



## REVIEW ARTICLE

### TRENDS, PARADIGMS AND CONCEPTS IN GLOBAL ENGLISH SOCIOLINGUISTICS

\*Atonde Terkimbi

Department of English Language and Applied Linguistic, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom

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#### ABSTRACT

The global spread of English has given rise to several sociolinguistic outcomes leading to the emergence of several concepts, perspectives and paradigms to account for or describe such a sociolinguistic situation. In this study, the most popular of these concepts have been critically analysed with the view to specifying what each entails and what makes it distinct from others. The analysis has revealed that though the concepts appear seemingly similar they are uniquely distinct as each echoes a specific sociolinguistic perspective. While the English as a Lingua Franca paradigm for example invokes the relationship between language and communication, World Englishes focuses on the relationship between language and community. English as a Global Language emphasises the status of English in the world while English as an International Language dwells on the functions of the language in the world. The democratisation of ownership of the language is the primary concern of English as Everyone's Language. The study however argues that most of these perspectives and paradigms are laden with assumptions which must constantly be challenged in order to generate new insights and a more informed understanding of the contemporary sociolinguistic context of the language.

#### INTRODUCTION

There exist several terms describing the place of English in the world especially in relation to its spread, the kinds of interactions it has had, its functions and the outcomes of such contacts. The most common of such concepts include: 'English as a global language', 'English as a world language', 'English as a lingua franca', 'English as an international language', 'English as everyone's language', 'world Englishes' and 'new Englishes'. These terminologies seem to say something which in many respects is similar about the English language which is that the language has expanded beyond its original shores and is serving some wider purposes in different contexts. It would however be an over-conclusion, if not in error, to say that all these concepts mean the same thing in the strict sense, especially at the micro level. Each of them has a particular point of emphasis even though at the macro level they are all interwoven in that they are all concerned with the place, spread and functions of English in the world. Given that these terminologies are minimally different, the tendency to misunderstand, or misuse them, in some cases, is very high.

\*Corresponding author: Atonde Terkimbi

Department of English Language and Applied Linguistic, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom

They are not synonyms and so cannot be used interchangeably. Another point worth mentioning is that most of these concepts have different advocates or proponents championing the discourses around them. There are in fact organised groups and communities of knowledge addressing most of these perspectives. There exist, sometimes, hot debates among them most of which generate scholarly attention. It is therefore not easy to have them readily and reconcilably presented in the same book or journal in a manner that is accessible to the reader in a comprehensive manner. The experience has shown that each scholar tilts towards his/her own school of thought and most times denies the reader access to knowledge about the other perspective or at least persuades the reader to see some sense in his/her thinking. The body of knowledge on English, its spread and functions in the world constitute what I call Global English Sociolinguistics, and the thinkings, ideologies, directions and research perspectives about it are what I refer to as trends, paradigms and concepts. These perspectives are shaped either ideologically, methodologically, theoretically, functionally or content wise. There is something unique about each paradigm that qualifies it as a separate community of knowledge, but the challenge has always been to have them handy and readily available for the reader or learner who is more interested in the conceptual knowledge rather than the debates and politics therein.

In this paper I have brought most of these various trends in global English sociolinguistics under one roof and have tried to show what each entails. I do not make any claims of an all-inclusive list of the existing trends, but have rather included the most popular ones and most of which are often misunderstood as echoing a similar sociolinguistic perspective or context. It would be worthy to note that these paradigms and concepts are both products and processes but not in any form refined products, but rather emerging, unsettled and continuing phenomena. The main purpose of this study therefore is to identify, describe and analyse the various concepts in global English stating the specific focus of each. It is also poised to show and argue that these concepts and paradigms could be challenged by linguists through productive engagement with them to gain more renewed insights.

### **English as a Lingua Franca**

The English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) concept refers to the use of English as a means of communication among people from different linguistic backgrounds. It is a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages (Seidlhofer 2001, 2004, 2005, Jenkins 2000, Crystal 2003). The context could be social, economic, political or technological. It is important to note that the ELF interaction may also include native English speakers but its central participants are non-native speakers of English. In such context English is used as a facilitating tool for communication among the linguistically and culturally distinct people in a contact situation for purposes of work, business or politics, as the case may be. The main concern of ELF is 'communication' and by extension comprehensibility and intelligibility. Widdowson (2015) stresses this point and distinguishes ELF from other paradigms like World Englishes as he maintains that while ELF focuses on the enquiry into the relationship between language and communication, World Englishes follows the sociolinguistic tradition with a particular focus on the relationship between language and community. ELF does not subscribe to the notion of strict grammatical correctness and errors. It is rather interested in how communication is received, accommodated, negotiated and comprehended (Jenkins 2000). It also does not believe in the supremacy of native-speakerism or the native speaker English as the target norm of usage. It does not see the native speaker as central to it and therefore does not see his/her English as relevant enough to become the driving force and measuring rod of communication or correctness.

