



World Englishes

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What is it?

World Englishes refers to different forms and varieties of English used in various sociolinguistic contexts in different parts of the world. Today English has a greater spread over the globe than any other language in recorded history, being used as the primary medium of international and intercultural communication. But it isn't one form or variety of English that is being used. The plural 'Englishes' emphasizes that the language belongs to those who use it as their mother tongue or as an additional language, whether in its standard form or in its localized variation. It argues against a mythical variety of English unmarked for users' sociocultural background sometimes referred to as world English, global English, Globish, or international English. World Englishes includes at least three types of varieties: (1) those that are used as the primary language of the majority population of a country, such as American and British; (2) varieties that are used as an additional language for *intranational* as well as *international* communication in communities that are multilingual, such as Indian, Nigerian and Singaporean; and (3) varieties that are used almost exclusively for international communications, such as Brazilian, Chinese, and German. Most of type 2 Englishes developed as a result of colonial imposition of the language in various parts of the world. Presently there are more users of type 2 and 3 varieties of English than of the first type and it is primarily they who are instrumental in its further spread.

Who uses the concept?

The term 'world Englishes' was introduced by Braj B. Kachru and Larry E. Smith in 1985 when they

began to edit a professional journal and insisted upon that term for the title. The concept is now used by researchers, students and teachers of language, literature, and the methodology of English teaching, and increasingly by those in international trade and tourism.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

The concept has a close fit with intercultural dialogue since English is increasingly used by people everywhere to interact with others wherever they are from. People from Asia use it to interact with those from Europe and people from South America to interact with people from Africa. Effective communication among users of different varieties is possible by cultivating an awareness of the variations in Englishes and their cultural, social, and ideational functions.

What work remains?

There is a need for research studies on how people from diverse regional, cultural, social, economic, and educational backgrounds use English in order to achieve their intended goals. Additional research is needed on studies of comprehensibility and interpretability among users of different varieties.

Resources

Kachru, B. B., Kachru, Y., & Nelson, C. (Eds.). (2006), *The handbook of world Englishes*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Kachru, Y., & Smith, L. E. (2008), *Cultures, contexts, and world Englishes*, New York: Routledge.

Smith, L. E. (Ed.). (1981). *English for cross-cultural communication*. London: Macmillan.