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978-0-521-83140-6 - Postcolonial English: Varieties Around the World

Edgar W. Schneider

Excerpt

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## 1 Introduction

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One of the most remarkable, and perhaps unexpected, sociocultural changes of the modern period, culminating in the late twentieth century, has been the global spread of the English language, a major component of a “language revolution” postulated by David Crystal (2004). For centuries scholars have dreamt of a single, universal language which would allow all of mankind to communicate with each other directly, but all attempts at constructing such a code artificially have failed in practice. Now, it seems, one has emerged quite naturally. The English language has spread into precisely this role without any strategic planning behind this process – it is the world’s lingua franca and the language of international communication, politics, commerce, travel, the media, and so on. However, at the same time, and contrary to expectations, English has diversified, developing into homegrown forms and uses in many locations. It has also become an indigenized language, even a mother tongue, in several countries around the globe. In some countries, the descendants of former colonists or colonizers have retained the language to the present day; in others, interestingly enough, it was the local, indigenous population who have adopted and appropriated the English language for themselves, thus contributing to its diversification and the emergence of new varieties.

Certainly this state of affairs is the product of colonial and postcolonial history, most notably the spread of the British Empire. Crystal (1997) explains the role of English as the leading world language through a series of subsequent but rather coincidental processes: English happened to be the language of the British Empire and colonial expansion between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, of the industrial revolution thereafter, and in the twentieth century of the USA as the leading economic and military superpower and the main agent of today’s economic and cultural globalization. That is certainly true, but it is only part of the story. In many countries English was a language imposed by foreign, colonial masters. Intuitively one could have expected it to be abandoned as fast as possible after independence. Indeed, some countries, like Tanzania or Malaysia, attempted to do so and proposed the removal of English as their political

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 2 Introduction

goal. After all, it was a foreign tongue, alien to a substantial proportion of the indigenous population, and an unwelcome reminder and heritage of colonialism, which meant, among other things, foreign dominance and loss of political and cultural sovereignty.

However, in most cases something strange, exactly the opposite, has happened, in bits and pieces, and in several countries independently of each other: English has managed to stay, not only in formal and official functions; it has indigenized and grown local roots. It has begun to thrive and to produce innovative, regionally distinctive forms and uses of its own, in contact with indigenous languages and cultures and in the mouths of both native populations and the descendants of former immigrants, making ever deeper inroads into local communities. Its pull and attractiveness are immense. From Barbados to Australia, from Kenya to Hong Kong a traveler will today get along with English, but he or she will also realize that the Englishes encountered are quite different from each other – pronounced with varying accents, employing local words opaque to an outsider, and even, on closer inspection, constructing sentences with certain words in slightly different ways. What is perhaps even more interesting is that our virtual traveler will encounter native speakers of English not only in Canada and New Zealand, where this would be expected, but also in Nigeria and Singapore, and in many more parts of the world in which English is not an ancestral language. English has become a local language of everyday communication in many countries and new environments; it is developing indigenous forms; it appears to be fragmenting, breaking up into regional varieties so that intelligibility may be compromised. And, interestingly enough, this process has intensified substantially during the latter part of the twentieth century and into the new millennium.

No doubt this global spread and concurrent indigenization of English is a phenomenon with many different facets and components, of concern to various people and disciplines. It raises issues of language policy and pedagogy, of cultural evaluation and sociopsychological integration, and, of course, for a linguist also of structural and pragmatic evolution. A new sub-discipline within (English) linguistics, somewhat fuzzily known as the study of “World Englishes” or English as a world language, has emerged since the early 1980s, with journals, textbooks, collective volumes, and conference series of its own, and the topic is becoming ever more popular (see Bolton and Kachru 2006). This is not surprising given that it is highly vibrant, with the changes happening to English going on at an undiminished pace and being relevant to all kinds of theoretical and practical questions.

