

Whether outer circle
englishes should be
recognised as
standard english in
their ...



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The question on whether Outer Circle Englishes should be recognized as Standard varieties of English has been highly debated for years. In this essay, we will examine this issue by first defining ‘standard language’ and ‘interlanguage’, what constitutes as Standard language and distinguishing between an error and feature in evaluating variation across varieties of English. We will also discuss whether Outer Circle Englishes should be on par with the Inner Circle countries in terms of their ownership of English.

We will use Singapore English (Outer Circle) as our point of reference to further elaborate on the points in this review. Standard Language is the term used for that variety of a language which is considered a norm. It is the optimum for educational purposes and used as a yardstick against which other varieties of the language are measured. Being a prestige variety, a standard language is spoken by a minority of people within a society (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 33).

Interlanguage, a term coined by Selinker, is defined during the language learning phase by its instability, in that a learner’s interlanguage passes through on their way to achieve full competence in the target language before reaching a point where it stabilizes and there is no more change (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 93). The domain use of standard varieties of language is normally native speakers who use English to communicate at home. They used it in writing, for teaching in schools and universities and on radio and television.

On the other hand, the non standard varieties are used as a medium of instruction in education, commerce and global communication. ‘ Many of the

characteristics of these dialects stem historically from the limited functions required of English in the early stages of contact between the indigenous and colonizing groups. The initial use of English would have been mainly in non-prestige domains, such as trading and these dialects are characterized by the same structural and morphological simplification observable in immigrant speech .

The conditions for the generation of a pidgin or a non-standard form of English characterized by structural and morphological simplification and by communication and learning strategies and interference. As domain separation in language use gradually disappears, English becomes an alternative to the mother tongue, especially in family and friendship domains. The non-standard form of English now has functions related to intimacy, solidarity, spontaneity and informality.

The standard language, encountered in the school and through contact with outsiders, has formal functions, thus the characteristics of a diglossic setting may obtain where complementary values low and high come to be realized in different varieties of English' (TeachingOnline, 2010). So when can a variety of language be considered a standard or norm? Bamgbose (1998) proposed five factors that can be used to determine when an innovation can be considered a standard or norm.

They are ' demographic (how many people using the language), geographical (how widely is the innovation used within the country), authoritative (who use the innovation), codification (what is the usage sanctioned) and acceptability (what is the attitude of users and non users

toward the innovation)' (Bamgbose, 1998, pp. 3). However, he cited the most important factor in determining whether it's a norm is codification and social acceptance. He highlights that codification in dictionary, textbooks and other courseware is a major factor to determine whether the particular variety can be widely accepted.

However, SLA (second language acquisition) researchers seem to perceive that the Outer Circle English or indigenised varieties of English (IVEs) are interlanguage and their purpose of learning is to integrate with the 'target language culture' (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 93). According to Quirk, he has deemed 'non native Englishes as inadequately learned versions of correct native English norms and therefore not valid as teaching models' (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 67).

Secondly, he concluded that the purpose of learners to acquire English is clearly of its power as an instrument of international communication and regards the language as their stepping stone towards better employment and career prospects. He also, based on a research by Coppieters, concludes non native speakers fail to recognize what is grammatically correct. This finding implies that there is a 'need for non native teachers to be in constant touch with the native language and non natives have different internalizations mechanism of the language' (Jenson, 2009, pp. 7).

Furthermore he also assumes that Outer Circle English learners come to the language with little or no prior knowledge of the language. In opposing to Quirk's position was Kachru's argument that non standard varieties is merely differences which should not be deemed as 'deficit'. Firstly, it is not a valid

reason to reject institutionalization just because native and non natives have different set of internalizations which are, in fact, linked to their ' own multilinguistic, sociolinguistic and socialcultural contexts'.

