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## **Realism and Imagination in the Teaching of English**

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# Realism and Imagination in the Teaching of English<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In the imagination of many of those establishing language policies, especially in educational ones, English can be ordered and controlled. Intentions about the type of English to be taught may be expressed, and curriculum requirements may specify the variety of English required of learners.

However, the imagined learner, the imagined teacher, and the imagined setting of use are often at odds with the reality of the learner's exposure to English, and of the learner's plausible occasions of use. This is one of many areas in which there is a failure to come to grips with the impact of the globalisation of English.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the conference of the *International Association for World Englishes*, Portland State University, Oregon, Dec 14-16, 2000.

## Realism and Imagination in the Teaching of English<sup>2</sup>

### People, places and varieties

Many of us, even those who have worked in the field of World Englishes, have not fully come to grips with the real complexity of how English functions around the world. From the earliest work, scholars such as Braj Kachru, John Pride and Rodney Moag have discussed the complexity in a variety of ways, but all of us (including me) are prone to use a shorthand terminology which can lead to inaccuracies. In particular, we forget that languages are not entities with an independent existence, but are social constructs that are linked to what people perform. Pakir reminded conference participants of this in her presidential address to the 2000 IAWE conference. And we forget that countries don't speak languages – people do. If specialists in the field forget this, how much more likely to forget it are policy makers and educators.

Kachru's *circles* metaphor should have led to a way of consistently seeing speakers of English in the context of the wider communities to which they belong, but it is actually quite hard to sustain the level of awareness implied by the metaphor. Our terms slip. So we may begin by saying 'The majority of Indians who know English have learnt it as a second language' or 'English is largely a second language in India' (both of which statements are true), but then we then move to saying 'Indian English is a second language variety' or 'Indians are non-native speakers of English'. We use a vocabulary that oscillates between the personal linguistic history of individuals, the dominant patterns of communities, and the features of varieties. We silently ignore the variation within countries. There are Indians and Nigerians (in large numbers) who are native

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speakers of English, just as there are (in smaller numbers) non-native speakers of English born and brought up in England. This is the real complexity of English (in his plenary to the conference Yasakuta Yano also reminded us of this reality). We make careless links between places, people, and varieties. Even the person who developed the metaphor that should have helped us falls into this trap:

Whatever vagueness one at first associates with the term *second-language* varieties of English as opposed to *foreign-language* varieties slowly diminishes when one assesses the international uses of English in geographical, historical, attitudinal, linguistic, and sociolinguistic contexts. The term *second-language* varieties acquires more meaning once the world varieties of English are further seen in terms of their functional distribution and localized formal characteristics. Who are the second-language users of English? Internationally, the users of English are viewed from three perspectives: that of a native user for whom English is a first language in almost all functions; that of a non-native user who considers English as a foreign language and uses it in highly restricted domains; and that of a non-native user who uses an institutionalized second-language variety of English.

(Kachru 1985, 211f)

The terms ‘non-native variety’ and ‘second-language variety’ are especially unhelpful, and not terms I use any more myself. There seems to be an assumption that ‘second-language varieties’ are spoken by ‘second-language users’. It’s not clear what it means to label *varieties* in this way. Is a non-native variety one which is spoken *only* by non-native speakers? That would exclude Indian, Nigerian and Singaporean varieties (among

others), all of which are used by both native and non-native speakers. Or is it a variety which embodies linguistic features which clearly mark it as having emerged from a process of non-continuous transmission (Thomason and Kaufman 1988)? In that case I would use the term ‘contact variety’ (following Weinreich 1953). As we will see, neither of these definitional requirements is met in the varieties of Standard English around the world. As I have said a long time ago (Gupta 1986), the features (both lexical, pragmatic and grammatical) of the Standard Englishes of the world emerge from features of English rather than from processes of contact, and can be found to some extent also in Standard varieties that are used in places which are dominated by normal transmission of English from one generation to another, as well as in the Standard varieties used in places where English was not generally an ancestral language.

The concept of the ‘native speaker’ has been much discussed (e.g. Le Page 1988, Tay 1979, Singh et al 1995, Gupta 1994 etc). The most usual definition of a ‘native speaker’ of a language is “one who acquired the language in infancy, before any other language was acquired (though not necessarily as the sole language being learnt)”, and that is how I use it in this paper. If we define a non-native variety in terms of the history of transmission of English in a given place, we cannot assume that everyone who speaks it is a non-native speaker in places where the majority are non-native speakers. And is our definition based on our known socio-historical knowledge? Or on linguistic features? If you are a non-native speaker do you necessarily use a non-native variety? Can a native speaker be a native speaker of a non-native variety? Due to the confusion in definition some have tried to adapt the scope of the term. For example Tay (1979) redefined ‘native speaker’ to cover speakers with a high degree of competence, while Singh (1995) used the term to confer a sort of legitimacy on any speaker of a language, whatever their level of proficiency.

The politicians and educationists who create and attempt to implement policies about English come with different sets of assumptions and values. Cameron (1995) has discussed the unhappy relationship between linguists and non-linguists in the debate about correctness and educational standards. On the World Englishes front there are similar tensions – politicians may see linguists who analyse varieties of English as promoting an ‘anything goes’ philosophy and reject much that they say. But in the outer circle countries linguists are actually more active and apparently more influential than in the inner.

### **Standard English**

In any discussion of realism in English, one of the nettles that needs to be grasped is that of Standard English. Standard English has got itself a bad name and has often been avoided in the World Englishes literature. Massive disputes about its definition and delimitation seem to me to have clouded a notion that is real in the sense that it affects linguistic performance. Standard English is meaningful as a concept largely in the written language. It comes with a concomitant normative tradition, and skill in applying the conventions in perfect detail is socially highly valued across the English speaking world.

