
WHO SPEAKS ENGLISH TODAY?

ENL, ESL and EFL

The spread of English around the world is often discussed in terms of three distinct groups of users, those who speak English respectively as:

- a native language (ENL)
- a second language (ESL)
- a foreign language (EFL).

When we come to look more closely at this three-way categorisation and, especially, when we consider the most influential models and descriptions of English use, we will find that the categories have become fuzzy at the edges and that it is increasingly difficult to classify speakers of English as belonging purely to one of the three. Nevertheless, the three-way model provides a useful starting point from which to move on to the present, more complicated situation.

English as a Native Language (ENL) or English as a mother tongue as it is sometimes called) is the language of those born and raised in one of the countries where English is historically the first language to be spoken. Kachru (1992: 356) refers to these countries (mainly the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) as ‘the traditional cultural and linguistic bases of English’. Their English speakers are thought

number around 350 million. English as a Second Language refers to the language
spoken in a large number of territories such as India, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Singapore, which were once colonised by the English (see A1). These speakers are also thought to number around 350 million. English as a Foreign Language is the English of those for whom the language serves no purposes within their own countries. Historically, they learned the language in order to use it with its native speakers in the US and UK – though this is no longer the case. The current number of EFL speakers is more difficult to assess, and much depends on the level of competence which is used to define such a speaker. But if we use the criterion of ‘reasonable competence’, then the number is likely to be around 1 billion (although it should be said that this figure is not uncontroversial).

Even before we complicate the issue with changes that have occurred in the most recent decades, there are already a number of difficulties with this three-way categorisation. McArthur (1998: 43–6) lists six provisos which I summarise as follows:

1. ENL is not a single variety of English, but differs markedly from one territory to another (e.g. the US and UK), and even from one region with a given territory to another. In addition, the version of English accepted as ‘standard’ differs from one ENL territory to another.

2. Pidgins and creoles do not fit neatly into any one of the three categories. They are spoken in ENL settings, e.g. in parts of the Caribbean, in ESL settings, e.g. in many territories in West Africa, and in EFL settings, e.g. in Nicaragua, Panama and Surinam in the Americas. And some creoles in the Caribbean are so distinct from standard varieties of English that they are considered by a number of scholars to be different languages altogether.

3. There have always been large groups of ENL speakers living in certain ESL territories, e.g. India and Hong Kong as a result of colonialism.

4. There are also large numbers of ESL speakers living in ENL settings, particularly the US and, to a lesser extent, the UK as a result of immigration.

5. The three categories do not take account of the fact that much of the world is bi- or multilingual, and that English is often spoken within a framework of code-mixing and code-switching. (Note that a distinction used to be made between these two terms, whereas more recently they have tended to be used synonymously and interchangeably, see e.g. Y. Kachru and Nelson 2006: chapter 18).

6. The basic division is between native speakers and non-native speakers of English, that is, those born to the language and those who learnt it through education. The first group has always been considered superior to the second regardless of the quality of the language its members speak. This is becoming an ever more controversial issue and will be taken up in unit B6.

To the above points can be added two more. Firstly, in a number of the so-called ESL countries such as Singapore and Nigeria, some English speakers learn the language either as their first language or as one of two or more equivalent languages within their bi- or multilingual repertoires. And secondly, there are so-called EFL/ELF countries such as the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries where English is increasingly being used for intranational (i.e. country internal) purposes rather than purely as a foreign or international language. For example, English is fast becoming the medium
of instruction in tertiary education, while in secondary and even primary education, school subjects are increasingly being taught through English as a means of learning both.

Models and descriptions of the spread of English

The oldest model of the spread of English is that of Strevens. His world map of English (see Figure A3.1), first published in 1980, shows a map of the world on which is superimposed an upside-down tree diagram demonstrating the way in which, since American English became a separate variety from British English, all subsequent Englishes have had affinities with either one or the other.

Later in the 1980s, Kachru, McArthur and Görlach all proposed circle models of English: Kachru's 'Three circle model of World Englishes' (1985/1988), McArthur's (1987) 'Circle of World English' and Görlach's (1988) 'Circle model of English'. McArthur's and Görlach's models are similar in a number of ways. Görlach's circle (not shown here) places 'International English' at the centre, followed by (moving outwards): regional standard Englishes (African, Antipodean, British Canadian, Caribbean, S. Asian, US), then semi-/sub-regional standard Englishes such as Indian, Irish, Kenyan, Papua New Guinean, then non-standard Englishes such as Aboriginal English, Jamaican English, Yorkshire dialect and, finally, beyond the outer rim, pidgins and creoles such as Cameroonian Pidgin English and Tok Pisin.

