
Introduction: Sociolinguistics and English around the world

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Only a few centuries ago, the English language consisted of a collection of dialects spoken mainly by monolinguals and only within the shores of a small island. Now it includes such typologically distinct varieties as pidgins and creoles, 'new' Englishes, and a range of differing standard and non-standard varieties that are spoken on a regular basis in more than 60 different countries around the world (Crystal 1985). English is also, of course, the main language used for communication at an international level.

Such diversity of form and function within what is nevertheless still thought of as a single language offers a unique opportunity to analyse and document the linguistic variation and change that is occurring on a far greater scale – as far as we know – than has ever happened in the world's linguistic history. It also allows us to investigate the relationship between language and the community in which it is used from a broader perspective than is usual. Academic disciplines tend to fragment into separate specialist fields: dialectology, bilingualism, pidgin and creole studies, and sociolinguistics, for example, are often treated as if they are relatively self-contained areas of study. All four of these fields, however, share the problems of describing and explaining linguistic variation, though the nature of the variation may differ; and all four fields investigate essentially the same social and educational issues arising from community attitudes that assign high prestige to some languages, or varieties of a language, and low prestige to others (see also Rickford 1988). Focusing on world Englishes in their social contexts, then, makes it easier to see what these disciplines have in common.

This introductory chapter does not attempt to summarise the contents of the volume. The papers speak for themselves, illustrating the range of variation that exists within the English language today and the diverse social contexts in which English is used. Instead, this chapter draws attention to the specific contribution that empirical research into English

around the world can make to our understanding of language in its social context and, conversely, to some of the reasons why a sociolinguistic perspective is important for the study of English around the world.

English around the world and sociolinguistics

Analysing sociolinguistic variation in the English that is used around the world poses an enormous challenge to sociolinguistics. One reason for this is that many fundamental concepts that have long been taken for granted within sociolinguistics become problematic when they are viewed from a multilingual perspective, rather than from the monolingual perspective in which they were originally developed. An example is the concept of the speech community. Early sociolinguistic surveys showed that social and stylistic variation could be incorporated into a single model of 'orderly heterogeneity' (Labov 1972), where all socioeconomic classes followed the usage of the higher socioeconomic classes in their more careful speech styles. Figure 1.1 (see chapter 1, page 18) illustrates this pattern of variation for the (th) variable in New York City. Such sociolinguistic patterning, together with tests of speakers' subjective evaluations of linguistic variants, led Labov to define the speech community as a group of speakers sharing a common set of evaluative norms (Labov 1966; see further Labov 1989). Romaine (1982) has already drawn attention to some of the problems that arise when applying this definition to (mainly) monolingual situations; the problems become still greater, however, when we investigate Creole communities (see Winford 1988) or the multilingual urban centres in 'developing' societies. As Guy (1988: 46) points out, in some cities of the 'third world' a majority of the population may have been born elsewhere, and many people may not even speak the official language or the standard dialect, so that they can hardly be said to form a speech community in the same way that New York City can.

There are other sociolinguistic concepts which are often taken as self-evident but which we are forced to question when analysing English as it is used around the world. 'Mother tongue' is not necessarily a useful or a meaningful concept in cities such as Lusaka, where population movement, language loss, language shift, and language attitudes may all affect the language that speakers consider to be their first language (see Siachitema, this volume). Furthermore, the distinction that has been drawn conventionally between the 'native speaker' and the 'non-native speaker' is becoming blurred and increasingly difficult to operationalise. At one time it may have been possible to make a distinction on the grounds that a non-native speaker of English had learnt the language through formal instruction, rather than acquired it as a mother tongue; but in many multilingual countries the functional range of English is changing rapidly, so that English is now used in informal domains as well as in more formal, official

domains. This means that although English may still be learnt at school, it may also be acquired through informal use in everyday life (see further Kandiah, this volume). Similarly, some pidgin and creole varieties of English are easily identifiable as native speaker varieties (this is so for the varieties reported in the Caribbean and Pacific sections of this volume), but others may be second language varieties, learnt at school (Liberian English is an example; see Singler, this volume). Some pidgins are not termed 'English' and although English may have played an important role in their linguistic development it is not clear if they are perceived within the community as 'English': one such pidgin is represented in this volume (Faraclas' paper on Nigerian Pidgin). Other typological classifications of varieties of English as they are used around the world can also pose problems: it has been pointed out, for example, that the criteria used to identify ESL, EFL and other varieties of English that were once thought to be relatively discrete (such as the five types of English distinguished by Moag 1982) cannot do justice to the multiplicity of situations in which English is used (Görlach 1988: 181). All these problems of classification and description, then, challenge the early assumptions that were made in sociolinguistics, and force us to reflect on their validity. The discipline stands to benefit greatly from being forced to reassess its terminology and its conceptual frameworks in this way.