Many practitioners of English pride themselves on their skill in doing Standard English but in English there is no centralised authority -- Standard English is determined by loose consensus of ‘good practice’, which means that no individual can reasonably be expected to be completely knowledgeable about what is and what is not considered best practice, and especially that individuals cannot be aware of what is considered good practice in one of the English centres other than their own. Those in touch with the linguistic culture of English know that they must have recourse to a range of methods to resolve difficulties. For example, Tsui and Bunton (2000) show how participants in a computer

forum for English teachers in Hong Kong draw on arguments based on ‘naturalness’, usage, native-speaker usage, and dictionaries. Although these respondents attached importance to ‘native speaker’ judgments, native use was not sufficient to confer approval – participants used a wide range of arguments and demonstrated the complex sense of authority which is typical of all English-using communities.

Banjo (2000: 30) gives a history of the involvement of linguists in the debate on an endonormative standard in West Africa, starting in the 1970s. He talks of the linguists setting to work “on the identification and formal description of it”. But in English linguistic culture (Schiffman 1996) linguists can’t *define* a standard — they can only reflect it. Many of us have (like me in 1986 and on other occasions too) written papers which seemed to assume that we could help shape a standard variety. Perhaps we can, but not I think in detail – only by shaping a linguistic culture that accepts a particular stance. And that has to some extent happened. But realism might have got there without our pushing anyway.

The certainties at the centre of the notion of Standard English are obvious, but the uncertainties at the edges are often forgotten. One hears and reads numerous comments that suggest that the native speaker has an inbuilt ability to do Standard English, while the non-native speaker is doomed to make errors. Both these assumptions are false. Standard English is a learned skill, and a skill in which there is not always an absolute agreement. If a complex text in StdE is given to half a dozen people who may reasonably be regarded as being skilled in StdE, to edit or correct, they will not agree, even if they have apparently similar backgrounds. They will agree on some things, and may be able to reach a consensus after discussion on others, but areas of dispute will remain – and I am not just talking about disputed usage here.

The limitations of disagreement are set at an early age. An officially sanctioned UK body, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, initiated in 1996 a study of the writing of pupils in the national examination in English taken at the age of 16 (GCSE). The mastery of standard English grammar was striking: “over two-thirds of all scripts ... offered no examples of non-standard English constructions” (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 1999: 19) The most commonly occurring ‘non-standard features’ were in (a) “use of prepositions”, and (b) “use of the definite / indefinite article”. Examination of the examples given in this document show that some of these usages are dialectal (e.g. ‘decided to go down the park’) but that the majority are ones which have been identified in numerous ‘new varieties’ of English, many of them concerning idiomatic expressions (e.g. ‘we are all in favour for the scrapping of school meals’, ‘gone in flash’).

Many of us have experienced disagreements in details of Standard English as part of the editing process of publishing. The following examples are taken from a book review I wrote for *Language and Society*. The examples numbered (1) are my original, while the examples numbered (2) are the editor’s ‘corrections’ (which I accepted). Where there is a (3) that is my rejection of the editor’s correction, showing a response to the correction (in all cases these were accepted by the journal). Disputes like these are typical of the kinds of disagreement that arise between different individuals who are skilled in Standard English.

1. -- one regularly reads, for example, that....

2. ; thus one regularly reads that ...

*[Punctuation preferences relating to dashes. Editor supplies thus to replace for example, whereas I do not use thus unless making a strong causal connection. Nevertheless, I accepted thus, even though I could not have written it myself.]*

1. sociopolitical

2. socio-political

*[Spelling alternatives.]*

1. comes from a stable of scholars
2. comes from a group of scholars

*[rejection of figurative expression? I don't understand the reason for the rejection of stable. I still prefer stable, but I accepted the change.]*

1. where they are a 'minority' community
2. where they are a "minority"

*[I don't understand rejection of community.]*

1. . However, general works...
2. . But general works ...

*[In US best practice however is not felt appropriate to begin a sentence. However, in UK best practice, no-one has anything against however beginning a sentence, but some people do object to but beginning a sentence! A clash here of prescriptive rules across the Atlantic.]*

1. a rare opportunity for their voice as members of society to be heard
2. a rare opportunity for them as members of society to be heard
3. a rare opportunity for their voices as members of society to be heard

*[Editor unhappy about inconsistent number concord (they/voice/members). I was unhappy about loss of voice – a compromise results which clears up the concord problem and restores voice.]*

1. can only come from this kind of ethnomethodological insight.
2. can only come from such ethnomethodological insight.
3. can only come from this kind of ethnomethodological insight.

*[I don't know why the editor rejected 'this kind of'. In turn, the correction produced a sentence which my grammar didn't allow and I simply went back to the original.]*

The deviance based approach that is still very prevalent in the study of World Englishes leads to the analyst behaving like an editor, or any other kind of Standard English expert. Too often *real* data from Singapore, or India, or Nigeria etc. (student essays, newspaper articles) is compared to a *theoretical* ideal of Standard British or American English. In my first paper in this field (Shields 1977) I identified one of the results of this method as 'pseudo non-standardisms' -- identifying as non-standard something you don't use

yourself (or think you don't) but which is in fact used by others in Standard English (often of some other variety). Most of us have been guilty of going astray on this. and, as I have said since, I myself have committed this error. For example I have identified the use of *wash-up* ('wash oneself') as being Singapore English, not realising at the time that it was also used in (among other varieties) American English. Like many others I also identified the plural *accommodations* as being characteristic of what we then called 'New Varieties' (in fact it's very widespread in US and UK English too). We cannot rely on our own instincts to identify structures, words, and usages. Instead we should be looking at real data from all over the world. As Anne Pakir said in her plenary address to the IAWE 2000 conference, Sidney Greenbaum's ICE corpora and similar language banks are already helping in this task. Smaller studies which compare like texts from one place with comparable texts from another are also needed, like Skandera's (1999) or the one by Yamuna Kachru presented at the IAWE 2000 conference. We can compare the assignments written by Australian, Kenyan, Indian, Singaporean, UK, and US students without being in a normative mode. All of us edit, and liberal minded variationists like me are just as likely to identify errors in standard English as anyone. I find the same 'errors' in Standard English in the essays of my students in Leeds as those I used to find in Singapore, and as those Craig found in the West Indies (Craig 1997). We find similar examples in magazines and the press. The examples below are all taken from the UK press in 2000. How might people edit some of these? How can people explain any non-standard features they identify?