As in many young fields, terminology is still somewhat unsettled, and there are alternative labels for the phenomenon under consideration emphasizing slightly different aspects. When in 1980 Manfred Görlach

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

founded the first scholarly journal exclusively devoted to these processes, he considered choosing *Englises* as its title but refrained from doing so because the plural form was still felt to be unacceptable, and he opted for *English World-Wide* instead. The books by Pride (1982) and Platt, Weber and Ho (1984) introduced the label *New Englises*, which gained quite some currency but was also opposed by some scholars who argued that the label *new* reflected primarily a shift of attention in western, Anglocentric scholarship. Braj Kachru and his followers have employed the term *World Englises*, introduced by a journal of that name founded in 1982 and disseminated also by an active scholarly organization, known as *IAWE*, the *International Association of World Englises*. This label is useful, customary, and widespread today, though associated with a specific school in the discipline and its programmatic agenda of “decolonising English . . . outside the ‘Western World’ ” (Hickey 2004b:504). In this book I use the term *Postcolonial Englises*, not only because it is more neutral but also because it focuses precisely on the aspect which I intend to emphasize: the varieties under discussion are products of a specific evolutionary process tied directly to their colonial and postcolonial history. I am concerned with developmental phenomena characteristic of colonial and the early phases of postcolonial histories until the maturation and separation of these dialects as newly recognized and self-contained varieties; hence, the term is taken to encompass all forms of English resulting and emerging from such backgrounds.

By and large, the relevant linguistic developments are products of the colonial expansion of the British Empire from the late sixteenth to the twentieth century. During the Elizabethan Age, Britain began to develop global ambitions and to challenge the dominance of the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and French as colonial powers. In the seventeenth century North America was settled, and, importantly, economically prosperous possessions were colonized throughout the Caribbean. At the same time firm trading connections were built with coastal locations in Africa and with the Far East. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, British ships explored the Pacific, substantial numbers of British settlers moved to Australasia and South Africa, and the Empire became the leading colonial power in South and South-East Asia. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, finally, brought with them colonial authority in further parts of Africa and also the emergence of the United States of America as a colonial power, mainly in the Philippines.<sup>1</sup>

Note, however, that what counts here is not the colonial history or the former colonial status of a given country per se, and also not the specifically British connection, but rather the type of contact situation caused by these historical circumstances, the expansion and relocation of the use of a

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Edgar W. Schneider

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 4 Introduction

single language to new territories where a characteristic type of language-contact situation evolves.

This book proposes a unified systematic approach of the emergence of Postcolonial Englishes (henceforth PCEs): it describes their general characteristics in the light of a uniform theory and looks at many of their individual manifestations, with all their bewildering variability. PCEs have emerged in a wide variety of sociohistorical circumstances, throughout the history of colonialism and on all continents. Hence, it is necessary to look closely into the sociohistorical contexts of their emergence, their “ecologies” (Mufwene 2001b). Different scenarios emerged, and they account for persistent differences from one variety to another. But one thing that all these varieties have in common is that they have originated in contact settings, involving intercultural encounters: contact between immigrants of various social and regional backgrounds (including speakers of different English dialects), and contact between English-speaking immigrants and indigenous populations.

It is natural to expect that differences in extralinguistic backgrounds have resulted in the far-reaching differences between the individual varieties that we find today in their respective forms and functions. Indeed, this is the position that scholarship has typically taken: it has been customary to view individual PCEs in isolation, independently of each other, as unique cases shaped by idiosyncratic historical conditions and contact situations. So far, theory formation in this emerging field has not proceeded beyond categorizations of the countries concerned into types according to the roles English plays in them (to be discussed briefly in chapter 2). In contrast, the present book points out that a uniform underlying process has been effective in all these situations and explains a wide range of parallel phenomena from one variety to another.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it presents the first unified, coherent theory to account specifically for the evolution of PCEs around the globe.

A closer look at what is going on in many English-speaking countries reveals strange, perhaps surprising similarities despite all obvious differences in their regional and sociocultural settings, illustrating the fact that a transnational perspective is required in understanding global English(es) today. Why is it that “nation building” was a major political issue typically associated with linguistic matters in many countries on different continents? Why is it that Singaporeans just like US Southerners or Nigerian Pidgin speakers keep resisting their politicians’ and educational gatekeepers’ pronouncements to speak “proper” English and to avoid “bastardized” dialects of the language (whatever the fashionable discourse convention at any given location might be)? Why do South African, Indian, and Caribbean writers employ local idioms to entertain their audiences, although this may restrict

