

# The Future of English: a Welsh perspective

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I hate plenary addresses at the beginnings of conferences. Well, you haven't got to know many of the participants yet, and they don't know you - except possibly by dubious reputation - and we all know from the large books on communication theory that it's not really possible to have a truly successful interaction if speakers don't know who they're talking to and hearers don't know who they're listening to. In my case, you may already have been puzzling over my title - or, at least, the second part of it. He doesn't sound Welsh, you might be thinking - or at least, recalling a comment which was made to me on my last visit to America 'He doesn't sound like Dylan Thomas'. But yes, I am from Wales, a small country of 2.5 million angels which, from a US perspective, is - near Russia, somewhere. To be precise, I am from Holyhead, a port town which you would use if you were taking the ferry to Dublin, Ireland, and which is to be found in almost the exact geographical centre of the British Isles.

Now I tell you these intimate details to lead up to my first point, which is in fact to do with regional accents and dialects. Did you ever come across one of those radio or TV dialect programs where participants would speak to a panel of Henry Higginses, who would try to work out from their accent which part of the country they came from. Now, if I were on such a program, as a participant, I would definitely beat the panel. It is not possible to tell, from my accent, exactly where in Britain I am from. You see, I spent the first 10 years of my life in Holyhead, in North Wales, then moved to Liverpool, with my family, where I went through high school in the 1950s, and became a failed Beatle, and where my strong Welsh accent earned me the nickname of 'Taffy' - that being the traditional label for a Welshman. In order to survive - and I mean survive - that accent soon shifted towards the classical Liverpoolian, Scouse accent - the one indeed that you will recall from Beatles movies - and which in a modified form is still quite a strong element in my speech today. But there were further modifications: I later spent 20 years at the University of Reading, in southern England, where to become part of the local community there, such as when attending a Saturday soccer match, you would have to use such dialect forms as *I likes a good game*, *'e'll miss by ten mile*, and say, along with everyone else, on the not infrequent occasions when Reading lost, *we was robbed* (Cheshire, 1982). Working in a southern British university community, I would of course find myself in the society of many speakers of the prestige educated British accent, Received Pronunciation, or RP - what is usually perceived to be the standard British accent abroad - the traditional accent of Oxford, the Queen, the BBC, and James Bond (except when Sean Connery played him). For the past 15 years I have been living once again in Wales: Wales is later this year to open its own National Assembly, so merely thinking of that political development brings the Welsh bit of my accent to the fore. And - on top of all that - I have had 22 years being happily married to an RP-speaking speech pathologist.

All of this adds up to an accent which we linguists technically call, a mess. Mine is a mongrel accent, a mixture of at least four distinct influences. As a result, it is an inconsistent accent. I sometimes say *bath*, sometimes *ba:th*; sometimes *example*, sometimes *exa:mple*. Nobody seems to notice, or mind. Moreover, the variability doesn't stop there, with personal history. It is affected by two other factors. First there is the fascinating phenomenon of *accommodation* - in my view, the most important sociolinguistic discovery of what we shall soon be calling the last century - the realisation that people do not have a single way of talking, but vary their speech in terms of who they are talking to (Giles & Smith, 1979). In the case of accents, it means that, if you meet someone with whom you immediately find

yourself in rapport, your respective speech patterns will converge; conversely, if you find yourselves not in mutual sympathy, your speech patterns will diverge. Some people are more empathic accommodators than others, some modify their accents more rapidly than others, but everyone does it to some extent.

I am an inveterate and immediate accommodator - I suppose most phoneticians are - and it regularly gets me into trouble. Some time ago, for example, I was at an arts conference where I met a splendid chap from Glasgow, in Scotland, and we hit it off very well. Within half a minute I could hear my accent shifting in his direction, and within a minute I realised that I was beginning to sound like Billy Connolly. That is where I often get into trouble, because unconsciously I can go too far. For at that point my interlocutor will invariably stop talking, and start asking awkward questions - on this occasion, 'Are you from Glasgow?' The problem is how to answer this question. If you lie, and say 'yes', the next question will be, 'Which part?', and when you then have to admit that you do not know, you might end up on the floor. Alternatively, if you tell the truth, and say, 'no', the next question will be, 'So why are you taking the piss out of my accent, then?', and equally, you will end up on the floor.

