

ENGLISH, BUT NOT QUITE

Locating linguistic diversity

Edited by
Oriana Palusci

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ENGLISH, BUT NOT QUITE

Locating linguistic diversity

Introduction

Oriana Palusci

The aim of this collection of essays is to analyse the state of English varieties, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, bearing in mind the profound effects of the contact with native languages and cultures of those countries in which English has gained an official status, in particular as a consequence of British colonisation.

In the wake of globalisation, the extensive current debate on the topic posits, first of all, a naming problem: Englishes, World Englishes, New Englishes, Postcolonial English, Varieties of English, New Linguistic Varieties, English as a Global language? Indeed, all of them, whichever the underlying approach or delimitating factor, are centred on the English language in its mutations in time and space and in its vital and productive contact with other languages. As a matter of fact, if we check the essential tools for the study of linguistic variation and change we find the monograph series “Varieties of English Around the World”, published by John Benjamins, which have deeply transformed our linguistic consciousness: starting in 1979, it now counts 50 volumes, indeed a bookshelf of research in a field implicating scholars from far-ranging parts of the world. We should also mention the volumes which linguistically map the global experience of English throughout the world: *Oxford Guide to World Englishes* (McArthur 2002), *World Englishes* (Bolton and Kachru 2005), the *Handbook of World Englishes* (Kachru et alii 2006), and *A Handbook of Varieties of English* in two volumes, accompanied by an interactive CD-ROM (Kortman and Schneider 2004). Likewise, academic international journals such as *World Englishes*, *Journal of English as an International and Intranational Language*, *English Today* and *English World-Wide. A Journal of Varieties of English* offer theoretical discussion as well as case studies and a precious updating on the interplay between English and Englishes.

During the 1980s a revolutionary shift took place in the broader area of English language studies, relocating the focus of research from Standard English to varieties of English in a global perspective. Consequently the spread and change of English was increasingly projected on a global scale through the aid of maps and diagrams: from Peter Strevens' map-and-branch model of English in 1980, to Braj B. Kachru's influential "Three Concentric Circles" of English (1982) and Tom McArthur's broader web-like circle of English, constituted by a big wheel with a hub and spikes (1987) or Manfred Gorlach's circle model of English with International English at its centre (1988-1990). In the last three models, the image of the circle predominates, maybe in order to emphasise the semantic sphere of circular, centre, tour of mathematical sets striving to enclose or embrace the proliferating phenomenon of contemporary English and its varieties at home and around the world.

In Italy, the field has been less productive, but is gaining ground with books, essays and articles both written in Italian and in English. I would like to mention, among others: *Le lingue inglesi* (Mazzon 1994), *Una lingua in viaggio* (Di Sabato 2000), *Global English. A Global Debate* (Salvi 2002), and *Le varietà dell'inglese contemporaneo* (Santipolo 2006). Each projects, from a different angle of vision, the study of English into a global perspective, addressing key linguistic issues, while studying sociolinguistic variation from both a synchronic and diachronic perspective.

Outside Italy, in the last decade, we may add, to an already impressive list, Gerhard Leitner's "Habitat Model", (2000) and Edgar Schneider's "Dynamic Model", the latter pinpointing five fundamental evolutionary phases in any new English (2007). It is not by chance that *English, but not Quite* opens with Leitner's "Developmental stages in the formation of epicentres of English", where the German linguist provides a unified account of languages and dialects of Australia using the ecological model, the description of a language embedded in an overall language habitat. Salikoko Mufwene, instead, envisages a general model for language evolution in which parallel languages are analogous to biological animal species with an organic evolution: he underlines that there is no abrupt discontinuity in the development of creoles, but rather «normal, uninterrupted language transmis-

sion [with] a continuous trajectory from the lexifier to specific creoles» (2001: 25).

If a language is similar to a growing plant, English is a plant constantly «re-locating and re-rooting» in a new territory (Schneider 2007: 5). After all, the language which left Europe was not the same in its expansion from age to age: the Pilgrim Fathers settling in New England in the 1620s with their strong Biblical tradition have little in common with the convicts sailing to Australia in 1787 on the First Fleet, who spoke a mixture of cockney and Irish dialects. On the other hand, the East India Company merchants had already been in contact with the languages of India in the XVII century, while British slave traders had started making business with West African natives since the XVII century.