McArthur's circle (see Figure A3.2) has at its centre World Standard English which, like Görlach's International English, does not exist in an identifiable form at present. Moving outwards comes next a band of regional varieties including both standard and standardising forms. Beyond these, divided by spokes separating the world into eight regions, is what McArthur (1998: 95) describes as 'a crowded (even riotous) fringe of subvarieties such as Aboriginal English, Black English Vernacular [now known as

![Map of English](image)

*Figure A3.1 Strevens's world map of English (source: Strevens 1992: 33).*
"African American Vernacular English" or "Ebonics"), Gullah, Jamaican Nation Language, Singapore English and Ulster Scots'.

However, the most useful and influential, model of the spread of English has undoubtedly been that of Kachru (1992: 356) (see Figure A3.3). In accordance with the three-way categorisation described in the previous section, Kachru divides World Englishes into three concentric circles, the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. The three circles represent the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition, and the functional allocation of English in diverse cultural contexts; as the language travelled from Britain, in the first diaspora to the other ENL countries (together with the UK these constitute the Inner Circle), in the second diaspora to the ESL countries (the Outer Circle) and, more recently, to the EFL countries (the Expanding Circle). The English spoken in the Inner Circle is said to be 'norm-providing', that in the Outer Circle to be 'norm-developing' and that in the Expanding Circle to be 'norm-dependent'. In other words, while the ESL varieties of English have
The "Expanding Circle"
China 1,088,200,000
Egypt 50,273,000
Indonesia 175,904,000
Israel 4,512,000
Japan 122,620,000
Korea 42,593,000
Nepal 18,004,000
Saudi Arabia 12,972,000
Taiwan 19,813,000
USSR 285,796,000
Zimbabwe 8,878,000

The "Outer Circle"
Bangladesh 107,756,000
Ghana 13,754,000
India 810,806,000
Kenya 22,919,000
Malaysia 16,965,000
Nigeria 112,258,000
Pakistan 109,434,000
Philippines 58,723,000
Singapore 2,841,000
Sri Lanka 16,608,000
Tanzania 23,996,000
Zambia 7,384,000

The "Inner Circle"
USA 245,800,000
UK 57,006,000
Canada 25,880,000
Australia 16,470,000
New Zealand 3,360,000

Figure A3.3 Kachru's three-circle model of World Englishes (source: Kachru 1992: 356).

Note: In this, the most frequently cited version of the model, the circles are oval rather than circular, and presented vertically rather than concentrically, with the lowest circles representing earlier versions of English. Note also that the model was first described in Kachru (1988) and published in diagrammatic form in Kachru (1988), and thus the numbers (which are for whole populations rather than English speakers alone) are now very out of date.
become institutionalised and are developing their own standards, the EFL varieties are regarded, in this model, as 'performance' varieties without any official status and therefore dependent on the standards set by native speakers in the Inner Circle.

Kachru argues that the implications of this sociolinguistic reality of English use around the world have gone unrecognised, and that attitudes, power and economics have instead been allowed to dictate English language policy. This situation, he considers, has been facilitated by a number of 'fallacies' about the users and uses of English in different cultures around the world. In B3 we will look further at this issue, which developed in the early 1990s into a major debate carried out in the pages of the journal *English Today*.

The three-circle model has been highly influential and contributed greatly to our understanding of the sociolinguistic realities of the spread of English. However, despite its influence, with many scholars, myself included, still using the three-circle model as their framework, over the past few years a number of World Englishes scholars have identified limitations with the model in its current form. Some of these limitations relate to recent changes in the use of English, while others concern any attempt at a three-way categorisation of English uses and users. The main points that have been raised by various scholars are the following:

- The model is based on geography and history rather than on the way speakers currently identify with and use English. Yet some English users in the Outer Circle speak it as their first language (occasionally as their only language). Meanwhile an increasing number of speakers in the Expanding Circle use English for a very wide range of purposes, including social, with native speakers and even more frequently with other non-native speakers from both their own and different L1s, and both in their home country and abroad. As Mesthrie points out, 'the German graduate students I taught in the cold Bavarian winter of 2005 seemed to be thoroughly at home in English' (2008: 32, emphasis added). In addition to this, English is increasingly being used as the medium of instruction in both schools and universities in many continental European countries, and more recently in Expanding Circle Asian countries such as China.

