7), and consideration of a variationist approach to world Englishes (Chapter 8), cultural taxonomy and metaphors (Chapter 9), colonial cultural conceptualisation (Chapter 10), or postcolonial pragmatics (Chapter 11) indicate the researchers' commitment to the social and cultural diversity and decolonisation of WEs. None suggests replacing the history or, more specifically, the colonial history associated with colonisation. Instead, the volume repeatedly emphasises the necessity of embracing the history of colonisation associated with WEs. Thus, the chapters in the volume capture the paradigm shift in the WEs movement itself and present innovative ways of researching WEs in multilingual ecologies. In summary, the volume strongly denounces any research that intends to understand WEs with reference to understanding linguistic variations in Standard Englishes from the Inner Circle. Instead, the volume suggests revamping WEs with research on WEs with reference to historical, political, social, and cultural realities of the multilingual ecology.

A variety of research data have been gathered from diverse contexts, starting from much coveted digital communication (Chapter 3) to contexts beyond postcolonial settings, such as territories that were protected states, League of Nations mandates, and United Nations trust territories, Maldives and Uganda (Chapter 4), Dubai, Singapore, and Hong Kong (Chapter 6), South Africa (Chapter 7), social media and other online language use (Chapter 8), India and sub-Saharan Africa (Chapter 10), and a radio show in Cameroon (Chapter 11).

## 4 *Research Developments in World Englishes* and beyond

The introductory chapter mentions that postcolonial contexts have received immense attention in WEs research. That is why, perhaps, India and the Maldives have been covered as research contexts. Nevertheless, South Asian

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countries, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and Maldives are the fertile ground of WEs, and the oldest WEs, also known as Indian Englishes, emerged from one of the South Asian countries, India. These countries are also historically multilingual with the presence of 700 spoken languages in the multilingual ecology. Amongst these languages, 454 were found to be actively spoken in India, 122 in Nepal, 77 in Pakistan, 42 in Afghanistan, and 40 in Bangladesh (Lewis, Simons, and Fennig, 2013). The communities in these countries are linguistically fluid with blurry boundaries between many languages and dialects. Research shows that the South Asian language ecologies are multilingual, varied, and diverse, and the communities are multilingual in practice (Bolander and Sultana, 2019). A chapter or two on these contexts, such as Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh – less represented in WEs research – could be explored.

Since WEs became an established paradigm in the 1980s and Bloomsbury even initiated a new series for publication in 2022, it is important to draw attention to the fact that the policies and practices in formal domains across the world are, in effect, monolingual, nationalistic, and chauvinistic, and communities also have monolingual biases, specifically towards powerful languages, such as those declared to be the national language and the official language (Sultana, 2021). For example, as the language of the British colonisers with more than 200 years of history in the Indian subcontinent, English is now the language of globalisation and international communication and, finally, as the language of the neoliberal education system, has also become one of the most powerful languages in South Asia (Sultana, 2014; Bolton and Bacon-Shone, 2020; Sultana and Roshid, 2021; Sultana, at press). To put it simply, while research studies of WEs in South Asia opt for heterogeneity, in reality, South Asian communities seem proactive in promoting homogeneity, and linguicism. and linguistic hegemony (Sultana, in press). Even though the volume addresses this issue in Chapter 2, more constructive discussion is needed about the decolonisation and deeliticisation of WEs because the first and foremost step in decolonisation and dehegemonisation is to problematise the language-centrism observable in applied linguistics (Sultana, 2022; Sultana and Izadi, 2022).

WEs need to be protected from various forms of discrimination, linguistic racism, and ethnonationalism sustained and nurtured by monolingual biases towards the SE (see Chapter 2 of the volume). Higher education in the United States has taken constructive steps over the last 20 years to re-envision the monolingualist unidirectional curriculum of writing based on the WEs paradigm with reference to praxis-oriented research. Recently, the translingual approach to composition pedagogy, specifically accepting code-meshing as a communicative tool, has

made classroom pedagogy more effective. The approach also makes students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds value their native linguistic and non-linguistic resources in the classroom, have positive self-perception, and feel empowered. The Bloomsbury Advances in World Englishes may consider publishing more edited volumes and books on WEs, keeping the current sentiment and cutting-edge innovative ideas of applied linguistics.

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