- As you are sat in the traffic jams on Bank Holiday Monday, ask yourself if there might not be a better way to live.  
*[ 'are sat' as an alternative to 'are sitting' is extremely common in spoken British English, is officially 'non-standard' in the National Curriculum, though widely found in examination scripts (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 1999:19), and is increasingly seen in Standard English contexts.]*
- The prince [of Wales] replied: "All of the viewers would be horrified if you don't wake up."

*[The 'tense incongruity of 'would ... don't' has been identified as characteristic of the English of innumerable outer circle countries (e.g. Gupta 1986, Banjo 1997). Did Charles Windsor use it or has the editor reworded?]*

- The former Saturday morning TV cook boasted to liking her drink.  
*[‘Boasted to’, not ‘boasted of’. Use of ‘inappropriate’ particles arbitrarily linked to verbs has been associated with outer circle varieties, and is also identified as a common non-standardism in the examination answers of UK students (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 1999:19). Widely discussed as features of various ‘New Englishes’.]*
- The antics of TV’s Castaways on Taransay is responsible for an influx of tourists to the Scottish islands.  
*[‘Antics ... is’. Errors in concord often attributed to ‘non-nativeness’. Another one picked out as being found in the writing of examination candidates in the UK (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 1999:19). Discussed in grammars based on data as concord affected by proximity (Quirk et al 1972:365ff, Biber et al 1999:189ff)]*
- Enjoy a pleasant walk along the riverbank and visit the Cathedral and Castle which is said to be the best of their kind.  
*[Cathedral and Castle ... is ... their. Concord again.]*
- Human growth hormone used to be very difficult to buy but it is now relatively easy to get hold.  
*[Another idiom issue (‘get hold (of)’) Perhaps someone told the writer never to end a sentence with a preposition.]*

Another corollary of the deviance approach is that all varieties of English in a place are lumped together so that *Indian English* or *Singapore English* is contrasted with *Standard English* (usually US or UK) without a real addressing of the diversity in Englishes within all communities. Sometimes *British English* or *American English* is equated with *British/American Standard English*. Students in Singapore sometimes have the impression that everyone in the UK speaks Standard English all the time. Conversely, in the UK, students might have the impression that everyone in Singapore or Jamaica speaks a contact variety all the time. These misconceptions are linked to a concept of Standard English which is idealised rather than real – a realistic assessment of Standard English does not tie it to any location.

The remarkable thing about Standard English, especially the Standard English found in edited, printed documents, is its uniformity across the world, and this without any central authority. We can accept this uniformity while recognising variation within texts that are written in Standard English, and we can accept that occasionally one doer of Standard

English can produce a sentence that another doer will regard as non-standard. Even our areas of uncertainty are shared.

Countries with contact varieties of English (such as Jamaica, Nigeria, Singapore) participate in this agreement on what Standard English is like. A few of them may establish a codified form of the contact variety (e.g. Tok Pisin, Bislama, Krio) but this codified contact variety in nearly all cases functions alongside a Standard English. Such is the strength of the concept of Standard English. So obvious is it to those imbued in the linguistic culture of English, that we fail to refer overtly to the universal presence of Standard English.

Since it is not expected that the syntax of any national standard of English will differ markedly from that of ‘world English’; generally, attention has been turned to the phonological and lexical descriptions of these local standards.

(Banjo 2000: 32)

We must not forget that the concept of Standard is very weak in lexis and phonology. There is no standard accent of English (though there are prestige accents, and individual words have standard pronunciations – for example the standard pronunciations of *chutzpah* and *chaos* don’t begin with the same sound as *chip*). Because there are a handful of words in which the American and British spelling traditions differ, we talk as if there are two Standard Englishes. There are not. In writing we have *one* shared Standard English, which is used all over the world in the same way, and which (all over the world) incorporates minor variations in lexis, many of which are used to reflect culture. When a Singaporean or a Nigerian or a Filipino uses Standard English they may have a preference for one of the spelling traditions, in those few words which differ, but they are not using either British or American Standard English – they are using that one unitary Standard English.

## A Tale of Three Cities

To illustrate the commonality of Standard English around the world I have selected web-based texts outlining the history of three different industrial cities. The first is Middleborough, Massachusetts. USA. The second my similarly named home-town, Middlesbrough, UK, and the third is the Indian city of Pune, Maharashtra. All three are described on official web sites of one sort or another.

### *A: Middleborough, Mass.*

When the town was rebuilt after King Philips War the Nemasket River became a major source of water power for the many mills set up on its banks. Although many dams and their accompanying mills were built on the river in the 1700's, the boom of the industries on the river took place in the nineteenth century. The dams and mills were located in three major places along the river, the Upper Factory on Water Street (Wareham Street); the Star Mill or Lower Dam or Lower Factory (location of Winthrop-Atkins Company today); and the Muttock or Oliver's Mill (Oliver Mill today). There was a dam on the river near Murdock Street where John Warren built and maintained a grist mill, shingle mill, and sawmill, but after his death they were destroyed. Since these other three areas had the most influence on the growth of Middleborough, for that reason they were mentioned.