The ELF paradigm was initially heavily attacked as a kind of 'watering down' of English or some kind of 'formless' English. But empirical research (Seidlhofer 2001, 2004, 2005, Jenkins 2000, 2014) in the past decade has provided enough evidence and stability to the variety. Its distinct phonological, grammatical and lexico-semantic features have been discovered and analysed. Its operation in context has also been rigorously tested and proven as a unique form of language use serving a particular communicative function (Meierkord 1996, Jenkins 2000, Mauranen 2003, Seidlhofer 2004). This process leading to the gradual acceptability and stabilisation of the ELF concept has been the product of some enduring research in such areas like phonology (Jenkins 2000), pragmatics (Meierkord

1996) and lexicogrammar (Seidlhofer, 2004). Corpora have also been compiled such as the English as a Lingua Franca in Academic settings (ELFA) corpus (Mauranen 2003, 2009) and the general Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) (Seidlhofer 2004, 2009).

It is however important to continue to challenge the assumptions that underlie this concept so that it could be put in proper perspective. It would also be useful to advance forward the extent to which an ELF phenomenon can be maintained considering the different contexts: geographical, cultural or social in which English is used. The notion of uniformity also needs to be problematised and evaluated especially the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) concept of Jenkins (2000) in which she provides a list of what could pass phonological within the ELF context and what could be avoided without consequences to communication and intelligibility. The extent to which these features would be adhered to by the Elfers needs to be evaluated. Could it be seen as another form of prescription in a more subtle manner? The bottom line is that the continued productive engagement with issues of ELF would prove useful in providing more insights about this emerging trend.

### **English as a Global Language**

While the English as a lingua franca paradigm refers to the use of English language among mostly non-native users of English, with communication as its main objective, English as a Global (World)Language (EGL or EWL) refers to the state or status of English as a language with which the whole world can use to communicate. It entails a sense of spread and coverage such that everybody in the world can use it to do one form of business or another with another person from any part of the world, therefore becoming 'the first global lingua franca' as it is spoken by a quarter of the world's population (Crystal 2003). It is in some sense considered as the language with which the world, as a global village, has for communication. The EGL paradigm relates closely with issues of coverage: spoken in all the continents, numerical strength of speakers: spoken by a majority of the world's population, neutrality, universality and accessibility. It is therefore considered as the legitimate language of the world. The EGL concept is linked with discussions, developments and themes of globalisation, diversification, progress and identity (Crystal 2003, Graddol 2006). The concept of English as a global language must however not be taken as a given because for a language to become global, it has to play a 'special role' in most parts of the world where it is spoken. The 'special role' implies two things: its use as an official language; co-official or semi-official and its recognition and priority as a foreign language in the educational system (Crystal 2003:4-5).

The choice of a global language also has to do with the functions of the language in the major spheres of life like the media, business, politics and the status of its speakers, a point which introduces the fundamental issues of power: economic, military, technological and cultural. Although such factors like business, academics, science, computing, education, transportation, politics and entertainment could play a reasonable role in making a language global, the socio-economic capital of those who speak or own it, more than any

other, goes a long way in determining how far their language can go. The EGL thinking preoccupies itself with proving how and why English has emerged as a global language, the processes leading to that and the functions the language is playing. Some of the common reasons advanced to have enabled the language to attain this status include the richness and depth of its vocabulary, its flexibility and simplicity in grammar, spelling and pronunciation. It is also considered a concise and democratic language without a coding for social differences. The quality of English literature throughout history has also been advanced as another important reason. Crystal (2003), although submits that English is a global language, argues against these claims as being insufficient, citing several examples in history like those of Greek and Latin which once served as global languages irrespective of their complex linguistic structures. Though the EGL school of thought has been under strict criticism by such scholars like Philipson (1992, 1998, 1999), Pennycook (1994) and Gomes de Matos (1997), but as to whether English is or will become a global language remains an ongoing discussion. Who knows, maybe the reality will solve the problem in the near future, the next 50 years or so.