- There is often a grey area between the Inner and Outer Circles: in some Outer Circle countries, English may be the first language learnt for many people, and may be spoken in the home rather than used purely for official purposes such as education, law and government.

- There is also an increasingly grey area between the Outer and Expanding Circles. Approximately twenty countries are in transition from EFL to ESL status, including Argentina, Belgium, Costa Rica, Denmark, Sudan, Switzerland (see Graddol 1997: 11 for others).

- Many World English speakers grow up bilingual or multilingual, using different languages to fulfil different functions in their daily lives. This makes it difficult to describe any language in their repertoire as L1, L2, L3 and so on.

- There is a difficulty in using the model to define speakers in terms of their proficiency in English. A native speaker may have limited vocabulary and low grammatical competence while the reverse may be true of a non-native speaker. The fact that English is somebody's second or third language does not of itself imply that their competence is less than that of a native speaker.
The model implies that the situation is uniform for all countries within a particular circle whereas this is not so. Even within the Inner Circle, countries differ in the amount of linguistic diversity they contain (e.g. there is far more diversity in the US than in the UK). In the Outer Circle, countries differ in a number of respects such as whether English is spoken mainly by an elite, as in India, or is more widespread, as in Singapore; or whether it is spoken by a single L1 group leading to one variety of English as in Bangladesh, or by several different L1 groups leading to several varieties of English as in India. Because of this, Bruthiaux argues that the model 'conceals more than it reveals and runs the risk of being interpreted as a license to dispense with analytical rigour' (2003: 161).

The term 'Inner Circle' implies that speakers from the ENL countries are central to the effort, whereas their worldwide influence is in fact in decline. Note, though, that Kachru did not intend the term 'Inner' to be taken to imply any sense of superiority.

For more details concerning these issues see, for example, Bruthiaux (2003), Canagarajah (1999), Graddol (2006), Holborow (1999), Kandiah (1998), Kirkpatrick (2007a), Mesthrie (2008), Modiano (1999a), Pennycook (2006, 2007), Seidhlofer (2002), Toolan (1997), Tripathi (1998) and Yano (2001). Kachru, however, believes that the model has been misinterpreted. He defends it robustly point by point against the problems listed in the first edition of this book (Jenkins 2003: 17–18), arguing that the model has the capacity to encompass the kinds of sociolinguistic changes observed by his critics (Kachru 2005: 211–20). He concludes that the concerns raised in Jenkins (2003) are constructed primarily on misrepresentations of the model's characteristics, interpretations and implications (Kachru 2005: 220). If you have access to Kachru (2005) and to some of the above sources, you may find it useful to read their authors' comments on the three-circle model, then Kachru's (2005) response, in order to help you decide on your own position.

Some scholars have since proposed different models and descriptions of the spread of English, sometimes in an attempt to improve on Kachru's model by taking account of more recent developments. Tripathi (1998: 55), for example, argues that the 'third world nations' should be considered as 'an independent category that supersedes the distinction of ESL and EFL. Yano (2001: 122–4) proposes that Kachru's model should be modified in order to take account of the fact that many varieties of English in the Outer Circle have become established varieties spoken by people who regard themselves as native speakers with native speaker intuition. He therefore suggests glossing the Inner Circle as 'genetic ENL' and the Outer as 'functional ENL'. His model also takes account of the social dialectal concept of acrolect (standard) and basilect (colloquial) use of English, with the acrolect being used for international communication, and for formal and public intranational interaction, and the basilect for informal intranational communication. This is problematic in that it does not allow for the possibility of basilect use in international communication, whereas such use is becoming increasingly common. On the other hand, the attempt to remove any possible suggestion of a 'mandatory' genetic element from the definition of 'native speaker' is very welcome.