#### **Upper Factory:**

The dam at the Upper Factory was built about 1762. Over the years a forge, cotton factory, grist mill, shovel mill, and saw mill were powered here by the Nemasket River. The forge operated for approximately 70 years. During this time the ownership changed several times and was rebuilt after being partially destroyed by fire in 1785. In 1813 a cotton factory was erected under the name of the "New Market", Manufacturing Company. An act of legislation created this new company for the purpose of manufacturing iron, cotton and woolen cloth, and yarn with power to hold real estate not exceeding \$50,000, and personal estate not exceeding \$150,000. Among the incorporators was a man named Peter H. Pierce, whose heirs have made a great contribution to the town of Middleborough.

The cotton factory did well until the depression of this industry in New England forced them to abandon it. The company then passed into a co-partnership in 1864 known as the Nemasket Manufacturing Company. A store and grist-mill were located here for many years. Colonel Peter H. Pierce was among the leading business men connected with this company too. The company was sold to others in 1867. The new proprietors expected to spend \$40,000 for new machinery. This was a sizeable sum when one notices ads in the same paper for blankets costing \$4.25, white shirts for \$4.50 and umbrellas for \$.75 each. The article further stated that the shovel business would employ between 50-100 people.

In a referendum to the town warrant in 1867 was a change in the location of the herring way at the Upper Works. The shovel and hammer shops were located very near the present channel. The new channel was cut through a few rods east of the works. The company would cut the canal while the town expense would be the moving of the bridge. The shovel mill, however, was destroyed by a fire in 1868. The ruins of the burned mill remained well into the 1900's.

The Clark and Cole sawmill established around 1888 on this same dam was the largest one in the center of town. As the iron industry became the second leading industry in Middleborough and the shoe industry became the leading one, the sawmills wooden boxes for shipping of boots and shoes made it a thriving business. The very wide boards produced by the mills up and down saw were in great demand for the building of houses. The output of lumber is said to have been a million feet a year and boxes shipped by the carload every day. With the coming of cardboard boxes, the box business declined in 1909 the firm went bankrupt. The property was sold at auction in 1914 to Judge Sullivan who later sold it. The Lobl Manufacturing Company makers of surgical and hospital supplies was established.

[*Industry in Middleborough.* <[www.middleborough.com/industry.htm](http://www.middleborough.com/industry.htm)>]

**B: *Middlesbrough, UK***

**1841:** Population 5463. Middlesbrough gets its own elected local government body, the Improvement Commissioners, responsible for paving, lighting, watching and cleansing. Henry Bolckow and John Vaughan, who have recently moved to the town, open their Middlesbrough **Iron** Works. They will play a significant role in developing Middlesbrough, and their industrial enterprises will employ thousands.

**1842:** A new docks complex, promoted by the Owners, opens to the east of Middlesbrough.

**1846:** The Improvement Commissioners open a Town Hall in the Market Place.

**1851:** Population 7631.

**1853:** The town gains status as a Municipal Borough, amid much rejoicing. Bolckow becomes the town's first mayor. Middlesbrough gets its first modern form of local municipal government. A new civic coat of arms is designed - by a man from Gateshead (Tyneside) - with a civic motto '*Erimus*' which means 'we shall be'. The new Borough Council takes on the responsibility of governing the town.

In the 1850s and 60s the town is booming, thanks to the discovery of vast **iron** ore deposits in the nearby Eston Hills, and the development of associated industries - **iron** and steel, heavy engineering, shipbuilding. Bolckow and Vaughan are synonymous with industrial Middlesbrough. Factories, rolling mills and workshops spring up along the river banks. Marshland to the west of the town is transformed into the Ironmasters' District -the industrial powerhouse of Middlesbrough's prosperity. The town is growing rapidly. A familiar pattern of 'grid **iron**' streets spreads south of the railway line. The Borough Council is responsible for many of the key services in the town, such as gas, water,

sewerage, ferries, libraries, street lighting and cleaning, markets, paving, police and fire brigade.

**1862:** William Gladstone visits Middlesbrough and calls the town an 'Infant Hercules'.

[*Middlesbrough: history in brief*. Accessed from <[www.middlesbrough.gov.uk](http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk)>]

**Ci: Pune, Maharashtra**

1820 The British establish a cantonment in the Eastern part of the city

1830 Deccan College started

1856 Bombay-Pune railway completed

1867 Khadakwasla Dam is built

1886 Pune-Miraj metre-gauge line is completed

1875 Department of Meteorology offices shifted to Pune from Simla

1884 Fergusson College inaugurated.

1885 Deccan Paper Mills starts operations

1888 Government photo-zinco press starts functioning

1893 Rajabhadur Motilal Pittie starts first textile mill in Pune

[*Pune City Timeline* (part of <[www.punecity.com](http://www.punecity.com)>)]

**Cii: PUNE**

Pune, the second largest city in Maharashtra, is the state's cultural capital, with a population of 2.5 million people. About 170-km from Mumbai by road, Pune was the bastion of the Maratha empire. Under the reign of the Peshwas - key ministers in the Maratha Empire - Pune blossomed into a centre of art and learning. Several far-reaching revenue and judicial reforms were also initiated in the city.

The British developed Pune as a military town when they captured it in 1818. Educational institutes there include the College of Military Engineering and the University of Pune, which offers a diverse choice of engineering, agriculture and technical courses.

A number of industries were located in Pune after Independence, as the city had well-connected road and rail links and a pool of technical and professional personnel.

Bajaj Auto, the world's largest manufacturer of scooters and three wheelers, TELCO (Tata Electric and Locomotive Company), the manufacturer of India's primary commercial vehicles and trucks, and the luxury car-maker, Mercedes Benz are located here. Software companies are the newest entrants into Pune's vibrant atmosphere. With the setting up of these new industries, there has been a corresponding increase in both the population and standards of lifestyle; today Pune is rapidly maturing into a prime industrial town, while retaining all its old charm, a unique blend of British and Maratha influences.