As the discussion continues, it is very important to reflect over some points in relation to the EGL paradigm. It is important to identify the voice(s) passing the judgement and concluding that English is a global language and to evaluate if they have some vested interests in the subject. Is EGL an agreed upon phenomenon or a subject in academic context? And is there any hope that an agreement would be reached. The other side of the divide would rather be as to whether we need to agree before a language can serve as a global language. That is, does the language need to be certified to pass as a global language? Another point to ponder upon would be the possibility of having many global languages, and with its attendant questions of hierarchy, and criteria of choice. The consequences of a global language, if at all it is desirable, must also be examined. The global language phenomenon needs to be evaluated in relation to the modern and fast changing realities of our time. Very crucial also is the instability of a global English as largely a process rather than a refined product. What could be the limits of the process and does it have an operational timetable. A critical look at this concept would prove more revealing as some taken-for-granted assumptions need to be further investigated.

### **English as an International Language**

The English as an International Language (EIL) paradigm introduces another perspective about the English language. This thinking sees English as a language with a worldwide coverage such that it is used in almost all parts of the world for international communication in all spheres of life such as education, business, science and technology, politics, diplomacy, media, popular culture and entertainment. It performs the role of a language of international networking and communication almost as a natural choice. EIL therefore refers to 'the use of English by people of different nations in order to communicate with one another' (Talebinezhad and Aliakbari 2001). What differentiates it from EGL is the fact that it does not imply status but rather a functional perspective about

English. This concept emphasises three important points about the English language: its coverage; geographical and social, number of speakers and its ever expanding functions in the world. To use a simple analogy, languages could be considered as local, regional, national or international, and English is an international one implying that it is supra-regional, transcontinental, cross-cultural, multicultural, intercultural and universal. It is a language without borders. EIL is an evolving field of enquiry with scholars (eg. Nunan 2000) devoting their time to understand its intrinsic features and nature.

The major postulation about EIL is that it is habitually spoken in the United States, the British Isles, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of South Africa and Liberia. It is estimated that 300 million people speak English as a second language, and an additional 100 million people use it fluently as a foreign language. About 1.5 billion people around the world have some knowledge of English, either as a native language, as a second language, or as a foreign language (Thirumalai 2002, Crystal 2003). English is one of the official languages of India which has over 1 billion people. Nigeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and many other nations which were ruled by Britain continue to use English both as an optional medium of instruction in their schools and as one of their official languages. The islands of the Philippines continue to use English as an important tool for education, administration, and for mass media purposes. English is the chief foreign language taught in the schools of Europe, South America, Asia and Africa. Also, it is gaining grounds in places where English has no historical or colonial history, such as central and East Asian countries, as a favoured foreign language. Most African countries that were colonised by French are rapidly embracing English as a second or foreign language (Thirumalai, 2002; Crystal 2003). Even though Chinese has higher number of native speakers, though arguably, than English, English has a wider spread across the continents than Chinese. This point marks it as uniquely international in scope.

However the acceptance of the emergence of EIL also presupposes an active acceptance of responsibility towards a new direction and perception of English. This implies that some changes in terms of teaching, learning, grammatical and linguistic configurations must be rethought and re-engineered to give it a truly international outlook. There must also be an active awareness and recognition of the various speakers with different backgrounds and proficiency levels. What it means to be an international language must be critically examined beyond mere assumptions and a new pedagogy must be developed to cope with the new realities of the language.

### **English as Everyone's Language**

The English as Everyone's Language (EEL) concept could be considered as a further extension of the EIL to imply that, now that the language has spread to cover the whole world, it is no longer the exclusive heritage of a particular group of people who speak it in the UK, North America, Australia and some other native English speaking countries. It is now a property of all those who speak it either as a first, second or foreign language. The point central to this line of thought is that the language has now been entrenched in all parts of the world and

a newer kind of competence has evolved with it. This is a kind of reclassification of the speakerism and ownership of the language. It collapses the dichotomy between native and non-native speakers and democratizes the ownership of the language to everyone who speaks it. This is one of the very recent trends in global English sociolinguistics and was voiced by Jun Liu (who is one of its advocates) in the 2013 IATEFL conference in Liverpool, UK. According to him, the future of ELT requires some conscious readjustment to cope with the changing faces, status and functions of the language in relation to changes in an increasingly globalised and technologically driven world. He argues for the need to redefine the role of the English language teacher, and proposes six abilities of a competent English language teacher. These include: making constant and effective changes, learning and speaking at least one other language, teaching less to maximise learning, teaching English in at least one subject area, familiarising oneself with new learning and teaching modes and encouraging learning outside the classroom (Liu 2013).

