

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In this chapter . . .

This chapter introduces the topic of “World Englishes.” It points out the present-day global spread of English and the variant roles of the language in different societies. It should also make you, the reader, aware of the fact that most likely you have already gained some familiarity with this fact. Nearly every speaker of English today has been exposed to different varieties of global English. For instance, in the media accents from all over the world are frequently heard – say, by watching an American sitcom, or by listening to an interview with an African politician. Many people have come across different varieties of English whilst travelling, or have met visitors from another country. By reading this book you will learn a lot more about where, when, why, and how such “new” forms of English have emerged.

It is not enough to remain on a purely theoretical level, however. Our topic comes alive only if we seek exposure to real-life language as produced in different regions, and so I suggest we begin by starting with a practical exercise right away. Just as an example of what we can look at and talk about when we encounter a slightly unfamiliar form of English, you will find a text reproduced, and I will comment on some of the properties of this speech form which I find noteworthy and illustrative. You can, and ought to, also listen to this sample by downloading it from the website which accompanies this book. I point out some of the features of this speech sample (i.e. words used, sounds employed, and constructions found in it), and comment on why these properties occur here, also considering the nature of the text itself. Linguists call this the “sociolinguistic conditions of text production.” I hope to show that resulting from these conditions language use needs to be, and typically is, situationally appropriate. Thus, the individual forms used indirectly acquire something like a symbolic function.

Finally, a short preview of topics to be discussed in the book’s chapters will give you a better idea of what to expect.

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## 1.1 English, both globalizing and nativizing

Have you been abroad? Do you travel a lot? Then you know what I'm talking about. Wherever you go on this globe, you can get along with English. Either most people speak it anyhow, or there is at least somebody around who can communicate in this language. But then, you realize that mostly there's something you may find odd about the way English is used there. If you are abroad English is likely to be somewhat different from the way you speak it:

- people use strange **words**;
- it may take you a while to recognize familiar words because they are **pronounced** somehow differently; and
- sometimes people build their **sentences** in ways that will seem odd to you in the beginning.

Well, if you stay there, wherever that is, for a while, you'll get used to this. And if you stay there even longer, you may even pick up some of these features and begin to sound like the locals. What this example teaches us is: English is no longer just "one language"; it comes in many different shapes and sizes, as it were. It is quite different in the many countries and localities where it has been adopted. To grasp this phenomenon linguists have come to talk of different "Englishes."

No doubt English is truly the world's leading language today. It is used on all continents. In surprisingly many countries (more than 100, according to recent estimates) it has important internal functions as a "Second Language" in addition to one or more indigenous tongues, being used in politics, business, education, technology, the media, etc. It is almost always used as the mediator language (a so-called "lingua franca") by people who need to talk with each other but have different mother tongues, for instance, as suggested in Figure 1, in the classic shopping and bargaining encounters in tourism. All around the globe, English is learned by hundreds of millions of people in all countries simply because it is so useful. A recent estimate puts speaker numbers close to two billion (although this is extremely difficult to guess – it depends on how much you have to know to count as "a speaker"). One of the main reasons for all of this is that in many developing countries people from all walks of life perceive English as the primary gateway to better jobs and incomes, thus a better life. And the entire process has gained so much momentum that at the moment nothing seems to be able to stop it in the foreseeable future.

At the same time, however, English has become localized and indigenized in a great many different countries. It is not only viewed as a useful "international" language, as just described, but it fulfills important local functions. In doing so it has developed local forms and characteristics, so that not



Figure 1 Shopping and bargaining with tourists – a classic situation which calls for English (here in India)

infrequently people enjoy using it in “their own” way. In many places local ways of speaking English have become a new home dialect which, like all local dialects, is used to express regional pride, a sense of belonging to a place which finds expression through local culture, including language forms. Furthermore, in many countries of Africa and Asia, where English was introduced just one or two centuries ago, there are now indigenous children who grow up speaking English as their first and/or most important, most frequently used, language. Some of them are not even able to speak the indigenous language of their parents and grandparents any longer. Come to think of it – isn’t this an amazing phenomenon?