[*Maharashtra: Community*. <[www.maharashtra.gov.in/english/cunity/cities.htm](http://www.maharashtra.gov.in/english/cunity/cities.htm)>]

These texts raise a number of cultural issues but include very few linguistic differences. Each assumes a knowledge in the readers of historical and cultural background to the history (e.g. *King Philips War, Maratha Empire, the British, Independence*). Reference is made to concepts that are not relevant to all parts of the English-using world (e.g. *local government body, Town Hall, municipal government, cantonment* – note that the less regionalised ‘military town’ is used in Cii, *three-wheeler*). In keeping with local norms, the Indian site uses metric measurements and the US one imperial. One or two words reflect the two spelling traditions (e.g. *woolen, center, metre*).

The Middlesbrough text, and one of the two Pune texts, have decided to write the history as a timeline (an earlier version of the Middlesbrough website used continuous prose):

Middlesbrough is a relatively young town, it became a municipal authority in 1853. In the last half of the 19th century the town grew at a tremendous pace and became a world centre for iron and steel production and shipbuilding. Middlesbrough’s population grew rapidly also. In 1818 the town had a population of just 40 people, a hundred years later that figure had increased to over 100,000.

Both in India and the UK, the writers of the timelines have, in line with Standard English practice, used the present tense for past events, and some minor sentences. The texts in continuous prose, in line with Standard English practice, use past tense for past events and write in full sentences. These are some of the stylistic choices available to all users of English.

These texts are carefully written, multiply authored texts, with a degree of care similar to comparable printed texts. That doesn’t mean that another editor would find them perfect. But they are all within the range of expectations of Standard English texts.

## Getting a partner

The intersection between stylistic choice and culture is even more starkly revealed in ads for partners (either matrimonial or non-matrimonial). Brief advertisements for partners can appear in a number of forms, but within the same publication (print or online) there is striking uniformity, which is largely the result of advertisers following consensually agreed conventions, rather than the result of editing by those responsible for the publication. The extracts I am using are all from print sources.

- A. *The Telegraph*. Calcutta based broadsheet. 22 August 1999. Newspaper's address, & box number at end of each ad.
- B. *City Weekly*. Singapore based advertising newspaper, issued free. 20 August 1999. Telephone number at beginning of each ad.
- C. *The Yorkshire Evening Post*. Local UK newspaper. 6 September 1999. Telephone number at end of each ad.

### A

Bride E.B. Kulin Ghosh Kayastha, at present at Manirampur, Barrackpore, State Govt. employee's only issue. Good-looking, smart, tan 23/5'-2" B.Sc., partial squint, uses specs. Govt. employee / established groom wanted.

Bride headmistress' only daughter, glowing complexion, Kayastha (Datta) 23/5-4", B.A. Eng (H). Eng/Dr/ bank officer/ LIC / govt. employee, suitable groom desired.

E.B. Baidya, B.A. 26+/5'-4" tan, good looking, knows recitation, suitable employed Baidya/ Brahmin groom wanted.

E.B. Chatterjee, M.Sc, 32/5'-8" good singer export businessman 15000/- own house in Salt Lake. Good looking graduate bride wanted.

Groom East Bengal Kayastha, 29+/5'=7", Naragan, handsome, ME Comp. Sc. & Engg. employed as Software Engineer. Resident of Salt Lake. Within 26, pretty, highly educated bride wanted. Contact with horoscope.

Groom working in Singapore, E.B. Rarhi Brahmin, M.Com, C.A, 33/33/175 cm. Post-graduate in Economics/ Math/ Physics/ Chemistry / English or Accounts E.B. bride wanted.

NRI professor, Kayastha, 45/167 cm / 63kg. Rs 6 lakh p/m, issueless divorcee, seeks beautiful bride. Issueless widows/ divorcees may also write. Caste no bar. No dowry.

WB Brahmin (Choudhury) Kashyap, slim fair pretty, BA (fail) 24/5'2", working in Central Govt., youngest daughter. Well-employed groom desired.

WB Mahishya 26/5'2" B.A. (English) knows computer, type, medium-complexioned, good-looking, slim, polite homely. Educated Govt. employee / established suitable groom wanted.

### B

Azwan here, 26 yrs old, Malay, still single, a gd listener & motivator. Looking for gals age below 30 for a sincere and long lasting frdship. Leave me a msg & I'll get back to U ASAP.

Hi gals out there, my name is Mark, 24 yrs old, working as a Driver. If U're 18 yrs old & above. Pls leave me your msg with your contact no. so that I can contact U ASAP.

Hi there, this is Lynn here, working as a Waitress. Care for a chat? Just leave a msg.

Hi, I'm 20 yrs old Indian gal, working as a Customer Service Officer. If any Indian guys out there interested to know me, pls leave a msg in my mailbox & I'll get back to you ASAP.

Hi, I'm 25 yrs old, heavy built and weighing at 87 kg. Like to know gals out there weighing between 60 to 75 kg because it is hard to find gals of my size.

Hi, I'm a Chinese gal, 17 this yr, standing at 1.67m, currently studying, tanned, simple & a gd listener. Enjoy sports & listening to music. Wld like to find someone who loves to share my passion for the sea. Just hope that U guys will get back to me soon.

Hi, I'm Linda here. 19, Malay, currently doing part time modelling for Sky Model. During my free time, I wld go clubbing. Interested, just drop me a msg.

Hi, my name is Kevin, 24 yrs old, currently in the Army, mixed parentage, standing at 1.75m, weighing at 65 kg & of average looks. Wanting to know more gals. Just drop me a line.

### C

ADVENTUROUS male 30, no ties, WLTM good looking female for fun, laughs, hopefully leading to relationship.

JUNGLE fever, 22 yr old voluptuous brunette, green eyes, VGSOH, WLTM fun loving, romantic Caribbean lover.

KAREN, intelligent, vivacious, attractive single mum, seeks tall slim man 28-35, with humour and integrity. Must like the rave scene.

MATURE bi male, early 60's, 5ft 9ins, medium build, north Yorkshire, WLTM similar for fun and games..