The EEL concept sounds very simple and direct, but is it really that simple and direct? We need to understand what it means to own a language and to speak it. What does it cost to own a language or to be a native speaker? It is possible to make such a claim but does the reality support it? Are second language and foreign language users of English willing to accept ownership of the language and accept responsibility for it? Would it imply giving up some languages in favour of English? What are the pedagogical implications of such a development? Will English language continue to be English? And what will be the impact of science, technology and other socio-economic and political forces that have some bearing on language? But the most crucial point to bear in mind is the nature of that English which is everyone's language: its features in terms of grammar, phonology, lexis and semantics.

### World Englishes

World Englishes brings to bear a sense of plurality to English which signifies the notion of varieties of English. World Englishes could be rephrased or understood as varieties of English in the world. 'World Englishes are culturally-appropriated and indigenously-customised varieties of English used in divergent sociolinguistic contexts' (Bhatt 2001; Sujau 2011). The notion of varieties of English has received some treatment by different scholars using different classificatory schemes or models. There are two very popular ones. The first is that which divides the speakers of the language into three as native, second and foreign language speakers. The English as a native language refers to those who speak English language as their first language. Such speakers could be found in the UK, US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and some other regions where English is the primary or first language of the people. The English as a second language refers to speakers in regions where English is not the primary language but has some official status in the educational and administrative spheres of the country alongside other indigenous and national languages. Nigeria, Ghana, India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Malaysia belong to this group. Most of the English as a second language regions have some historical links with the English as a native speaker nations. English as a foreign language incorporates

speakers in regions where English is neither a first or second language and is mostly taught in schools as a subject with limited use in everyday life. It does not play a central role in the countries' national life, as would a first or second language. China, Japan, Korea and Egypt are some of the countries where English is a foreign language. This classification is not without shortfalls in that it seems to give the Englishes clean and clear boundaries in a seemingly linear manner without any acknowledgement of complexity which abounds in real sociolinguistic contexts. It also privileges other varieties as being more primary and more native which in turn activates a sense of desirability in favour of some over others. However it gives a fairly clear distribution of the nature of the speakers of the English language worldwide.

Another classification model is the one by Kachru (1985, 1986, 1992) popularly referred to as 'the Circles of English'. Kachru's classification relates closely to the native, second and foreign language mode but appears more flexible and has an awareness of fluidity, expansion and complexity. He divides the speakers and varieties of English into three circles: the inner, the outer and the expanding. The inner circle refers to speakers in places where English is historically and culturally the primary language of the region. UK, US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand belong here alongside other regions with similar sociolinguistic reality. This group is close to the native speaker category. The outer circle refers to countries where English has some reasonable official status and functions in education and other contexts but is not historically the primary or first language of those who speak it. Members of this group include Nigeria, India, Malaysia, the Philippines and most of the countries grouped as English as a second language in the first classification discussed above. The third circle, the expanding circle, is a reference to places or regions where English does not have established roots but is being gradually learnt and used in some contexts. It is not a very stable variety in that it is an evolving and expanding one. China, Japan, Korea and many countries of central and East Asia belong to this circle. The use of the term 'expanding' is seemingly sensible because it describes a sense of instability and progression.

Kachru's model has however been challenged by several scholars (like Quirk 1990) which I am not going to preoccupy myself with here. I would rather want to say that the drawing of boundaries like those by Kachru could amount to some form of oversimplification of a rather complex phenomenon. The history of English and its many years of cohabitation with other languages, peoples and cultures reveal more patterns than would be graphically represented in a classification as the one by Kachru. Another point worth considering is that even if Kachru's classification was true and reliable some years ago, it would certainly not apply to the present sociolinguistic realities of English. The notion of who is central or peripheral to the language based on geographical location is not an easy task to embark upon considering the deep level of intercultural and transregional interactions that have ensued especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century aided by developments in science and technology. Many linguistic boundaries have been dislocated, if not broken, due to globalisation and superdiversity which also presupposes complexity. Having said that, I would want to state that there are several other models of classification proposed by different

scholars but what is particularly useful to note is that the concept of World Englishes invokes the concept of varieties of English in the world and particularly regional varieties, echoing 'the relationship between language and community' (Widdowson 2015). It links speakers with their regions, thus we can talk of British, American, Canadian, Australian, Nigerian, India, Ghanaian, Malaysian, Chinese and Japanese Englishes among others, even though these varieties may not necessarily be stable and homogeneous in nature.