Fortunately, accommodation, being a mutual effect, doesn't usually have such dire consequences. But it does add further variability to an already complex situation. And the same result comes from my second factor - the international consequences of mobility. My original regional mobility within Britain - from Wales, to Liverpool, to southern England, and back again to Wales - plus an upward movement through the British class system, from upper working class to whatever class a professor of linguistics is supposed to have these days - not much higher, come to think of it - is now only a part of a growing international mobility, which is also having repercussions on my English. Am I talking to you now in British English? On the whole, obviously, yes - *splendid chap* (I said a few moments ago) is stereotypically British (*nice guy*, if you will) - but analyse what I say carefully and you would have to conclude that it is a mixture of British and American. One reason is that I have already been in your company for a few days, and so I have begun to accommodate. Another, is that I want my speech to be intelligible, so I have switched out of British English on several occasions. Do you remember my saying that I went to *high school* in Liverpool - well, of course, one can't go to *high school* in the UK; what I went to was then called a *grammar school*, or *secondary school*. I called my wife a *speech pathologist* - but in British English she would be a *speech therapist*. And do you remember I talked about Beatles *movies*? In my normal dialect, that would have been Beatles *films* - though *movies*, as a term, is becoming increasingly current in the UK. Traditionally, it would be considered inconsistent - inconceivable, perhaps - for the same speaker to say, almost in the same breath, as I might have done, *I went with this nice chap to the movies*. Today, this kind of mixture is becoming increasingly the norm, and most people don't even notice when it happens. And if they do, it doesn't bother them.

The differences between British and American English are familiar territory - though people still underestimate the total number of lexical differences (and I mean idioms as well as words) which differentiate our two histories. There are several thousand of them. Words I have just illustrated. For idioms, I recall my first ever visit to the US, back in the 1960s, when I taught for a university quarter at Bowling Green, Ohio. I called into a diner for breakfast, and found myself faced with a burly chef who was obviously not into suffering fools gladly. He asked me what I wanted. I said, 'eggs - please'. There was a silence. He looked up. I looked back. Then, obviously running out of patience, he growled 'How do you like your eggs?' Now, the point you have to appreciate is that I had never been asked that question in a restaurant before. It is not a British question. I had no idea what range of options to choose from in my reply. I remember stammering, 'Cooked?' I remember his face changing - fortunately, into a smile. 'Limey, huh?' he said. And then he gave me the list of

'once over easy', 'sunny side up', and a range of other possibilities which I can now operate with as fluently as any of you. These idioms are now a natural part of my dialect, though they come to the surface only in certain parts of the world - increasingly, in more and more of it, as time goes by. So what dialect is in this brain of mine now? Is it British English, or American English, or something new?

I would argue that it is indeed something new, an amalgam of some sort, and one whose amalgamy - if you'll permit the word (the *Oxford English Dictionary* has the usage attested in the 18th century, although labelled 'obsolete and rare') - is steadily increasing, as the processes of globalisation force us to encounter an ever-widening range of divergent linguistic inputs. Turn on the BBC these days and one no longer hears only what used to be called 'BBC English'. There is not only a great deal of national variation. (The dialects of the so-called Celtic fringe are strongly present - Scots and Irish, especially - and Northern and above all London-influenced accents will be heard in a range of programs, from documentary to drama.) There is international variation, too. But the international linguistic palette on offer in the UK at the moment includes far more than what we might call standard American English, as manifested in films and sitcoms; some of the most popular daily soaps now come from Australia, and the effect is already noticeable among the young.