MIXED lad 19, enjoys dancing and clubbing, GSOH, medium build, seeks fit, straight acting / looking lad, 18-24, for fun friendship possible 1-2-1.

PROFESSIONAL Asian male, 32, slim build. considered attractive, GSOH, loyal, trustworthy, enjoys going out, having a good time, looking for female for relationship.

TOP at TLC, top at being sincere. Slim, young, 5ft 10ins, 40ish, seeks similar petite feminine female.

VERY feminine female, blonde, attractive, GSOH, seeks similar for friendship, fun possibly more. Leeds area.

Stylistically, these two Indian and UK newspapers are much more similar, while culturally Singapore and the UK are closer. Again, we are not looking at differences in English so much as differences in the expression of culture., and choice of a stylistic alternative.

In Yorkshire and Singapore the advertisers are seeking lovers rather than spouses (though the Singapore ones are all heterosexual). Advertisers in all three cultures are obsessed with height, age, and appearance. Singapore and Yorkshire treat ethnic information rather on a broad sweep (e.g. *Malay, Indian, mixed parentage, Asian*), though in Yorkshire silence about ethnicity implies the advertiser is white – silence about

ethnicity in Singapore does not imply membership of any specific ethnic group. In Calcutta, advertisers are assumed to be Indian, Hindu and Bengali, but very precise information on caste (e.g. *Kulin Ghosh Kayastha, Baidya, Rarhi Brahmin* – caste is in fact identified in every advertisement in this sample) and on region of ancestry within Bengal is supplied (*E[ast]/W[est] B[engal]*). Linguistically, it is the Singapore text which most stands out, a different choice having been made within the alternatives available to English users. The Calcutta and Yorkshire advertisements are dominated by noun phrases, with the verb absent or very weak. The Calcutta ads are all sentence fragments, while in Yorkshire only two verbs appear in main clauses: *WLTM* ('would like to meet') and *seeks*. The Singapore advertisements use fuller sentences. The BE dominance of BE as the verb of main clause is especially striking because this verb is routinely omitted in all kinds of abbreviated language in English. The Singapore texts also usually begin with greetings – the presence of greetings and BE links these texts to similar oral texts on telephone services, and it is perhaps relevant that the contact with advertisers in the Singapore texts (but also in the UK texts) is made telephonically, while in the Indian texts it is made in writing.

Both the Calcutta and the Yorkshire ads use a vocabulary associated with the formal and written rather than colloquial (e.g. *resident, desired, male, female*), and the many abbreviations are usually acronyms (e.g. *E.B* – 'East Bengal', *GSOH* – 'good sense of humour'). In keeping with their much more oral feel, the Singapore texts use more informal vocabulary. Abbreviations are more likely to be of single words (e.g. *gd* – 'good', *pls* – 'please').

I have selected ads from particular publications in each of three countries. Other sources from these three countries would continue to reflect cultural aspects of the three countries (e.g. ethnic composition, degree of acceptability of same-sex sexual

relationships), and of the more local culture of the particular publication (there are dating as well as marriage ads from Indian sources, especially on the web). In lexical choice, and in abbreviation patterns, there are some choices which are culturally more restricted. Although syntactically very different from each other, however, the syntactic and stylistic decisions are not linked to their cultural or geographic origins: there are other sources from all three countries which make alternative stylistic decisions (e.g. British and Indian ads with greetings and full sentences, Singapore ads in abbreviated language). As far as Standard English is concerned, all are operating within a shared range of alternatives which have linguistic consequences.

### **Presenting a culture to the world**

If you are G Simpo, webmaster of the Italian Embassy in Pakistan, you have the task of describing your own culture to Pakistan (and the world). One of the things you need to explain is the education system (A). *Japan Insight* has links from Japanese Embassies around the world, and serves to explain Japan to the world (B). Text C is part of a pan-European website produced by the *Interuniversity Conference for Agricultural and Related Sciences in Europe*, which explains the structure of education in all European countries for the benefit of other Europeans, in a standard format, here illustrated by Italy.

#### ***A: Italy in Pakistan***

Education in Italy is divided in two main sectors: institutional and vocational. Primary and junior secondary schooling for children aged 6 to 14 is compulsory and it consists of eight years (five of primary and three years of junior secondary school). At the end of the compulsory schooling, students have a wide choice between the different types of senior secondary schools: classical, scientific, technical, mechanical, accounting, linguistics, artistic. All senior secondary school have a five year duration. At the end of it this course the students can choose any university faculty. The Italian universities are some of the oldest and best reputed of the world.

[*Introducing Italy*. <[www.embassy.italy.org.pk/introduc.htm](http://www.embassy.italy.org.pk/introduc.htm)>]

***B: Japan for the rest of the world***

Postwar educational reform in 1947 established the new single track system with 6 years of elementary school, 3 years of junior high school as compulsory, and 3 years of senior high schools and 2-4 more years of college education. This time it was modeled after the American system with its emphasis on education for everyone.

*Education System in Japan Insight*

(accessed from Japan Information Network: <[jin.jcic.or.jp/jin-index.html](http://jin.jcic.or.jp/jin-index.html)>)

***C: School System (Secondary Education)***

With 2 exceptions when it is reduced to 7 years, secondary school in Italy consists of 8 years of study: 3 years of "scuola media inferiore" (junior high school) which is obligatory for everyone, and 5 (or 4) years of "scuola media superiore" (high school). Enrollment in the secondary school system takes place after successful completion of 5 years of elementary school. The "scuola media inferiore" is the same for everyone, but there are several types of "scuola media superiore": "Liceo" (two types, classical and scientific; "Istituto Tecnico" (several types, each specializing in a different area, e.g., agriculture, building & construction, industry, business, languages, nautical education, etc.); "Istituto Magistrale" (4 years, teacher education); "Liceo Artistico" (4 years, education in the arts).