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

international accessibility to (and commercial success of) their literary products? Why are so many nations in Africa, Asia, and in the Caribbean struggling with the issue of which norm of English to prescribe in education, officially promoting a British speech type that obviously is not a realistic (and perhaps not even a desirable) target? Why are conservative language critics lamenting “falling standards” of English in so many different countries, from New Zealand to Tanzania? Why were observers and visitors surprised about the putative “homogeneity” of English as spoken in nineteenth-century North America or twentieth-century New Zealand, while currently we get reports of regional speech differences emerging in locations as far apart as Canada or Australia? Why are words borrowed from indigenous languages into local forms of English typically from specific semantic domains? Aren’t the similarities between the kinds of structural innovations to be observed in a great many different varieties of English around the globe (like local “accents,” specific borrowings, the coinage of new compounds, or slight variations in the uses of prepositions or the constructions which verbs allow) linguistically remarkable, even stunning? Obviously, PCEs have more in common than one might think at first sight.

It is the core thesis of this book that, despite all obvious dissimilarities, a fundamentally uniform developmental process, shaped by consistent sociolinguistic and language-contact conditions, has operated in the individual instances of relocating and re-rooting the English language in another territory, and therefore it is possible to present the individual histories of PCEs as instantiations of the same underlying process. More specifically, it is posited that evolving new varieties of English go through a cyclic series of characteristic phases,<sup>3</sup> determined by extralinguistic conditions. Individual countries in which PCEs are spoken are regarded as positioned at different phases along this cycle, an explanation which accounts for some of the differences observed in the shapes and roles of PCEs.

At the heart of this process there are characteristic stages of identity reconstructions on the side of the parties involved, which are to some extent determined by similar parameters of the respective contact situations. Comparable constellations of communities in migration contact settings (between indigenous population and immigrant groups, respectively) have resulted in analogous processes of mutual accommodation and, consequently, in similar sociolinguistic and structural outcomes. In essence, the process consists of a gradual and mutual cultural and linguistic approximation of the two parties in a colonization process: in the early phases of colonial expansion settlers consider themselves outpost representatives of a distant homeland, and the burden of linguistic adaptation and, sometimes, language shift rests largely upon the indigenous population. In the long run, this process entails structural nativization, understood as the emergence of

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Edgar W. Schneider

Excerpt

[More information](#)

locally characteristic linguistic patterns and thus the genesis of a new variety of English. In the course of this process both groups tend to rewrite their identities, based upon permanently shared territory, and in the end they emerge as a new nation with hybrid roots and new linguistic norms.

Chapter 2 situates the approach pursued here in its scholarly context. I will briefly survey the disciplines that have influenced the study of PCEs methodologically and conceptually, the various approaches that have dominated the field over the last few decades, and a few general issues that need to be considered.

In chapter 3 the theoretical framework behind this book, which I call the “Dynamic Model” of the evolution of PCEs, is outlined. Before going into the model itself, some foundations will be addressed, notably a taxonomy of language contact settings and colonization types, and the theories of social identity and linguistic accommodation. This is followed by a thorough presentation of the components of the model itself. I suggest that in a typical developmental scenario, the history of PCEs can be described as a sequence of five distinct phases, labeled “Foundation,” “Exonormative stabilization,” “Nativization,” “Endonormative stabilization,” and “Differentiation.” Each of these is characterized by specific ecological and linguistic characteristics, so at each stage a mutually dependent set of factors needs to be considered, relating to the respective sociopolitical background, the identity constructions of the parties involved in a contact setting, the resulting sociolinguistic conditions, and the linguistic effects of these factors. Finally, I discuss a few important parameters of variation within the model, and I consider its wider applicability, e.g. to the global diffusion of Romance languages.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the strictly linguistic side of the central thesis. It asks which structural phenomena on the levels of phonology, lexis, and grammar are widespread in PCEs; it looks into the methodological and conceptual basis behind our familiarity with, and perception of, differences between varieties of English; and it investigates the linguistic processes which have produced the similarities between them. Given that, quite naturally, much attention in the literature is devoted to extralinguistic conditions and sociolinguistic parameters, it is the intention of this chapter to redress the balance and to develop a strictly linguistic, structurally descriptive perspective on PCEs that goes beyond a conventional, somewhat anecdotal listing of individual examples.