A second challenge that the analysis of English around the world offers to sociolinguistics concerns the methodology that is used in research. Many of the most widely used frameworks of analysis were developed during investigations into language use in Western industrial societies and have been shaped by underlying theoretical assumptions that were not always made explicit (see, for discussion, Milroy 1987). For example, the early Labovian framework of analysis linked the stylistic continuum to a functionalist model of social class, without explicitly acknowledging its dependence on this model. This meant that research results were interpreted as if they had resulted from a neutral, objective analysis rather than from an analysis tied to a theory-dependent model of class. For instance, the recurrent pattern of social and stylistic variation illustrated in figure 1.1 (chapter 1 below) was explained in terms of the prestige of the variants preferred by the higher socioeconomic classes; the persistence and spread of other, low-status, variants was then, correspondingly, accounted for by the notion of covert prestige (see, for example, Labov 1966; and, for further discussion, Milroy, this volume). As Milroy (1987: 99) points out, this type of interpretation can be illuminating, but the failure to acknowledge the dependence of Labov's view of sociolinguistic variation on a specific model of social class has meant that interpretations in terms of prestige have until recently been taken for granted. There has been very little consideration of alternative models of social class in sociolinguistics, and little meaningful debate on how linguistic variability

can best be related to social structure. Shifting the focus of inquiry to non-Western societies, which are organised differently, forces us to give proper consideration to these questions (see, for example, the papers by Chishimba, Jibril, Rickford and Winford, this volume).

Similarly, analysing patterns of sex differentiation in English around the world puts into proper perspective the 'typical' finding that female speakers use a higher proportion of standard forms. Clearly, the finding is dependent on gender roles rather than simply on biological sex so that, at the very least, the interaction of speaker sex with other social variables must be analysed if we are to obtain a clear understanding of the inter-relationship between linguistic variation and social factors (see the papers by Escure and Clarke, this volume). Khan's paper in this volume demonstrates that in at least one English-speaking community, in India, the familiar pattern is reversed; Eisikovits' paper, on the other hand, shows far greater differentiation between the speech of male and female speakers in Sydney than has been documented for English-speaking societies before. Extending the analysis of sex differentiation in English to a wider range of societies, then, forces us to recognise that patterns of variation differ from community to community and that a simplistic approach to the analysis of sex differentiation in language use can give a very misleading impression of the nature and the function of linguistic variation.

An additional, important, perspective on language and gender is given by Kuijper's and Mühlhäusler's papers in this volume which, using qualitative approaches, demonstrate the cultural salience of gender divisions in two very different English-speaking communities. Sociolinguistics has tended to operate with preconceived ideas about the relative importance of different social parameters, and these ideas may have prevented us from understanding some crucial aspects of sociolinguistic variation. For example, it has been suggested that a preoccupation with the category of social class has led researchers to ask the wrong question about gender differentiation in language, by asking why women approximate to the norms of the class above them rather than, perhaps, approaching class differentiation in terms of gender differences (Milroy 1988: 581). Milroy refers to Coates' (1986) regraphing of data from several surveys carried out in the UK and the USA, which shows that the sex of speakers accounts for patterns of variation at least as well as, and sometimes better than, the social class to which they are assigned by the researcher. We are beginning to recognise, then, the importance of assessing the relative cultural salience of different social categories in the community whose speech is being investigated. A qualitative approach is one way in which this can be done; again, extending the scope of inquiry to a range of very different social settings forces us to look beyond those social categories that our own culture has conditioned us to believe are important, and

helps us to formulate the kinds of questions that can lead to a fuller understanding of linguistic variation.