One really interesting aspect about all of this is that this indigenization and nativization process of English in many countries, frequently former colonies in the British Empire, is a product of the very recent past and not primarily of their colonial heritage of centuries ago. It is only for the last few decades, quite a while after independence in many cases, that English has made such inroads into local cultures. Again, this should come as a surprise to an outside observer. English was the language of the colonial power, the settlers and expatriate rulers, sometimes perceived as the oppressors. Once they were gone, wouldn’t it have been natural for a newly independent country to breathe deeply and forget about the days of lack of freedom, to do away with all the colonial heritage, including their language? But interestingly enough,

quite the contrary has happened. In many countries English has been embraced, appropriated, transformed, made “our own.” And in fact, this issue of the “ownership” of English is very much a topic of current debate and has even hit headlines in international journalism. For example, on March 7, 2005, *Newsweek* had a cover page and story entitled “Who Owns English? Non-Native Speakers Are Transforming the Global Language.” What has happened here?

This book describes this process of the global spread of English and its various facets, both from a general perspective (looking at sociohistorical circumstances, political issues involved, and linguists’ explanations and categorizations) and in specific cases and regions. The core chapters (4–6) characterize the major world regions in terms of the reasons why English has been brought there, how and why it is used, and what its characteristic properties are. In each case, my strategy is that of “zooming in” from the general to the specific: I combine a general survey of characteristics of an entire region with a closer look at a case study from one select part of that region, allowing me to showcase a typical instantiation of English in use in a given context. Each case study will then include a model discussion of a select text from that locality. In fact, this text-centered, hands-on approach is one of the specific characteristics of this book as against others on the same subject, which may tell you something about English in specific regions as well, and may provide samples, but none will tell you exactly what to listen and pay attention to, which features characterize particular texts as samples of their respective varieties.

I assume no prior familiarity with any of these issues or regions, and very little, if any, with linguistics. Assuming that you, my readership, will comprise both some linguistics students and non-linguists just interested in this subject, I will employ a dual strategy. I offer some technical terms (which the linguists amongst you will know or may have to remember), but I will also do my best to introduce and explain them briefly. In case you find certain technical terms difficult, please have a look at the glossary, where you will find further definitions and explanations. The same applies to phonetic transcription, the conventional way of rendering pronunciation details on paper. Linguists employ some special symbols, “phonetic characters” as devised by the “International Phonetic Association,” for that purpose. The ones I use are reproduced and briefly explained in Appendix 1. Many of you will be familiar with these IPA characters, and there is no other equally powerful and accurate way of providing information on pronunciation, so I will employ them too, using a broad phonological transcription set between slashes. In addition to that, however, I will do my best to indicate what you need to pay attention to, or what happens in articulating certain sounds, in non-technical terms as well.

If this sounds a little abstract and perhaps alien to you, different from your daily concerns and background – let me assure you it isn’t, really. Whenever we communicate (and each of us talks much of the time), whenever we listen to somebody else talking, subconsciously this machinery works inside of us. We assess what we hear – not only the meaning, the message itself, but the way it is encoded. And the details of this encoding (one’s “accent,” for instance) actually signal quite a lot to us: who our interlocutor is in terms of background, status, age, etc., how friendly he or she wishes to be, what the situation is like, or what the hidden message is between the lines. I am not saying that we are all experts on global Englishes anyhow, and sure there may be hidden messages that we fail to understand, but yes, somehow we are all sociolinguists who constantly analyze how something is said, in addition to what is being stated. To each and every new communicative situation we are in we bring our accumulated, if incomplete, familiarity with different ways of talking, and our earlier exposure to all kinds of Englishes, local and global. And we not only listen explicitly but we also read between the lines, as it were. Frequently what we do as linguists (or students of linguistics) is no more than spelling out what on this basis somehow we “know” anyhow. Ultimately, however, this also means we need to develop methods, hypotheses, and “theories” to collect data objectively, to systematize our observations, to make our claims convincing to others (which is what we could call “proving our theory”).

## 1.2 English, both global and local: a first example

That may sound grand, but I don’t think it is; it begins with the very first steps. And to show you how this works, let us look at one sample text and see what, apart from the contents itself, it contains in terms of interesting, perhaps suggestive, indicative linguistic features as to its origins and implications.