However, one crucial event did trigger the expansion of English: the exportation, if we can call it so, of the British education system to territories where people had very different linguistic traditions – not based upon writing techniques – and had to learn English, and through the language of the settlers and/or invaders, their culture, their literature, their legal system (Penycook 1998).

Today, if we google the website of countries where English is an official language¹, *de facto* or *de jure* (U.S.A., U.K. and Australia do not have an official language, but English is certainly the dominant language), we discover an impressive list of nations which have English as the official language together with another (Canada and New Zealand) or with more than one, as in the case of India, where 21 languages have official status in the single states and English is a “subsidiary official language”, or in South Africa, where English shares official status alongside other 10. With the exception of the United States, an independent nation since 1776, where the term American English has gained prominence, the language of the countries quoted in the long google list is still mentioned as English, as if the reference to Standard English were more important than any possible documented variety in use. This is also true if we check Italian translations of books written in a variety of English: in this instance, each one is *tra-*

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_where_English_is_an_official_language (last visited 5 October 2009).

dotto dall'inglese and not from Indian English, Nigerian English, Australian English and so forth. This makes even less sense if we consider the fact that broadly speaking the spreading of English today is due to the role of the United States of America as a world power, with 'General' American English taking over in the fields of technology information, science, medicine, cinema, pop music etc. Thus, the pertinent question: is English a global language, or rather American?

Things have been further complicated, because the process of standardization is not a crystallized one: despite the fact that the passage from pidgin to creole has already taken place in the history of the contact with English, usage demonstrates that when English is used by speakers who do not have a fair grasp of the language for work purposes, the ceaseless code-mixing and code-switching from one's mother-tongue to 'elementary notions' of English, sets the whole process in motion once again.

Another question requires to be briefly tackled in regard to the evolution of English(es): being a *lingua franca*, English also has a structural influence on the contemporary languages it comes into contact with. Returning to the metaphor of the growing plant, we can consider hybrids with an English base as sprouts that have undergone a grafting process but are not yet fully shaped, i.e. they have not reached the level of a pidgin. In the following hybrids, the new name blends together a national language and English, both mainly anglicised: Spanglish (Spanish + English); Hindish (Hindi + English); Denglish (Deutsche + English), with the exception of Italianese or Franglais (Santipolo 2006).

It is true that, in the English language, a compound usually features a right-hand position of the head, which bears the imprimatur of the whole word (of English we are speaking anyway); nevertheless, through the blending process, the name of the new Standard varieties – South African English, Indian English, Canadian English – displays the non-British nation as first stem, thus recognizing status to an older linguistic tradition still resisting full assimilation.

Anyone visiting Great Britain today cannot avoid noticing the linguistic phenomena taking place in multicultural cities such as London, Birmingham, Leicester, Glasgow. What is happening is that due to a vast migration especially from British ex-colonies towards the old mother country the varieties of English are mix-

ing together, especially in London (Salverda 2002). In Greater London, linguistic systems mutate rapidly, as in the case of Jamaican English, i.e. Jamaican African English.

The 15 papers collected in *English, but not Quite* are based on a socio-linguistic and socio-cultural approach, employing the critical tools of postcolonial studies, cultural studies, discourse analysis (e.g., media discourse, news discourse, advertising etc.). They deal with language contact phenomena, such as loans, calques, code-switching, diglossia, multilingualism, lexical innovation, culture-bound words, stratification of vocabulary, morpho-syntactic features, word formative processes, semantic/cultural interpretations, but also take into account the geographic and historical background of the 'colonised' countries, in order to deal with the issue of linguistic identity/identities and the age-old question of the 'ownership' of English, a fluid and protean language reinterpreted and reclaimed again and again. As Pennycook states «English is bound up with transcultural flows, a language of imagined communities and refashioning identities» (2007: 15).