Upon completion of the "scuola media inferiore" program one receives a "licenza". The title conferred after completion of the "scuola media superiore" differs according to the type of school: "maturit" for the "liceo", and for the various types of "Istituto", "abilitazione" in the relative field (agricultural, technical, industrial, teaching, business, art, etc.).

[Italy<[www.agr.kuleuven.ac.be/intorg/ica/guide/italy/page1.htm](http://www.agr.kuleuven.ac.be/intorg/ica/guide/italy/page1.htm)>]

[Part of *Interuniversity Conference for Agricultural and Related Sciences in Europe* – web site home page is in Slovenia. Part is in Belgium, *Higher Education in Agricultural and Food Sciences: Guide to Courses within Europe*, This document has been arranged for the World Wide Web by the Norwegian Agricultural students: Olav Helland, Gunnar Weld and Bård M. Holtbakk. Italian section by Gualtiero Baraldi, *Facoltà di Agraria, Università degli Studi di Bologna.*]

Texts A and B have made similar decisions – to use English words (which are approximations) to express Italian and Japanese concepts. There are two problems in doing this – one is that this is an area in which all English using societies differ in their structure and terminology. The Italian website has gone for terms associated with Britain and the Commonwealth (*primary, secondary*) while the Japanese website has gone for terms associated with the USA (*elementary, high school, college*). The other problem is

that it is not necessarily the case that the English terms match well with the culture being described – this is especially the case with Italy. The centrally controlled web site (C) takes a very different strategy – the loanword strategy. The Italian terms are used, sometimes with a translation (with the terms of both the US and UK traditions), but sometimes without a translation at all (e.g. *liceo*, *licenza*). This is a consistent policy throughout web site, and seems to me to produce a text which is much clearer.

We see here how writers need to be able to convey a variety of cultures through English, and to choose terms which interpret that culture well and travel across international boundaries. As I have said elsewhere (Gupta 1999) too many learners of English are being taught a narrow model of either US or UK English without a real appreciation of how they are going to use English. In speech as well as in writing, the learner of English is not learning English as someone might learn Finnish, which would be for the purposes of speaking to Finns and developing knowledge of Finnish culture. English is not tied to specific cultures in the same way – a Finn learning English does not learn English in order to interact with British, American or Irish people, but as a lingua franca to be used on a much wider front. The learning of English needs to be placed in a realistic context for the specific learner, or group of learners. In the outer circle countries (and inner circle) English is now generally taught very much within the local context, with the learner situated as being most likely to use English within their own society.

### **English Linguistic Culture**

English has been polycentric for centuries. It's arguable for how long. In the modern English period, there was from time to time overt polycentrism was in the British Isles. During the Old English and Middle English periods there were multiple centres for English standards, and the most dramatic consequence of this was the identification of

two closely related codes, English and Scots, which since the seventeenth century onwards have been variably seen as two languages or as two kinds of English. Although a strong standard for written English emerged from the sixteenth century, notions of standard in speech were much weaker. Since the eighteenth century Standard Written English has once again been polycentric, with (slightly) different conventions in written English on the two sides of the Atlantic. There are multiple prestigious accents of English rather than a single standard accent. In the twentieth century additional centres have been added, firstly rather shamefacedly, but since the mid-80s with confidence, as English was extended in its use in dozens of other ex-colonies of Britain (and a couple of ex-colonies of the US). Speakers and writers in these centres need to express their own culture, and adapt English to meet their needs. However, one thing that changes little is English linguistic culture, which consists of:

- acceptance of some polycentrism;
- openness to new words with a variety of patterns of word formation, including uncritical acceptance of loanwords; and
- a strong agreement on the role and central features of Standard English and on techniques of conflict resolution.

The main places where traditional English linguistic culture meets a radically different linguistic culture are Europe and China. Here English is being learnt as a foreign language by people whose own linguistic cultures have strong traditions of central control and strict, legislated controls. Users of languages change the language to fit their culture, and one of the tensions in other Europeans learning English is the very foreign linguistic culture. Chumba & Simo Bobda (2000) compare the heritage of the linguistic culture of French with its strong tradition of maintaining ownership and a centralised control of French in France, with that of English, leading to a situation:

While it is fully justified to talk about “(new) Englishes” in the world, the concept of “(new) Frenches” stands a slim chance of selling today.

(Chumba and Simo Bobda 2000: 43)

For me, coming back to Europe after Anglophone Asia seemed like a journey back to an unrealistic past. In Singapore in the early 1980s there were extensive arguments about ‘endonormative’ and ‘exonormative’ standards for English. These arguments are now all over – it is accepted that there will be a local accent of English and that there will be local words for local concepts. In 1998 Singapore started a new campaign to develop good English. But this campaign did not attack Standard Singapore English, or the Singapore accent – instead its aim (we shall see if it works) is to eradicate the contact variety, Singapore Colloquial English, and promote the use of Standard English in all social situations.

Kachru’s outer circle countries have their own confidence and are developing institutions of local standards. What has given the impetus to this is the requirement to express one’s own culture in English. The culture changes the English *but not much* – Standard English is so powerful that it sticks. Did linguists establish this local standard? Can they? I think not. There is no tradition in English linguistic culture of prescriptive codification. Though it is flattering to see Singapore’s senior politicians, such as Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong, apparently quoting my own remarks to the effect that of course there must be a Singapore accent and some local words in Singapore Standard English, I do not think that those of us who argued this over the 1980s really brought about a change in thought – this acceptance of polycentrism (in a very small way indeed) was already there in the culture of English. Will Singapore’s campaign eradicate the contact variety? We can’t ever know – the leaky diglossia of Singapore English has always leaked in one direction – that H encroaches in the domains of L – Standard is usable almost everywhere in Singapore but SCE isn’t. If the L variety, SCE (aka Singlish) dies, it may be that it was simply a stage Singapore was going through.