Please read Text 1, “Knowledge,” and, if you can, listen to it on the website accompanying this book. I have deliberately selected a sample which is not explicitly localized in its contents. There are no loan words from any indigenous languages and no local references (the text, you will find, is about the importance of acquiring knowledge). I will point out some properties which I find noteworthy, hoping you share that assessment. Of course, what you will hear and find interesting also depends on your individual background. But there are certainly a few observations which all of us will share and which, based upon your and my partial familiarity with other dialects of English (supported, possibly, by scholarly documentation in

**TEXT 1: Knowledge**

Okay. No, knowledge is not come from vacuum. You have to read, you have to meet with people, you have to have a discussion, and in fact, you have to appreciate the differences between your opinion and other opinion. Then, it start . . . it create a thinking . . . it create a thinking skill, it create . . . it create . . . something that will generate the . . . the new things. Some people may be looking at how coconut falls from the tree. And when we ask them why coconut fall from a tree, maybe say, because it('s) is old enough and ripe enough and is fall. But if you ask a physicist, why falls . . . why coconut fall from the tree, he will say, this is because due to gravity. So different person have different perception of falling object. Therefore, having a knowledge about falling object will create you some ideas how we can change, we can transform energy from one form to another form. Basically, knowledge is generator. So, if you want to build our nation, if we want to build ourself, if we want to improve ourself, there is no other thing other than knowledge. We have to . . . we have . . . we have to be very, very concerned about development and knowledge.

linguistics), can be stated objectively, independently of who we are. And this, after all, is the goal of linguistics, the scientific study of how language works.

The extralinguistic context is of course always important in the understanding of a speech selection, so I should state at the outset that this is a sample I recorded in the media, the concluding part of a TV speech, to be precise. Let us start with the obvious and move on to the more specific.

The speaker is a male adult, and clearly not a native speaker (he does not sound like someone from Britain, America, or the like). But we may assume he is educated – that is what the topic and the choice of words (formal and scientific vocabulary like *vacuum*, *physicist*, *gravity*, *perception*, or *transform*) imply. On the other hand, he hesitates repeatedly and sometimes struggles for words, coming up with a generic expression like *the new things*. Context and style are obviously formal, as suggested by the impersonal topic and the slow and careful mode of delivery, and of course also by what we know about the extralinguistic context.

What makes the speaker's pronunciation special, and how would we implicitly compare his accent to what we may know about other accents?

- Amongst his vowels, the most persistent phenomenon worth noting is that in words where British and American English (BrE, AmE) have a diphthong, a gliding movement from one tongue position to another as in *day* /eɪ/ or *show* /əʊ/, this speaker produces a monophthong, a pure

/e/ or /o/ sound (listen to the way he says *basically*, *nation*, *change*, or *no*). This is common if you know speakers from Scotland, the Caribbean, or many parts of Africa and Asia.

- In *gravity* he has a fairly open /a/, not an /æ/ where the tongue is more raised.

On a more general note, the speaker’s accent, like standard BrE but unlike AmE, is “non-rhotic,” i.e. he does not pronounce an /r/ after vowels, e.g. in *energy* or *form*. This is an indication that the sample may come from the domain of the former British Empire. Amongst consonants, the “th” sounds are largely as expected, though occasionally the friction that characterizes these sounds seems reduced down to a stop articulation /d-/ in *then*. The *p*’s in *people* sound very “weak,” like /b/. The final fricatives in *ideas*, *improve*, and *knowledge* are articulated without voicing (vibration of the vocal cords in one’s neck), as /-s/, /-f/, and /-ʃ/, respectively. What is more noteworthy is that final consonant clusters are consistently reduced. This means that whenever at the end of a word two consonants occur in a row, the second one is not realized at all. So in *fact*, *physicist*, *different*, or *object* the final *-t* is not there; in *build* or *concerned* *-d* is omitted, and the word *ask* is clearly articulated twice as *as*’ without /k/. Speakers of British and American dialects do this as well in informal situations, but in language contact situations this reduction has been found to be especially widespread. Much less common globally, and an indicator of a possible Asian origin, is the omission of a single word-final consonant, to be found in this sample in *about*, pronounced without /-t/.

What gives this sample its distinctive sound most strongly, however, may be some rhythmic patterns which have to do with stress assignment.