Subsequently, in chapter 5, the concepts developed up to then are applied to a wide range of case studies. The histories and present-day situations and characteristics of English in as many as sixteen countries from all continents, ranging from Fiji to Canada, from New Zealand via Malaysia to Kenya and Barbados, are discussed in the light of the Dynamic Model. This chapter can be read as the first-ever global history of PCEs, paying attention to both the

Cambridge University Press

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Edgar W. Schneider

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

7

underlying uniformity and the remarkable diversity of this process. It strikes a balance between emphasizing common, underlying traits shared by substantially different locations and historical settings on the one hand and respecting differences between such varieties on the other. These differences can be either of an idiosyncratic nature or determined by colonization types (e.g. between communities where European settlers predominated, as in Australia; where English was deliberately selected by the indigenous community, as in Nigeria; and where creoles developed, as in Jamaica). Overall, a rich texture of the evolution of English and Englishes around the world, paying attention to their political and cultural contexts, sociolinguistic settings, and structural characteristics, emerges.

Chapter 6 approaches the topic from a complementary perspective, namely by describing in some detail the emergence of a variety that has passed all the way through the evolutionary cycle (and thus allows us to evaluate it in hindsight) but is not typically discussed as one of the PCEs, American English. Apart from the fact that the Dynamic Model is found to apply quite convincingly in this case as well, this chapter presents a history of American English as such, one which in its coherence, explanatory power, and also attention to detail goes considerably beyond earlier historical surveys of this variety.

Finally, the conclusion considers a few general aspects of, and insights derived from, the previous chapters. Based upon the earlier discussions and the input of the case studies, it evaluates the applicability of the Dynamic Model and its theoretical and practical consequences.



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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 2 Charting the territory: Postcolonial Englishes as a field of linguistic investigation

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### 2.1 Ancestry

First and foremost, PCEs are varieties of English, shaped and determined by the sociohistorical conditions of their origins and by the social nature of man. Human beings usually associate closely with other humans nearby and have considerably less contact with people who live far away or in different social circumstances, whom they are less likely to encounter. Hence, they accommodate and adjust their speech forms to those of their friends and neighbors to express solidarity, which is the reason why there are dialects and varieties of languages. The study of PCEs builds upon some precursor disciplines which have investigated such variation and developed methodologies to probe into regional, social, and other types of language variation. Obviously, the popular idea that there is only one “standard” variant, a “correct,” monolithic form of English, with all other realizations being somehow “deviant,” “dialectal,” or “broken,” is misguided. Rather, with Mufwene (2001b) we need to accept that every language consists of an enormously large “pool” of features, linguistic options to choose from if one wishes to express one and the same idea. Choices are possible in vocabulary, pronunciation, word forms, and also the syntactic arrangement of sentence constituents. Which of these choices are made, and how precisely we speak, depends upon and at the same time signals an individual’s background. In most instances, as soon as a person starts to speak, listeners will be able to roughly assess where the speaker grew up, in which social circumstances, and how formal or casual is the speech situation being framed.

By implication, the same applies to speakers of PCEs. These parameters of variation have been studied by linguistic disciplines which can be regarded as precursors of the field of studying PCEs: dialect geography, sociolinguistics, and pidgin and creole studies (or contact linguistics, more generally). These disciplines have provided methodological tools, are driven by similar research goals, and are interested in comparable applications of their results.



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Edgar W. Schneider

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 2.1 Ancestry

9

The first parameter of language variability linguists turned their attention to, originally because of its implicit significance for the understanding of outcomes of language history, was *regional variation*, investigated by dialect geography (Francis 1983; Davis 1983; Chambers and Trudgill 1998). It is a trivial fact that speakers from different countries, regions, or, at times, even villages speak differently and can be recognized by their “accents,” by regionally marked words, and (although this is less well known popularly) by regional features of grammar. Beginning in the late 1920s in the USA and in the 1940s in England, dialect geographers have systematically collected evidence of such differences to establish “linguistic atlases,” both in Britain and in North America (as well as in non-English-speaking countries, of course).