European educational rhetoric hasn't really grasped the linguistic culture of English. The 1998 Braunschweig conference (Gnutzmann 1999 (ed)) articulated this clearly. Typically English is learnt with a model of either UK or US pronunciation (often very precisely taught at the higher levels) and along with British and/or American culture. Some of the papers in Gnutzmann (ed) discuss this and document changes. Stephan (1997: 105f) argues that some students in German may be encouraged to move away from the traditional monolithic model of British English with RP pronunciation and that they also are sporadically exposed to real linguistic variation through personal contact and media. But even if there is a move towards a more realistic view of English as a world language, schools and universities still advertise for teachers who are native speakers and who are familiar with British or American Culture. Access to English language text on ATM machines is likely to be through a union flag, as it is on a web site advertising *Country Learning*, a private English school in Thüringen:

**Wir lehren hier nicht nur die englische Sprache an sich, sondern bringen Ihnen auch Lebensart, Kultur und Traditionen englischsprachiger Länder näher.**

We are also not just here to teach the English language but to bring you closer to the way of life, the culture and traditions of English speaking countries.”

**Die Lehrküche lädt Sie ein zum Selbst-Zubereiten typisch englischer Gerichte, welche Sie sich dann später schmecken lassen können.**

There's also a kitchen where you can learn to prepare typical English dishes, which you can enjoy later in pleasant company

[<http://www.countrylearning.de/deutsch/home.htm>](http://www.countrylearning.de/deutsch/home.htm)

Other cultures have a different linguistic culture (Schiffman 1996). If French linguistic culture is applied to English we can see why some French commentators regard English as having been corrupted by its spread.

An article by Georges Lochak (1998) for the *Association pour la sauvegarde et l'expansion de la langue française*(Asselaf) argues that it is the French language, not ancestry, that defines being French. The writer regrets that English is so dominant in scientific writing, and that works are not taken seriously unless published in English.

Il faut ajouter que la plupart des scientifiques ne parlent absolument pas l'“anglais”, ils parlent un incroyable sabir. Il est désopilant, dans un congrès, de prendre un instant de recul et de savourer les variétés de “broken English” qu'on y entend, avec les accents multicolores, souvent incompréhensibles d'un pays à un autre : comprendre l'accent japonais quand on est français n'est pas une mince affaire, et la réciproque doit être vraie. Le pire des accents est, bien sûr, un bon accent anglais ou américain ! Ne serait-ce que parce que l'élocution est trop fluide et trop rapide.

[Translation by AFG: *Furthermore, most scientists do not exactly speak 'English', but an amazing pidgin. It is hilarious at a conference, to pause for a moment and savour the varieties of 'broken English' that can be heard, from one country or another, with multicoloured accents, often incomprehensible. It's no easy matter to understand a Japanese accent if you are French, and doubtless vice versa. But the worst accent of all is certainly a good British and American accents! The reason for this being only that articulation is too fluent and rapid.*]

(Lochak 1998)

Lochak claims that there is no such thing as bilingualism – one language is always dominant, and one always thinks effectively only in one's own language. “c'est quand on a une langue maternelle solide qu'on peut en ajouter d'autres ; sinon, on devient infirme dans toutes”.*[it is when one has a solid mother tongue that one can add other languages: otherwise one becomes disabled in all languages]* “... on ne pense que dans une langue que l'on maîtrise : en général, la sienne.” *[One thinks only in a language one has mastered – generally one's own.]*

He attributes purist values to English.

Ce n'est pas que le français qu'il faut défendre, c'est l'allemand, l'espagnol, le polonais, le tchèque, l'italien, le hongrois, le russe, le japonais, le chinois... Toutes les langues, y compris l'anglais ! Car le pidgin des congrès et des relations commerciales, que nous parlons tous (ou à peu près), ne fait que diluer et dégénérer la vraie langue de Shakespeare.

[*It is not only French that has to be protected, but also German, Spanish, Polish, Czech, Italian, Hungarian, Russian, Japanese and Chinese. All languages --- including English! Because the pidgin of conferences and business dealings, which we all speak (more or less), will only dilute and degenerate the true language of Shakespeare.*]

These views seem bizarre and even offensive to those imbued with the linguistic culture of English. The linguistic culture of English with its lack of academies, readiness to welcome new words, polycentricity and wide spread, is one which promotes realism.

## **Conclusion**

Since the study of World Englishes began in the late 1960s (perhaps with the famous controversy between Braj Kachru and Clifford Prator), many of the issues which once seemed radical have become accepted in academic and educational circles, especially in the outer circle. The inner and outer circle countries are generally able to cope well with polycentrism in theory, thanks to the traditional linguistic culture of English. However, the strong tradition of Standard English and its concomitant normative values mean that there are judgmental processes at work within that welcoming of polycentrism. 'Expert' users of English have strongly held views about correctness, though with the exception of a few regionally specific features (such as whether *however* can begin a sentence, and the way to make a distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses), disagreements do not have strongly regional patterns.

The expanding circle countries, however, are not as in tune with the linguistic culture of English as are the inner and outer circle countries. The expanding circle countries are still not accepted as centres within the polycentric model and are thus dependent on the authority of outside 'experts', which puts them in an impossible position as far as participating in a polycentric culture is concerned. I personally would like to see the realism that prevails in the English using countries be extended in those countries in

whose daily life English plays little part, but it could be argued that articulating a more controlled model of English is part of *their* adaptation of English to their own needs.

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Dear Professor Smith

Finally, after a heavy teaching semester, here is the text of my plenary from the IAWE December conference, for consideration for *World Englishes*. I look forward to your feedback.

I very much enjoyed the conference in December, and have been in touch with several people whom I met there for the first time. I have not forgotten my rash offer to host a meeting, and am looking into the financial and organisational issues before I make an proposal.

All the best