The studies of creole varieties and second language varieties of English in this volume are important in this respect, since they add new social parameters to those that have been commonly used in research into 'native speaker' varieties. These social parameters include residence in urban or rural communities, type of neighbourhood, age at which English is acquired, degree of Westernisation, and other languages spoken (including the problematic 'mother tongue'). The most important social factor in many communities is education, which interacts with other speaker variables such as gender, social status and neighbourhood (see further Sridhar 1985: 46). All these speaker variables pose problems of measurement which need to be resolved; and their diversity reminds us not only of the way in which language intimately reflects the social organisation of the community in which it is used but also, again, of the need to begin an analysis with an open mind about which social parameters should be taken into account. They point to the need to determine empirically the social salience of different speaker variables, perhaps by carrying out an ethnographic analysis before beginning the linguistic investigation, perhaps by experimental investigation, and ideally by the researchers being local residents themselves.

Several papers in this volume analyse statistical regularities in the linguistic constraints that govern variation. This approach to the analysis of variation in English around the world can lead to progress in our understanding of the physical and cognitive basis to the constraints. For example, Khan's paper in this volume finds that consonant cluster simplification in a variety of Indian English is subject to the same phonological constraints as it is in US varieties of English, thus confirming their presumed origins in articulatory processes. The papers by Singler and Platt in this volume are interesting in that they identify some linguistic constraints on morphological and syntactic variation, about which we still know relatively little. Many of these constraints may be language-specific, or variety-specific, but evidence is accumulating which suggests that speakers find certain syntactic environments more salient cognitively and perceptually than other environments, and that these environments may condition variation in many – perhaps all – languages. Platt's finding (this volume) that semantic similarity between a premodifier and a noun affects plural marking on nouns, and Faraclas' finding (also in this volume) that additional semantic distinctions in pronoun forms are established first in focused positions in the clause, each have parallels in analyses of variation in other varieties of English (see, for example, Stein, in press). A pressing research question is to investigate the universality of linguistic constraints such as these. This would necessarily involve analyses of a wide range of different languages, but at this early stage of enquiry a focus on a single

language in a diverse range of social settings can help to establish comparisons and to suggest the kind of constraints on variation that are worth investigating on a wider scale.

Finally, there are many important aspects of language use which cannot be handled easily within the variationist framework; again, considering a single language in a range of diverse situations brings us face to face with these aspects and draws attention to the need for an eclectic approach to sociolinguistic research. Some of the papers in this volume illustrate the insights that can be achieved using qualitative methods (see, for example, the papers by Mühlhäusler, Kuijper, and Chick). Several contributors call for new perspectives and new models (see, for example, the papers by Kandiah, and by Tay; see also Kachru, 1985: 30); they also call for collaborative research between specialists in language and specialists in literature, and for an eclectic combination of analytical techniques and different theoretical models (see also Edwards 1988; Sridhar 1985). These needs have been articulated by others, some working in monolingual situations (for example, Cheshire 1987; Coupland 1988), and others working on languages other than English (for example, Van de Craen 1987). Once more, at this early stage in the development of sociolinguistics, a focus on analysing a single language in the very different social settings in which it is used may help to decide which of our existing models and methods can best be used in conjunction with each other, as well as the kinds of new models that can most usefully be developed.

Sociolinguistics and English around the world

A great deal of interest has been generated in the English language as a result of its spread around the world and its use as an international language. At least two academic journals are uniquely concerned with English around the world (Benjamins' *English World-wide* and Pergamon's *World Englishes*); there is also a popular magazine, *English Today*, published by Cambridge University Press. It is important that amid this understandable interest and enthusiasm we do not overlook the more undesirable consequences of the development of English as a world language. From a linguistic point of view, for example, the spread of English has all too often been associated with the death, or virtual death, of the indigenous languages in those countries to which it has been transplanted. England itself is a prime example. From a social and political point of view, the spread of English around the world was largely the result of exploitation and colonisation, and in many multilingual countries English is still the language of an exclusive social élite. In countries where English has been well established for many centuries (notably, though by no means only, Great Britain and the USA) there are difficult educational problems stemming from the coexistence of a standardised variety of

English and a range of associated local dialects, and the complex attitudes that are held towards these standard and non-standard varieties (see, for discussion of the UK situation, Cheshire and Trudgill 1989). Similar problems are now being seen on a world scale, albeit posed in a slightly different form (see the papers by Quirk and Kachru in Quirk and Widdowson 1985, and the discussion therein; see also Kachru 1986a, 1986b and 1986c). Finally, the immense amount of variation that exists in English around the world presents difficulties of codification and standardisation, as well as problems in the choice of a teaching model, none of which can be neglected in the English-language teaching context.

