



WHICH ENGLISH?

Photo: nchlsft (shutterstock)

“English can no longer be cast aside in the internationalization literature as though it was merely a practical problem to be ‘fixed’ in university EAP units.”¹

MAGGIE MCALINDEN & ILAN ZAGORIA
Curtin University, Australia

The status of English as a global language is largely unquestionable: English is the first language to have spread to such an extent globally. It is the language of international politics, business, education, entertainment, media, the arts and technology, and it is studied by more people than any other language.

Since the 1980s, the number of international students seeking education in English has grown dramatically – in North America student numbers have doubled, in Britain they have quadrupled, and in Australia they have grown

ten-fold. This increase relates, in part, to the status and spread of English as a global language. However, when English is referred to as a global language, there is usually a particular kind of English in mind.

CATEGORISING ENGLISH

Kachru's² influential geographical model of the use and spread of English problematises the ownership of English. The model categorises the use of English globally by dividing the English-using world into three circles, the so-called inner, outer and expanding circles.

The inner circle includes 'native' English speaking countries such as North America, Britain and Australia. The outer circle consists of former colonies such as India, Kenya and Nigeria, where 'nativised' varieties of English are the official language of government, the media and education, and are widely used as a second language. The model is completed by the expanding circle that includes, but is not limited to, parts of Asia, Europe and Central America where English is not commonly used outside of language classrooms, but where the use of English as a foreign language is expanding rapidly.

However, the model is too simplistic and misrepresents the current use of English in the world. It focuses on nations rather than speakers and so ignores the existence of different language communities within those nations. The model also

(L1) in the world. If the definition of a global language were based on the number of L1 speakers of a language, then Chinese would be the definitive global language, with over one billion L1 speakers of one or more varieties of

language proficiency of international students in Australia sets unrealistic and probably irrelevant goals and standards. What these standards do ensure is that learners of English and multilingual speakers of English are discriminated against in their access to education in countries like Australia and Britain since they need to meet particular English language requirements not required of the monolingual speakers of English in these countries. Even when international students do meet the minimum levels of English language proficiency required to gain entry to a tertiary education course, they are then largely expected to use English as if they were an expert native user of academic English.

When multilingual users and learners of English are evaluated against inner circle expert user norms in our universities, the inner circle norms are reinforced, ensuring the ongoing privilege, status and commercial value of inner circle English internationally.

Very few speakers of English as an additional language attain, or need to attain, native-like fluency or proficiency in English. So why do international educational institutions continue to set unattainable language learning goals for multilingual users of English by continuing to benchmark English language proficiency against inner circle norms? Who decided that English is the sole property of its native speakers and that it should be taught in its native form?

LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM

Education in English and English language teaching is not neutral or disconnected from culture, history and ideologies. There are clear global and

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 80% OF ALL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS WORLDWIDE ARE BILINGUAL

underestimates the numbers of expert, bilingual speakers of English in the outer circle countries and the level of English used outside the classroom in the expanding circle countries.

Kachru developed his model in an attempt to recognise and legitimise the existence of varieties of English beyond the inner circle countries. The model introduces a critical understanding of English as a post-colonial artefact but at the same time, through its notions of inner, outer and expanding circle, it also maintains linguistic privilege and prejudice. The model reinforces the global dominance of inner circle English by proposing that native varieties and speakers of English are ideologically and historically located within the privileged inner circle with all other varieties of English and speakers of other languages on the periphery and in binary opposition to English as a 'native' language. This positioning of 'native' varieties of English as the standard to which all other varieties of English are compared, creates and maintains a status quo wherein speakers of English in the outer and expanding circles are "radically silenced and subjugated by their relegation to the margins".³

THE MYTH OF ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

There remains a widespread and common misconception that English is the most widely spoken native or first language

Chinese worldwide compared with 400 million L1 speakers of English. Moreover, the total number and growth of monolingual speakers of English globally is far outweighed by the total number and growth of L2 speakers. There are more than one billion users and learners of English as an additional language currently worldwide. It is estimated that 80% of all English language teachers worldwide are bilingual. Despite this, the English language is generally considered the property of inner circle, monolingual speakers of English. Native speaker varieties of English such as British, North American and Australian English are widely viewed and used as the norm against which other varieties and dialects of English are to be benchmarked and to which all users of English are encouraged to aspire.

DISCRIMINATION OF MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS

The benchmarking of English language proficiency against inner circle norms serves as a gatekeeper in our universities yet English language proficiency does not predict or ensure academic success in tertiary education. The status of inner circle varieties of English as the sole standard to measure the English

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY DOES NOT PREDICT OR ENSURE ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

national trends that privilege inner circle native-speaker varieties of English and which equally discriminate against non-native speaker varieties and speakers of English. The goal of inner circle, native speaker-like competence in English as a requirement to study in Australian and other Anglophone universities can be considered a neo-colonial ideology.

This ideology is reinforced by second language acquisition research that seeks to account for the inability of English language learners to achieve the goal of native-like competence. This research has yet to provide any significant answers as to why adult learners, or multilingual users of English, need to achieve this goal. In the internationalised, multilingual, multicultural context that we live and work in, the privileged status of inner circle varieties of English is no longer relevant and should have no place. An alternative is needed.

WORLD ENGLISH

Current entrenched conceptions of inner circle English can be replaced with the idea of English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) or of World English (WE) to better reflect the reality of how English is used in international higher education and in other international contexts. A *lingua franca* is a common language used between people who do not share the



Photo: Intellistudies (shutterstock)

English used around the world. The aim of these corpora is to document the linguistic forms that occur within the plurality of the ELF/WE paradigm, to learn more about how the different varieties of English function in achieving meaning, and, most importantly, to legitimise the notion of multiple English variations. By identifying the commonalities as well as recognising the differences of grammar and vocabulary used in varieties of English around the

without the need for users of English to replicate the prescribed native speaker norms. Framing the testing, study and use of English within the ELF/WE paradigm counters the status quo of native speaker, inner circle English, reduces linguistic discrimination, and aims to legitimise multiple varieties (and speakers) of English. Valuing these varieties of English should be an important principle of international higher education. **E**

WHO DECIDED THAT ENGLISH IS THE SOLE PROPERTY OF ITS NATIVE SPEAKERS?

same first language while the concept of World English seeks to legitimise the established and emergent varieties of English of the outer and expanding circle countries.

Linguists have compiled lexical and grammatical databases of English as a *lingua franca* and of particular varieties of

world, a process of legitimisation can occur whereby established and emergent varieties of English gain acceptance.

Within the ELF/WE paradigm, the norm of a 'correct' English is contested. Variation is the norm and the norm is inherently unstable and continually changing. Successful communication can occur

1. Jenkins, J. (2013). *English as a Lingua Franca in the International University: The Politics of Academic English Language Policy* (p. 11). Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.

2. Kachru, B. B. (1992). *The other tongue: English across cultures*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

3. Kandiah, T. (1998). Epiphanies of the deathless native users' manifold avatars: A postcolonial perspective on the native speaker. In K. Singh (Ed), *The native speaker: Multilingual perspectives* (pp. 83). New Delhi: Sage.