### New Englishes

Does the term New Englishes imply the existence of 'Old' Englishes? The term New Englishes refers to a subtype of World Englishes. It is used to refer to emerging varieties of English as opposed to those more established and entrenched ones. 'New' here could also mean young varieties that are still growing and are fast changing. These include varieties such as those of Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore. The more established Englishes which could be termed 'Old' Englishes include those of the US, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand while the New Englishes are mostly found in Africa and Asia. The new Englishes are nativised varieties with lexical, semantic, grammatical, phonological, social and cultural influences from the regions they are spoken. They are unique varieties because of their domestication and adaptation to the social, linguistic and cultural milieu within which they are spoken. As new, young or emerging Englishes, there is the need to embark on further research to unravel the nature and character of these new varieties of English and discover what is uniquely peculiar about them. The recent impact of globalisation and superdiversity on the new Englishes would also need to be further investigated. It is therefore hoped that with time these new Englishes will grow into 'old' Englishes and other younger new Englishes would emerge.

### Summary of Discussion

This paper has identified and analysed the different concepts, trends, paradigms and traditions that have emerged due to the global spread of English from the British Isles to other parts of the world. The analysis of these various traditions has revealed that even though they are related, each echoes a specific sociolinguistic perspective. The main focus of the ELF paradigm is *communication*. The world Englishes (WE) on the other hand is based on the relationship between *language and community*. It accounts for the various varieties of English which have evolved from the different speech communities the language has had presence. The New Englishes are closely related to WE but are mostly hybrid varieties drawing from both the English language and the native languages and cultures where they are spoken. These varieties exclude those of UK, North America and Australia. They are mostly found in Asia and Africa. English as a global language dwells on the *status* of English among the languages of the world. It has to do with the ranking of English and its global coverage. Though closely related to it, the English as an international language paradigm concerns itself with the *functions* of English for international communication for purposes of business, politics, education, culture, entertainment and other spheres of life. Here

the emphasis is on English functioning as a language for international communication and the factors and forces supporting it. The English as everyone's language perspective follows a somewhat controversial position as it dwells on the issue of the *ownership* of the language. Proponents of this tradition argue that English is no longer the language of a specific group of people called native speakers but the property of all those who speak it irrespective of their region or level of proficiency. Their argument stems from the prolonged presence of English in many parts of the world and its entrenched varieties, both regional and social, such that speakers of the language can assume a sense of ownership of it.

The major contention of this paper is that understanding what each of these perspectives implies is very important for scholars interested in English sociolinguistics. This understanding is useful in that it provides insights on the various concepts we encounter on a daily basis in our study of English sociolinguistics. From this study we are able to identify the focus of each tradition. But what is most important is for linguists to engage more with these paradigms and trends in order to get a renewed understanding of their claims and assumptions. Also considering the fact that the relationship between language and society is not a rigidly stable one, it behooves linguists to continue to investigate the existing and emerging sociolinguistic trends, paradigms and traditions.

### Conclusion

As discussed above, the global English sociolinguistic context has several paradigms which reflect the nature of the interactions and relationships between English and other languages, cultures, peoples and regions of the world, and the kinds of developments and outcomes of such contact situations. The trends go a long way to show how English has fared so far and the functions it is performing. The concepts are at a macro level similar in that they all interrelatedly and cumulatively help in giving illuminating insights about the spread of English and its current functions and status in the world, but at a micro, more minimal and specific sense, they have different emphases and orientations. A study as this which focuses on showing the specific concerns of each is a useful starting point for an informed understanding of the state of contemporary English within the global sociolinguistic context. Even though scholars have carved their niches and have set in motion their perceptions and research agenda, there is still much to be investigated. There is the need to problematise some of their claims and assumptions in relation to the current sociolinguistic realities of the 21st century, an age heavily influenced by globalisation and superdiversity. We must also be constantly reminded that languages do not remain as static products but keep changing, and therefore must be constantly reinvestigated. For example what was true about English five years ago may not be true or same about the language today and what is true today may not be the case tomorrow. Change and complexity are integral to language, English not an exception. But at the present moment, the speed of change has been alarmingly indescribable, requiring a commensurate research and scholarly attitude towards knowledge from researchers. This is what scholars in English sociolinguistics must be aware of. Their ideas must be constantly under scrutiny in relation to current realities.

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