As a matter of fact, the struggle between Englishness and Otherness in British ex-colonies engenders a profitable renewal: new plants have sprouted and grown out of the English language also through the varieties considered here. David Crystal's seminal work, *English as a Global Language* (1997), I believe, relies on a questionable concept since the varieties selected by Crystal have, without doubt, proliferated in such a way that its fully developed branches and twigs in the bud display their strength and ability to consistently mark their differences from the 'mother' plant. Hence the title of this collection of papers: *English, but not Quite*, exploring diversity and change.

One of the most interesting features of the following papers lies in their focus on contemporary and pragmatic aspects, rather than on a well-established historical framework, so that the reader may join in on the 'journey' of the English language from continent to continent, during which English steadily enriches its vocabulary, its morpho-syntactic features, and its usage. Indeed, linguistic speculations are based on textual corpuses representing the varieties investigated in their most dynamic forms, providing a vivid account of contemporary speaker performances. For this reason, the case studies in this volume analyse 'authen-

tic' material, not only literary texts, but especially the media, from songs lyrics to newspapers, from advertisements to food recipes, online materials, websites and blogs. In this way, the data have been gathered to sketch a timely picture of XXI-century varieties of English.

The decision on how to order the contributions was quite a task, because I had to decide the route to take in order to give shape to the volume. As mentioned above, the starting point was Gerhard Leitner's paper, opening with a lively discussion on the recent debate about what is common to the developments of Englishes. He then resorts to his own work on Australian English, which shows a dynamism that allows side-steps and regression, encourages multiple entries from the outside via renewed migration or techno-cultural factors. Leitner uses Australia as a model case but widens his linguistic framework in order to encompass other cases such as Northumbrian English (Scots and Northern English dialect). His "Habitat Model" is a valid introduction to the origins of the diversification of English in contact with other languages and cultures, thus working as the first step of our circular 'tour' through Englishes.

Hence, our journey through the varieties of English in the world starts from Britain's first colony, that is Ireland, then crosses the Atlantic Ocean moving to the British ex-settler colonies in the Americas (Canada, U.S.A., Barbados) from north to south; then we once again cross the Atlantic to Africa (Nigeria and South Africa). Next stop is Asia: first India, then south-west to Malaysia. The voyage southbound takes us to the antipodes: Australia and New Zealand. Ploughing the oceans, we sail back to the Mediterranean Sea and to Malta.

The first leg of our journey is Irish English, a variety developed within the UK, due to the annexation of Ireland: after a general description of the historical and linguistic context, Andrea Binelli examines Damien Dempsey's lyrics emphasising his use of Dublin variations. With a westward movement we land in Canada, where the development of English is influenced both by native substrata and by English-French bilingualism. After a brief introduction on the role of Canadian English today, Oriana Palusci analyses the naming process in English of the Aboriginal peoples, through dictionary definitions and legal documents, showing its link with a question of power politics, then enlarges on the case

of the word *Métis* which has slowly been redressed by the *Métis* themselves from the 1970s onwards. Mirko Casagrande dwells on some lexical and morpho-syntactic features of Quebec English, the variety of English spoken in the Canadian Francophone province, especially on code-switching, borrowings and culture-bound words in text types such as recipes, tourist advertisements and articles selected from *The Gazette*, the Anglophone voice of Quebec.

Then we move south, namely in the U.S.A., where African American varieties have a strong hold on some of the most relevant worldwide cultural aspects, as the recent presidential election of Barak Obama has shown: Luisanna Fodde aptly introduces the main linguistic features of African American English and discusses the critical concepts of race and ethnicity in the United States within the framework of language diversity. She dwells on the role played by race in the stigmatization of non-standard varieties in the U.S., and then gives a diachronic and synchronic description of African American English, pinpointing a series of interesting examples from both the spoken and the written language. Elisabetta Convento examines a very popular output of African-American cultural roots, Rap music. Through the linguistic analysis of some lyrics by Public Enemy, playing both with their African American roots, and with the stereotypes of the Whites concerning the Blacks, a new linguistic subversion is created. Public Enemy's songs certainly belong to the African American cultural tradition, but the structure of their lyrics does not strictly respect the syntactical and morphological rules of African American English.