- Certain words are stressed on unusual syllables, compared to more mainstream accents, and this also affects the respective vowels such that vowels which in standard English are an unstressed schwa /ə/ receive a full articulatory quality. Listen to *person*, stressed on the second syllable to yield /pə'sen/ (the apostrophe indicates stress on the following syllable), and to *transform* /'transfɔ:m/ and *concerned* /'kɒnsən/, with initial accents.
- Furthermore, in words like *different*, *physicist*, *perception*, *generate*, or *generator* the vowels in the unstressed syllables, which in (“stress-timed”) BrE would probably disappear altogether or be strongly reduced, are articulated remarkably clearly and with some duration. This contributes to the impression of a “syllable-timed” accent (in which roughly each syllable takes equally long) which has been found to characterize many New Englishes.

The origin of the sample from one of these varieties can be deduced from many characteristic grammatical features as well. Note that in none of these



observations I am passing any judgment on whether this is “right” or “wrong” – we will discuss such attitudes later, in Chapter 8; here we are just making and comparing some observations.

- In some cases there is a tendency to leave out grammatical endings, both on verbs (as in *it start* or *coconut fall*) and in nouns, when the plural is clearly contextually implied but not formally expressed by an *-s*, as in *other opinion*, *different person*, or *ourselves*. Note that this is not as unusual as it may seem. In Norwich, England, the local dialect leaves out verbal *-s* frequently, and in America speakers may say something like *twenty-year-old* or *twenty mile away*.
- Article usage is variable sometimes, as it is known to be in some Asian (and other) varieties. We would expect an indefinite article *a* before *coconut*, introducing an object not mentioned so far in the discourse, and before *generator*, but on the other hand we might not say *a knowledge*, as this noun is commonly assumed to be “uncountable.”
- Verbs also behave uniquely in some respects. The verb *create* allows a construction which it does not have in, say, BrE, namely complementation by an indirect object: *create you some ideas*.
- Questions do not require *do*-support or inversion in *why falls* and *why coconut fall*.
- Some constructions may be argued to increase the explicitness of marking and thus to contribute to securing the message. For example, in *because due to* the same idea is expressed twice in a row, as it were; and in *one form to another form* the noun is repeated where commonly the second occurrence might be left out.

Finally, note that some constructions cannot really be analyzed or explained, and possibly just understood, satisfactorily. Is the speaker saying *is ... come*, and if so, why? Why *is fall*? Should *falling object* be understood as a plural without *-s* or as a singular lacking an indefinite article? Is the long /i/ audible in *maybe say* to be understood as a reduced *will*, which would make sense?

One’s ability to precisely determine the local origin of this sample depends upon the individual backgrounds of us, the listeners, of course. All of us will know that this represents one of the New Englishes, and many will be able to trace it to Asia; and I suppose Asians will do better. On the other hand, if you happen to be from Malaysia I am sure you will not only recognize this as a voice from your home country but will also easily identify the speaker’s ethnicity as Malay. In fact, closer familiarity with the cultural background helps to better contextualize the speaker’s intentions. Muslims sometimes believe that a place in heaven is secured by performing praying rituals and religious duties only, and that the only knowledge required is that of Allah’s



word in the Quran. This speaker’s statement is directed against such an opinion. He means to emphasize the importance of striving for worldly and scientific knowledge as well, also for the benefit of the process of nation building. In doing so he ties in with a call once made by the former Prime Minister Dr. Mahatir.

I hope you agree that this sample, even if it stems from a fairly formal context, actually tells us quite a lot about its origins and social embedding. Other samples would signal wildly different things to us and would display many other linguistic phenomena which, depending on our own individual linguistic backgrounds, we might think of as apparently odd – the more so the more we approach the informal end of linguistic production, the closer we get to “down-to-earth” speech forms. Some of this knowledge about speakers and varieties of English we possess intuitively, having accumulated it as competent speakers and through our own individual linguistic histories. Much more can be stated and taught, however. And all of this needs to be contextualized, to be connected with related knowledge about pertinent sociohistorical and political background information. Forms found in one particular text can be compared with properties and usage contexts of other varieties of English. And finally, all these observations need to be related to the issues and problems identified and the systematic frameworks and concepts developed by expert linguists.

### 1.3 Preview of the following chapters

The chapters of this book provide some of this factual background knowledge and will stimulate an increased awareness of problems, with the goal of enabling you to understand the globalization of English and to consciously interpret linguistic usage from all around the world in its proper contexts.