These, then, are some of the applied issues to which a sociolinguistic perspective on World Englishes can contribute. It can do so in several ways. First, it can contribute to English-language teaching issues by ensuring that descriptions of world varieties of English have a sounder empirical base than is the case at present. Current descriptions, whether of a non-standard dialect, a 'new' variety or even of a hypothetical international standard variety, are all too often given as lists of assorted departures from southern British standard English or from American standard English, with no attempt at determining the extent to which the local linguistic features function as part of an autonomous system (see further Sridhar 1985). In the absence of systematic empirical research, descriptions of different varieties of World English have often been based either on the writer's personal observations or on the recorded speech of a single person, so that there is no way of seeing how the linguistic features that are said to be characteristic of a given variety of English are governed by social and situational factors. It is impossible, from such descriptions, to distinguish reliably between features that are performance errors and features that are recurrent, 'legitimate' features of a local variety.

Where the variety that is being described is a second language variety of English, initially acquired mainly through formal instruction, a sociolinguistic analysis can help to answer the question of where learners' errors stop and where legitimate features of a local variety of English begin (see Hancock and Angogo 1984: 306). Learner, or performance varieties, may sometimes be nativised to the extent that they have some characteristic features reflecting the culture in which they are used (see Tay, this volume); but one of the principal differences between the variation that exists in learner varieties of English and the variation that exists in more stable varieties of the language is that stable varieties exhibit patterns of sociolinguistic variation which reflect the social organisation of the society in which they are used. These patterns do not come into existence until the variety is used as part of everyday social interaction between members of that society. It is interesting to note, in this context, that many of the features that English teachers in Kenya are instructed to see as interference phenomena (see Kanyoro, this volume) appear to function as markers of

national and ethnic identity amongst educated Kenyan speakers of English (Schmied, this volume); they should therefore, it seems, be considered as characteristic of the local variety of English rather than as errors.

A sociolinguistic perspective is also important for identifying social attitudes both to the use of English relative to other languages in the community's verbal repertoire, and to the use of different varieties of English within that community. Several of the papers in this volume point to the need to take these attitudes into account in practical issues concerned with language planning, language teaching and language in public life generally (see, for example, the papers by Sato and Devonish). The question of language norms is an extremely sensitive issue in any society; in many of the countries represented in this volume the issues are particularly complex. Sometimes the complexity has arisen from a colonial legacy of a set of external reference norms, which now coexists with local norms (see, for example, the papers by Clarke, Woods and Guy in this volume). Several papers in this volume indicate that a change in local attitudes and norms is in progress (for example, Sahgal, this volume). The communities represented here often differ greatly from each other, yet the social, educational and political reactions to linguistic variation are essentially the same in them all, and there is the same danger of allowing prejudice and ill-informed views to cloud the issues. If they are to be discussed in a less impassioned and a more constructive and informed way than has often been the case in the past, it is vital that reliable information is available on the socially and linguistically patterned nature of variation within the different countries where English is spoken, as well as on the corresponding set of language attitudes and language norms, and on the function that local varieties may fulfill as markers of national identity or of other aspects of a person's social identity.

A sociolinguistic perspective on English around the world is crucially important in attempting to unravel some of this linguistic complexity. The papers in this volume provide a great deal of information on some of these important topics, but we still have a long way to go before we will be ready to meet the practical challenges of English-language teaching in a world context, or to decide whether it is really necessary to attempt to engineer the use of a planned variety of international English. As always, more empirical research is needed in order that these, and other pressing issues, can be properly addressed. One of the aims of this volume, therefore, is to stimulate further empirical research into English in its social contexts around the world. A further aim is to assess the extent of our current knowledge, in order to show where there are gaps which future research might set out to remedy. Above all, however, the volume aims to represent the rich diversity in the form and function of English as it is used around the world today.