At this point the path bends back to south-east and touches Barbados. Alessia Oppizzi's paper on Bajan English proverbs in the web traces the linguistic 'colonisation' of Barbados and tackles the issues of bilingualism, diglossia, linguistic identity, code-mixing and code-switching, highlighting Bajan English as a creole. Then we cross the Atlantic to Nigeria, where Francesca Vaccarelli, after isolating some of the main features of Nigerian English, reads a certain number of online articles published between April 2005 and December 2007 in three Nigerian newspapers with a wide circulation. Travelling further down to the south of the continent, Francesca Rosati takes us to the complex linguistic situation of South Africa, with its multilingual and mul-

ticultural environment where each of the estimated twenty-five native languages spoken within its borders have deeply shaped South African English.

The second trajectory leads us to north-east, to India, where Esterino Adami provides an overview of the main lexical and morphological characteristics of contemporary Indian English within a postcolonial perspective and concentrates on ‘Pukka’ language, a hybrid form of English, taking examples from different domains and text-types such as the language of the Internet, advertising, recipes, wedding invitations and obituaries. A third change of direction moves us south-east again, first to Malaysia, then to antipodean Australia and New Zealand. Eleonora Federici faces the question of Malaysian English, a variety which started to achieve a distinctive identity after the introduction of the British educational system in the Southeast Asian region prior to independence, while outlining how ethnic diversity stands at the basis of languages mingling in this country. In “Talking about our own”: Nyoongah Aboriginal English in Jack Davis’s *In Our Town*, Katherine E. Russo contends that literature may be a useful point of departure for the codification of distinct Australian Aboriginal Englishes, in order to demonstrate the complexity of their pluricentric nature. Significantly, the features of these varieties lie especially in the expansion of their manifold lexicon related to Australian Indigenous sovereignty. Questions on the influence Māori has brought to New Zealand English are asked by Marinella Rocca Longo in “New Zealand English as a Linguistic Mix”: if Standard New Zealand English can be defined as Pākehā English, can we claim the existence of a Māori variety of English?

The last leg of this journey with stops in different continents brings us back to north-western areas of our hemisphere, and to Malta, where Sabrina Francesconi studies the role and use of English in Malta and illustrates the results of a survey she conducted in August 2007 pertaining language habits, domains, competence and awareness. Finally, the tour ends where it originated, Great Britain, where Di Sabato and Cordisco raise the issue of a taboo word – *fuck* – and on its use in a selected corpus of online newspapers and blogs (*The Guardian* and *The Observer* in 2006) in order to track the evolution of present-day English in which swear words are employed with a different connotation.

With this last paper, our tour around the world of Englishes is accomplished. It is obviously only a partial view of the rich verbal goldmines highlighting the evolution of English varieties, but it surely gives a multifaceted vision of that ever changing and very lively creature, the English language.

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Developmental Stages in the Formation of Epicentres of English

Gerhard Leitner

1. Introduction

English today is the most widely spoken language of the world with more non-native speakers than native speakers. It is gaining new types of native speakers in countries where English is implanted in multilingual settings. English dominates in international communication, international relations, science and technology, military and peacekeeping activities. It is the language that the majority of European parents think is the most important language for children. It gives access to popular culture worldwide and satisfaction to many. Reading *Harry Potter* in English means reading it months earlier than Italian or German speakers and enables one to participate in insider discussions. That position is the centuries old result of history marked by intensive political, although often not peaceful, relations in Europe, European explorations, colonization, exploitation, and econo-cultural contact. It is the result of new and old nations' aspiration to participate at regional level in Asia, Africa or Europe. Periods of globalization or, as they are referred to in French, of *mondialisation* (Grataloup 2006) have significantly strengthened the position of English as a tool of empowerment.

International relations in Europe have by and large created the base of English (as a foreign language). Colonization and decolonization have led to the growth of national forms. Ages of *mondialisation* have established English as a global or a large regional language. None of these realities is really limited to Great Britain or Anglophone countries and English shares with French, Spanish, Portuguese or other European languages the fact that it has