Now, the point I want to make is simply this: I am not alone. Indeed, I am becoming typical. I would go further: in an increasing number of parts of the world, I am nowadays the majority. What we used to perceive as a 'pure' accent or dialect (though in fact such notions are myths, for dialects have always displayed mixed influences, and have never stood still) is being replaced by perceptibly 'mixed' varieties. As people move around more, their speech patterns change more rapidly; and even if they do not move around, the processes of global communication bring them into regular contact with a much wider range of varieties than ever before. A century ago, most people would have used only one dialect, and had routine encounters with only two or three. Today, through the media, personal mobility, and population movement, they routinely encounter hundreds. How many regionally influenced varieties of English would one hear outside this hotel in an hour? Hundreds.

Of course, to reach a total of hundreds, we must extend our concept of variation even further, to include those varieties of English which display the influence of other languages - European, Asian, African, Latin American .... And just how many varieties of English these days display such influence? The answer, which still takes some people by surprise, is - most of them, because we have to talk about world English now. It is time for some statistics.

Nobody knows how many people speak anything in the world, really. Language statistics are a primitive science. Most countries don't even *ask* what language its people speak, in their censuses. And when it comes to global statistics, we are in the business of informed guesswork. Still, international organizations and linguistic surveys, using various criteria, have come up with some figures, and as they are the only ones we have, we must use them, though always cautiously, as guidelines for our thinking. The most widely cited estimate these days for the number of people who use English as a first language in the world (i.e. in the USA, Canada, the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and a few other territories) is 400 million. The range, however, is between 350 and 450 million. The chief reason for the uncertainty is to do with whether creole and pidgin varieties derived from English should be included in the total: if you consider these to be 'varieties of English', then you will include them, and you will move towards the higher total; contrariwise, if you consider that they are, in some sense, separate languages now, you may wish to exclude them, and you will then move towards the lower total. It should also be noted, in passing that, of these 400 million people, about 230 million of them live here, in the USA - well over half. Only 56 million live in the UK. British English is very much a minority dialect of world

English now, much to the disgust of those who complain regularly about the matter in letters to the *Daily Telegraph*, and who write to me asking me what exactly I propose to do about it!

But the issue of British versus American English begins to seem very dated when we consider the next total - the number of people who speak English as a second or foreign language. Here the figures are even more difficult to be sure about, for the obvious reason that fluency is a continuum, and we have to decide how much competence in English somebody needs before being allowed to join the community of world English users. A criterion of native-speaker-like fluency would clearly produce a relatively small figure; including every beginner would produce a relatively large one. The British Council, the organization in the UK that looks after the country's arts, cultural, and educational affairs abroad, has estimated that at the turn of the century about a billion (thousand million) people will be learning English, somewhere or other in the world. That figure cannot be ignored - the people are, after all, learning English, as opposed to some other language - but plainly it needs to be interpreted cautiously, because it includes all learners, from beginners to advanced. Let us assume a medium level of conversational competence in handling domestic subject-matter. Using that criterion, the commonest estimates I see these days hover around 400 million for those who live in countries where English has some sort of official status - countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Singapore, India, and about 60 other countries. And for people using English in the remaining countries of the world - China, Japan, Russia, the countries of Europe and Latin America, and so on - over 100 countries, in all - a figure of 700 million would be a middle-of-the-road estimate. That makes about 1500 million as a grand total, which is about a quarter of the world's population, currently passing 6 billion.

Two things need to be said straight away about this total. First, yes, one in four of the world's population make some use of English now, and that is an unprecedented situation for any language to find itself in. It is a fact that English is a global language now. But if one out of four do use English, that means that three out of four do not. So we must not exaggerate the situation.