The following, second chapter spells out some fundamental observations which on second thoughts are likely to come quite naturally but which we have typically not been raised with when talking about language. Cases in point are the fact that all languages appear in different forms all the time; the fact that language contact and multilingualism are normal and not exceptional; and the fact that language largely depends upon external events and circumstances rather than being an independent entity in its own right. Furthermore, the chapter introduces models which have been proposed to categorize and conceptualize the varying types of global Englishes.

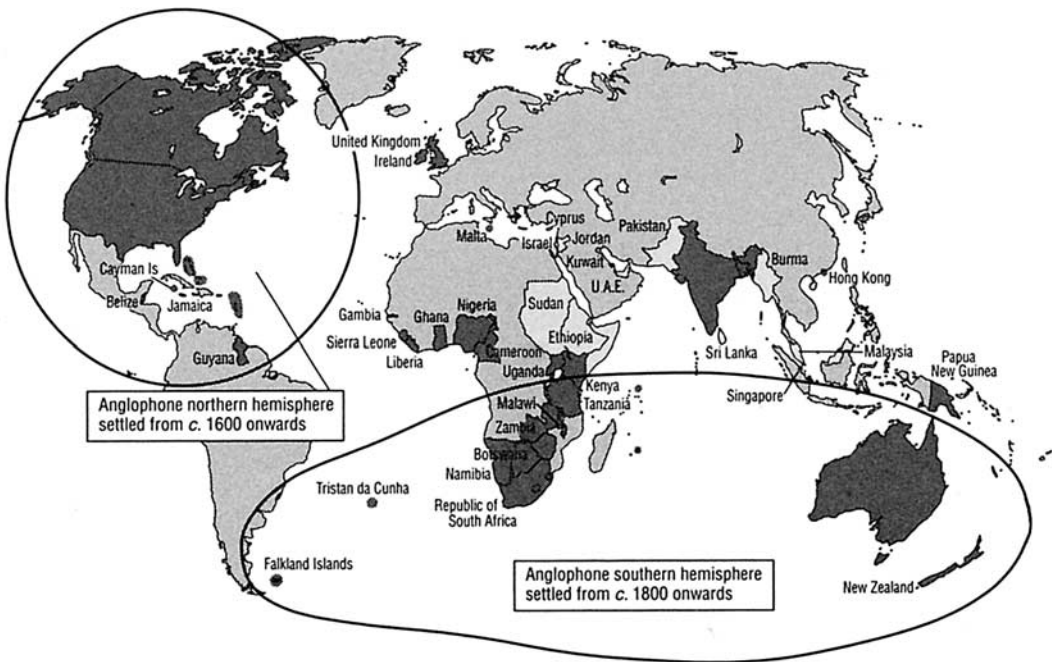
Chapter 3 lays the historical foundations. It discusses the history of European colonization, primarily with respect to the growth of the British Empire, and the more recent events that have promoted the further spread, modification, and predominance of English to the present day.

Chapter 1, section [1.3]

The next three chapters then look at the forms and functions of English in major world regions and individual countries.

Chapter 4 outlines its spread in what from the rest of the world is viewed as the “western culture,” Europe and America. Ultimately, as elsewhere, even in the British Isles, English is the product of colonization and diffusion in contact with other languages, and it appears in a bewildering range of dialectal forms, as the case study of Northern English illustrates. From the “Old World” English was then transported to the “New World,” North America, where it has been transformed in the conquest of a continent. At the same time, it has retained strong dialectal variants backed by regional pride and associated with a distinctive regional culture, as in the case of Southern English. In the Caribbean, exemplified by a closer look at Jamaica and Jamaican Creole, an agrarian plantation economy and the century-long mass importation of slaves from Africa have created uniquely blended languages and cultures.

It makes sense to distinguish northern from southern hemisphere colonies, settled in and after the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, respectively, and Map 1 illustrates this division. The Southern Hemisphere is the topic of Chapter 5, with closer attention paid to Australian English and Black South African English. Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa are products of later colonization. It will be shown that while different patterns of settlement



Map 1 The division of the anglophone world by hemisphere  
(from Hickey 2004: 628; reproduced by permission)