Secondly, Quirk seems to perceive that the motivation of learning English is to interact with the native people and the spread of English primarily from the ' perspective of monolingual societies'. In addition, he regarded the international non native varieties as ' interlanguages' that is striving to achieve ' native like character'. In fact, the above views shows that Quirk and a majority of SLA researchers have yet to recognize IVEs as fully-fledged language varieties and also has failed to acknowledge the changing role of today English. (Jenson, 2009, pp. 69)

Given the above debate, how do we differentiate whether the IVE setting should be considered a feature of a new variety or an error? It must first fulfill four factors. ' Firstly, it must have the prestige of its users. Secondly it must be used by the bulk of speakers, and thirdly, it must be systematic, due to the influence of the speech community's first language(s) and culture. In fact, it is the prestige factor that usually lags behind and perpetuates and endonormative outlook even when in fact a functionality adequate local variety has come to be widely used throughout a society' (Groves, 2010, pp. 18).

Lastly, it is the ' passing of time' where acknowledgement of a new variety as a standard language would take years, decades or even longer to be widely accepted. Australian English is one good example. (Groves, 2010, pp. 119) ' In research on IVEs, the term ownership has been used to refer to the

ways in which speakers appropriate the English Language for their own needs' (Higgins, 2003, pp. 620). The Inner Circle has always been labeled as the 'norm providing'. This means that English language norms developed in these countries and it is their first language.

In the Outer Circle, English is primarily known as the institutional language for education, commerce and technology. We ought to take into consideration that there are more young learners in the Outer Circle regards English as their first language. According to the latest census, more Singaporeans are now speaking English at home. If English is spoken or taken as the first language is set as one of the key criteria to define standard, there should now be a paradigm shift from how Outer Circle learners are viewed.

As such, the purpose for which English is learnt in the Outer Circle has now shifted from the initial purpose of being a medium of instruction for education and commerce. This global language has become a formal variety at work and an informal variety at home for the so called 'Outer Circle' group of learners. In addition, 'Widdowson and Chisanga and Kamwangamalu take the view that speakers in the postcolonial world may appropriate English at the grammatical level for their own contexts, thus owning the language by altering it to suit their own local purposes, divorced from the norms of the center' (Higgins, 2003, pp. 17)

Let's take Singapore English as an example to illustrate these points.

Singapore was under the British colony before she gained self government in 1959 and independence in 1965. Since English has been the administrative

language during the British colony, Singapore decided to keep English as the main language in order to maximize economic growth. The use of English as our first language is meant for unification purpose; Singapore is a multicultural society that is made up of four different ethnic groups (namely Chinese, Indian, Malay and Eurasian).

As the global language for commerce, technology and science, the advocate of English also helps Singapore to integrate into the global economy.

Standard Singapore English is used in the primary school education and for local news coverage. Based on the Ministry of Education (MOE) statistics, students with five GCE 'O level' passes has been at a constant percentage at 80% and above. General Certificate of Education (GCE) is part of the British education reform.

One point to mention is that Singapore students who have gone through their foundation in Singapore Standard English and successfully move on to Secondary education, tested under the British standard have eventually obtained good grades in the GCE 'O' Level. Should we still doubt the standard of this local norm? Another factor to consider is whether the speakers view the local variety as a legitimate variety. This refers to the acceptability of the local government and speakers. Singaporeans have oriented themselves towards the ideology that only the Inner Circle varieties are the only legitimate.

This attitude is most likely because of the increased number of students studying abroad in countries such as United States and England. In addition, even when more younger generation speaks English at home and claim

themselves as native speakers, the local government has ‘block claims of ownership’. This is because of the preference of ‘assigning Native Speaker status following ethnic lines instead of linguistic ones to preserve multiracial harmony in Singaporean society’ (Higgins, 2003, pp. 22).

In light of the above, my view is that we should not differentiate between Inner Circle or Outer Circle varieties of English. We should have a good grasp of how to negotiate and understand the various varieties of English. It will be even more helpful to discard the terms Native Speaker and Non Native Speaker. Based on the above discussion, there ought to be considerable possibility that some speakers in the outer circle are native speakers in their own right.

Moreover, the processes that the Outer Circle Englishes gone through e. g. codification, acceptability etc to get internationally recognized is the same as what the Inner Circle Englishes has encountered. As such, Outer Circle Englishes should be considered as standard varieties of English in their own right rather than label them as interlanguages. However, to do this, the attitudes of the users need to be change to acknowledge that English in the Outer Circle is not inferior to the Inner Circle Englishes.