But I must pause here, before going on to my second 'thing'. My statement that 'English is a global language now' reminds me. My spies tell me that there was some debate at TESOL last year, in the wake of my book *English as a Global Language*, in which some people characterized my views as triumphalist. Apparently, for someone to say that English is a global language is, in their view, to applaud that state of affairs. I am, according to them, delighted that English has done so well. Well, I wasn't here to defend myself, last year, so permit me to do so now, just for a couple of minutes: Marshal's in town. Such an interpretation is, I humbly submit, nonsense. Using the criteria that I expound in my book, I mean it as a statement of fact, no more. It is no more meaningful to interpret it as triumphalist than it would be to interpret the statement that 'the African rhino is dying out' as conveying support for big-game hunting. It seems not to have dawned on those critics that the concept of a Welshman being triumphalist about English is something of a contradiction in terms! Such people evidently had not read any of my earlier books, such as the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, which is a celebration of *all* languages. Indeed, if there is anything which does characterise me, as any linguist, it is that I want all languages to do well. I have done as much as anyone to work for and with minority languages. I have been on committees defending them, I have turned out articles about them, I have even written a play about them, and my next book is entirely devoted to the tragic situation affecting so many of them. So when I hear that someone quotes me as saying that 'English is a global language', and says, 'There you are, you see? Triumphalism', I say, 'I'r diawl efo chwi', which might be translated into US English - though admittedly with something lost in the translation - as 'Get real'.

So the statement 'English is a global language', as with all such statements as 'Everyone understands English now', or 'English is killing off other languages', need to be interpreted very judiciously. And, if you permit me a digression within my digression, let me comment briefly on this last point: the greatest tragedy of the moment is indeed that so many languages are dying - the likelihood is that half of the world's 6,500 languages will have died out by this time next century - but nothing is to be gained by saying, as one newspaper did recently, that English is the cause of all of this. That explanation is only partly relevant. It is of course relevant for North American Indian languages, or the languages of Australia - or for that matter, Welsh - but it does not work for the Indian languages of Central or South America, or most of the indigenous languages of Asia, where other languages have been the dominant factors. Plainly, the issue of language endangerment and death is closely bound up with the whole complex issue of globalization, and the history of empires, in which the English language has indeed had an unequalled, but nonetheless restricted role. Similarly, the media belief that 'English is everywhere' is a nonsense - discoverable by anyone on holiday who leaves the English-spoken-here atmosphere of the airports, seafronts, and hotels, and wanders into the back streets of the cities and towns.

You may remember, before my double digression, that I promised you a second point about the world English statistics. This is to draw attention to the balance between these estimates, and in particular to the significant equivalence which has emerged between people who speak English as a first language and those who speak it in countries where it has some sort of official status. They are now about the same - some 400 million each. But because the population growth in second-language countries is about three times what it is in first-language countries, there is little doubt that the new millennium is going to be an era in which far more people will be speaking English as a second language than as a first language. That change in the centre of gravity of the language has probably already passed. And certainly, if speakers of English as a foreign language - the Japanese, Chinese, Dutch, and so on - are added to the total, then first-language speakers of English are these days being outnumbered by those whose English is not their first language by a possible factor of 4 to 1.

The point about 'centre of gravity' is crucial. Once upon a time, Britain *was* the centre of gravity of the English language. In the last century - sorry, I am getting into training for next year - it was the United States. But increasingly we are being forced to recognise that nobody 'owns' English any more, that people are doing their own thing with the language as it grows in strength of numbers in different places, and that some unprecedented things are happening to the language as a consequence. Some of our most cherished conceptual distinctions are having to undergo revision.

Let me give just one example - the distinction between 'first language' and 'foreign (or second) language'. All over the world, now, I am encountering this kind of scenario: the following is a real example. A German oil-worker goes to the Middle East, working for a firm which uses English as a lingua franca. His first language is German. He meets there a female counterpart from Malaysia, whose first language is Malay. They can communicate only in English. They fall in love, and begin to live together. In due course, they have a baby, and decide to speak to it chiefly in English. So now: here is a baby who is learning English as a foreign language as its first language! What kind of English will that be? And what kind of English will it develop into, as that baby grows up - along, of course, with millions of others in a similar situation around the world - and perhaps achieves positions of power and prestige? What will be the norms of English then?