Organisation of the volume

In order to ensure comprehensive and systematic coverage, the contents of the volume have been divided into eleven geographical areas. For each of these areas, a specialist author with extensive experience of living and working in that part of the world was invited to write an overview paper which would survey the more important sociolinguistic research that had been carried out in that area and which would point to the research that is still needed. The overview authors were also asked to cover a short list of specified topics in order to give some background information about the use of English in that area of the world and to enable clear comparisons to be drawn between the different regions. Academics are independent creatures, however, and the specialist authors did not always follow their instructions to the letter – and perhaps the volume is all the better as a result. The overview papers for each of the eleven areas are followed by case studies, often chosen with the help of the specialist author or of the advisory committee for the volume. These case studies provide representative examples of the sociolinguistic research that has been carried out in that part of the English-speaking world.

There have, inevitably, been problems, not the least of which lay in the definition of the geographical areas. Dividing the world into a small number of separate areas defies logic, and many criticisms will doubtless be made of the decisions that were eventually reached. To forestall some of the more obvious objections, it should perhaps be explained that at an early stage in the planning of the volume it was decided to exclude the UK and the USA, as far as possible, on the grounds that the research that has been carried out there has been very widely disseminated. It seemed more important to give space to other areas of the world from which the research findings are less well known or have been less readily accessible. These two countries, however, could hardly be excluded completely from a collection of papers that aimed to represent ‘World’ English; furthermore, the research that has been carried out in the UK and the USA has often been very influential in shaping research carried out elsewhere in the world, and it should therefore be represented in some way. The decision was therefore made to include a single overview paper on sociolinguistic aspects of English in the UK and the USA, but to exclude case study papers for these countries (although there is a case study from Northern Ireland in the section of the volume that is concerned with Ireland and the section on ‘The Pacific’ includes a case study paper from Hawaii, one of the states of the USA).

It was also decided, at an early stage in the planning of the volume, to treat New Zealand separately from Australia, in an attempt to break away from the tradition of treating these two countries as a single linguistic

area. Given their different histories and their different social, political and cultural situations, it was considered important to clearly stress their sociolinguistic distinctiveness in this volume. Inevitably, however, this decision restricted the space that was available for other countries, so that some countries now have to sit uneasily with others that have been assigned to the same geographical area. Hong Kong, for example, is included here as part of South-East Asia. Some geographical areas have a more sociolinguistically complex makeup than others; many, such as the Caribbean and the area that I have named the 'Pacific', are so complex that they each merit a separate volume in their own right. There can, of course, be no perfect way of dividing the English-speaking world into separate areas; the divisions that have been made here are best seen as simply providing a reasonably coherent organisational framework for the volume.

Other aspects of organisation and categorisation have posed problems. The intention was to exclude countries such as Japan or the Netherlands, where English is used mainly as a foreign language rather than as a language of everyday communication within the country. It is not always possible, however, to establish a clearcut division between those countries where English is a foreign language and those countries where it is a second language, since the status of English in the language policies of a country can – and does – change. In Tanzania and Malaysia, for example, English is no longer an official language, though it was until relatively recently. Case studies for these two countries have in fact been included in the volume. As mentioned earlier, the division between native and non-native varieties of English, or between first and second language varieties, is also difficult to establish. The distinctions that are drawn between different varieties of English and the terminology that is used by different writers are currently inconsistent, and they are changing rapidly. Terminology is understandably a sensitive issue, as some of the contributors to the volume make clear. For these reasons, I have not attempted to change the terms that the contributors have chosen to use. Instead, I have tried to ensure that although their terminology sometimes differs, the distinctions that the contributors wish to draw are clear from the contexts in which the terms are used. I have also done my best to refrain from imposing my own variety of English on the contributions to the volume.

Many of the case studies describe research that has been carried out within a quantitative, variationist framework of analysis, reflecting the worldwide influence of this approach. Not all the case studies are of this type, however. There are some sociolinguistic questions for which a quantitative analysis is not the most appropriate approach; and there are other methodologies that are equally valuable. However, although the case studies differ in their approaches and, sometimes, in their aims, they