Differences between New Englishes can be regarded as a continuation of such regional differences: comparing English as spoken in, say, Australia, Nigeria, or India essentially entails looking at regional language differences. Provided that the listener has an ear for such differences and has had exposure to the respective varieties before, the regional origin of a speaker can usually be identified on the basis of his or her accent and other features of language use. In the case of PCEs, the assignment of a speaker to a certain location on the basis of such differences has usually operated on an inter-regional or even international basis, i.e. by broadly comparing the Englishes of one country to another, and not intranationally, with an eye to internal regional differences. This is a consequence of the time depth of the respective varieties: it takes a very long time – generations or even centuries – for regional speech differences to emerge, stabilize, and become recognizable in the public mind. In most PCE-speaking countries, therefore, a dialectology with a “traditional” orientation and methodology has not yet been initiated, also because internal regional differences tend not to be as pronounced and conspicuous as in “older” English-speaking countries. However, in the case of some communities where conditions for the emergence of regional differences (internal group coherence being more important than outside contacts for an extended period of time) have prevailed, we do find regional differences and scholarly documentations of such variation, e.g. with respect to dialects of American English, inter-island differences in the Caribbean, or emerging regional speech differences in Australia and New Zealand. I will return to some of these topics in the case studies below. A most interesting case in point, for instance, is Bryant’s (1989, 1997) work on the regional lexis of Australian English, which has produced dialect maps along the lines of earlier word geographies to describe regional variation in a new variety of English.

In the 1960s linguists began to emphasize the fact that speech differences are motivated not only by regional differences but also by an individual’s

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 10 Charting the territory

social background, i.e. parameters such as social class, education, sex, ethnicity, and that in general it is necessary to understand the way competing languages and language varieties are used in increasingly complex societies. Accordingly, as is well known, the discipline of *sociolinguistics* can be subdivided into two major branches. “Macro-sociolinguistics” (e.g. Fishman 1972) is broadly concerned with the functions of languages and language varieties in a society, i.e. questions of language policy, multilingualism, diglossia, language uses, educational policies. “Micro-sociolinguistics,” as developed by William Labov (1972; Chambers 2003), employs quantitative methods to work out detailed correlations between individual language variants (features of pronunciation, morphology, and syntax) on the one hand and language-internal constraints and extralinguistic (social) users’ groupings on the other, frequently motivated by a fundamental interest in principles of language variation and language change (Chambers, Trudgill and Schilling-Estes 2002). Clearly, both approaches are of immediate concern to and have greatly influenced investigations of PCEs. Macro-sociolinguistic problems show and have been documented most clearly in multilingual societies, many of which frequently, precisely because the language situation is so complex, have resulted in the emergence of new varieties of English. Micro-correlational sociolinguistics has been applied to Australia (Horvath 1985), to New Zealand (most vigorously and successfully in the 1990s and after in work by Laurie Bauer, Allan Bell, Elizabeth Gordon, Janet Holmes, Peter Trudgill, and many others; see Bell and Kuiper 2000, which includes a survey of earlier research, and Gordon et al. 2004), the Caribbean (in work by Peter Patrick, John Rickford, Don Winford, and others) and to Singapore (by John Platt and his associates).

At about the same time, during the late 1950s and the 1960s, *pidgin* and *creole* linguistics evolved as a field of study, with various linguists working on creole languages having recognized unexpected structural similarities across creoles based on different lexifiers (see Holm 1988/89; Arends, Muysken, and Smith 1995). Consequently, in its early phase creole linguistics was strongly concerned with fairly general, theoretical questions, like theories of creole genesis and the roles of universals, substrates, and superstrates, respectively (see Muysken and Smith 1986). More recent research tendencies have included a broader documentation of early creole texts (e.g. Rickford 1987 for Guyanese, Winer 1993 for Trinidadian, D’Costa and Lalla 1989 for Jamaican, or Huber 1999 for West African Pidgin English), the recognitions that some creoles have emerged gradually rather than abruptly (Arends 1993) and that creoles come in different degrees of “depth” (Schneider 1990; Neumann-Holzschuh and Schneider 2000), and, in fact, that it seems impossible to delimitate them precisely as a class of