The point about 'power and prestige' is also crucial. The 'new Englishes' which have been developing around the world in the past 50 years are very different from the regional dialects that we remember from the past. They are being fostered with the same kind of enthusiasm

and pride as - well, as happened here, in the US, 200 years ago. One of the chief talking points in the United States at the end of the 18th century was just what variety of English should be the basis of the new nation, and how far English words and spellings should be led away from the British standard. People in Britain at the time talked dismissively about colonial English, and many still do have an antagonistic attitude towards any usage perceived to come from abroad. (In some people's minds, everything they don't like is an Americanism, even if it comes from Australia.) But times change, and there are now two educated norms, one on each side of the Atlantic, two prestige dialects, and these of course compete as teaching models around the English-learning world. American English very quickly came of age, as the prestige of your country grew. Eventually, it would literally pay people to learn it - or, at least, certainly not to be rude about it.

Now, exactly the same kind of discussion went on in the new nations of Africa and Asia in the decades following the Second World War. (And let us remember, in passing, just how explosive a growth there was during that period: there were only 51 member states of the United Nations at the outset; there are now 184, almost a fourfold increase in less than 50 years.) Repeatedly, we see a three-step development: first, there was an initial reaction against English, as the language of colonialism, and a desire to use local languages instead; then, complex local ethnic situations (such as in Nigeria, where there were over 400 languages to choose from) led to a realization of the value of maintaining the traditional lingua franca; and, as a result, the need to develop a new identity fostered the evolution of a new variety of English, distinct from those associated with Britain or the USA. The linguistic features which characterize these new Englishes are chiefly lexical: some regional dictionary projects were able to accumulate 5,000 new words and phrases without difficulty - words for local fauna and flora, clothing, religion, and so on - especially when they took loanwords from indigenous languages into account.

What power and prestige do you associate with these new varieties of English? It is all happening so quickly that it is difficult to be sure; there have been so few studies. But impressionistically, you can see several of these new linguistic features achieving an increasingly public profile, in their respective countries. You can tell, because they are becoming used less self-consciously in the national press - a local word is no longer put in inverted commas, for example, or given a gloss. You can tell, also, because you hear the local words being used, often at first with some effort, then more naturally, by first-language speakers of English in the locality. Indeed, the canons of local political correctness, in the best sense of that phrase, may foster a local usage, giving it more prestige than it could ever have dreamed of - a good example is the contemporary popularity of Maori words in New Zealand English. And, above all, you hear the local words beginning to be used at the senior or most fashionable levels of society - by politicians, religious leaders, socialites, pop musicians, and others. Using local words is no longer to be seen as slovenly or ignorant; it is respectable; it may even be cool.

And now, let us again widen the focus, and move from national to international levels. These people who are important in their own communities - whether politicians or pop stars - start travelling abroad. The rest of the world looks up to them, either because it wants what they have, or because it wants to sell them something. So here we have the typical present-day scenario - an international gathering (political, educational, economic, artistic...) during which senior visitors use, deliberately or unselfconsciously, a word or phrase from their own country which would not be found in the traditional standards of British or American English. Once upon a time, the reaction would have been: ignorant foreigners, why don't they learn English properly! Today, you cannot say this, nor is it even sensible to think it, if your visitor has more degrees than you have, or owns a bigger company, or is your social equal in every way. Now, you have to accept the new usage, and learn to live with it - maybe

even, in due course, come to like it - as a feature of increasing diversity in English. It can take a generation or two, but it does happen. It happened within 50 years between Britain and America: by 1842, Charles Dickens (in his *American Notes*, revised in 1868) made some fascinating observations about American linguistic usage - such as (in Chapter 9) his amazement at the many ways that Americans use the verb *fix* - all expressed in tones of delight, not dismay. But, whatever your attitude towards new usages - and there will always be people who sneer at diversity - there is no getting away from the fact that, these days, regional national varieties of English are increasingly being used with prestige on the international scene.