Another more recent attempt to take account of developments in the spread of World Englishes is that of Modiano (1999a, 1999b). He breaks completely with
historical and geographical concerns and bases the first of his two models, 'The centripetal circles of international English,' on what is mutually comprehensible to the majority of proficient speakers of English, be they native or non-native. The centre is made up of those who are proficient in international English. That is, these speakers function well in cross-cultural communication where English is the lingua franca. They are just as likely to be non-native as native speakers of English. The main criterion, other than proficiency itself, is that they have no strong regional accent or dialect. Modiano's next band consists of those who have proficiency in English as either a first or second language rather than as an international language. In other words, they function well in English with, respectively, other native speakers (with whom they share English as an L1) or other non-native speakers from the same L1 background as themselves. The third circle is made up of learners of English, i.e., those who are not yet proficient in English. Outside this circle is a final band to represent those people who do not know English at all (see Figure A3.4).

Although it makes good sense to base a modern description of users of English on proficiency and to prioritise (as McArthur and Görlach had done earlier) the use of English as an international or world language, there are certain problems with Modiano's model. In particular, where do we draw the line between strong and non-strong regional accent? Presumably a strong regional accent places its owner in the second circle, thus categorising them as not proficient in international English. But as things stand, we have no sound basis on which to make the decision. And who decides? Again, given that international English is not defined, what does it mean to be proficient in 'international English' other than the rather vague notion of communicating well? Where do we draw the line between proficient and not proficient in international English in the absence of such a definition?

A few months later, Modiano redrafted his idea in response to comments which he had received in reaction to his first model. This time he moves away from intelligibility per se to present a model based on features of English common to all varieties of English. At the centre is EII (English as an International Language), a core of features which is comprehensible to the majority of native and competent non-native speakers

![Figure A3.4 Modiano's centripetal circles of international English (source: Modiano 1999a: 25).](image-url)
of English (see Figure A3.5). His second circle consists of features which may become internationally common or may fall into obscurity. Finally, his outer area consists of five groups (American English, British English, other major varieties, local varieties, foreign varieties) each with features peculiar to their own speech community and which are unlikely to be understood by most members of the other four groups.

There are still problems. For example, the difficulty of determining what goes into his central category remains. In addition, some will find unpalatable the fact that Modiano equates native speakers with 'competent' non-natives, implying that all native speakers of English are competent users of English, which is patently untrue. There may also be objections to the designation of all the native varieties as 'major', but established Outer Circle varieties such as Indian English (spoken by a larger number than the NS (native speaker) populations of the US and UK combined) as 'local'.

Returning recently to Kachru's model, Graddol (2006: 110) points out that 'Kachru himself has recently proposed that the "inner circle" is now better conceived of as the group of highly proficient speakers of English — those who have "functional nativeness" regardless of how they learned or use the language'. Graddol demonstrates this in Figure A3.6, which he devised according to his interpretation of Kachru's words.

Graddol argues that 'in a globalised world ... there is an increasing need to distinguish between proficiencies in English rather than a speaker's bilingual status' (2006: 110). This is similar to Rampton's (1990) notion of 'expertise', which, Rampton argues, is a more appropriate concept for English than that of nativeness (see unit B6 below). Degree of proficiency or expertise is an eminently (and possibly the most) useful way to approach the English of its entirety of speakers nowadays, regardless of where they come from and what other language(s) they speak.

The source for Graddol's presentation of functional nativeness in diagrammatic form was Kachru (2005) (Graddol, personal communication). However, it seems that Graddol's interpretation of the phenomenon of 'functional nativeness' may not be precisely the same as Kachru's. For when Kachru himself discusses functional nativeness
Figure A3.6 Representing the community of English speakers as including a wide range of proficiencies (source: Graddol 2006: 110).

(2005: 12, and see also Kachru 1997: 217), he explains it in terms of two variables: 'the RANGE and DEPTH of a language in a society' (capitals in the original), i.e. the 'domains' in which a language is used and 'the degree of social penetration of the language'. In other words, Kachru seems to be referring to the use of English in a society, and Graddol to the proficiency level of speakers of English within the entire 'community' of English speakers. The two overlap, but are not necessarily identical.

Most recently, Canagarajah (in a lecture, 'Developing a model for plurilingual competence', given at Southampton University, England, in July 2008) looked afresh at McArthur’s circle model and argued that its world standard English centre is problematic. Canagarajah suggested replacing it with 'Pragmatics' – strategies of communication (see Canagarajah 2005: xxvi) – leaving the grammar to take care of itself. Still more controversially, as an alternative, he suggested leaving the centre completely empty. Either way, the implication is that it is impossible to capture the variability of English forms used in context around the world within a single term, a conclusion that is particularly consistent with the notion of English as a Lingua Franca (see strand 6).