If these new Englishes are becoming standardized, as markers of educated regional identity, what is taking their place elsewhere within the social spectrum of these communities? Here, even less descriptive research has been done, but there are enough anecdotal reports to suggest the way things are going. When actual examples of language in use are analysed, in such multilingual settings as Malaysia and Singapore, all kinds of unusual hybrids come to light. Different degrees of language mixing are apparent: at one extreme, a sentence might be used which is indistinguishable from standard English. At the other extreme a sentence might use so many words and constructions from a contact language that it becomes unintelligible to those outside a particular community. In between, there are varying degrees of hybridization, ranging from the use of a single lexical borrowing within a sentence to several borrowings, and from the addition of a single borrowed syntactic construction (such as a tag question) to a reworking of an entire sentence structure. In addition, of course, the pronunciation shows similar degrees of variation, from a standard British or American accent to an accent which diverges widely from them (Crystal, 1996).

If you want a published example of this happening, look at Loga Baskaran's paper called 'The Malaysian English mosaic' published in *English Today* in 1994. She reports a conversation between two lawyers, one Tamil, the other Chinese, who have learned English and Malay as foreign languages. Her extracts include such sentences as *Might as well go window-shopping a bit*, standard colloquial English, and *Betul juga* ('True also'), standard colloquial Malay. In between, there are several types of mixed construction: an English sentence might show the influence of Malay (*OK, at about 12, can or not?*); or it might actually incorporate some Malay (*You wanted to go shopping, nak pergi tak?* = 'want to go, not?'). And these different types are all frequent, and live comfortably together in the same conversation.

This is the sort of conversation - between well-educated people, note - which you might hear at grass-roots level in communities all over the English-speaking world. And slowly, attitudes towards such forms of 'nativized English' are changing. Traditionally, code-mixed speech of this kind would be sneered at, given a demeaning name, such as 'Franglais', 'Spanglish', 'Angleutsch', 'Wenglish', 'Tex-Mex', and so on. Attitudes towards these varieties are still generally negative, despite the ethnolinguistic research which is demonstrating their complexity and subtlety. But as people who use these mixed varieties as markers of their identity become more influential, these attitudes will change. In 50 years time, we could find ourselves with an English language which contains within itself large areas of contact-influenced vocabulary, borrowed from Malay, or Chinese, or whatever. First-language speakers from those areas would instinctively select this vocabulary as their first choice in conversation, and the rest of us would recognize their words as legitimate options - passively, at least, with occasional forays into active use. Could this be a 21st-century scenario?

Of course it could. In fact, it would not be so different from the scenario already found in English today. English has always been a vacuum-cleaner of a language, sucking in words from whichever other languages it has come into contact with. There are over 350 living languages given as vocabulary sources in the files of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Several

of these languages have provided English with tens of thousands of words. French alone provided thousands in the early Middle Ages. There are *already* over 250 words with Malay as part of their etymology in the *OED*. So the foundation is already laid. The contact-language words of the future will of course include more alternative rather than supplementary expressions - localized words for everyday notions, such as tables and chairs, rather than for regionally restricted notions, such as fauna and flora - but the notion of a lexical mosaic as such is not new. It has been in English for centuries.

Most of us already actively make use of this mosaic. The more educated you are, the more you are able to switch between lexical registers, as circumstances warrant it. I can talk about *kingly*, *royal*, and *regal* things, words coming from Anglo-Saxon, French, and Latin, respectively, or *fire*, *flame*, and *conflagration*, or *ask*, *question*, and *interrogate*. There are many such triplets, and whole styles are identifiable based on whether they make copious use of the first, second, or third type of vocabulary. The phenomenon has attracted its share of criticism over the years. Organizations which support the use of 'plain English' tend to be strongly critical of Latinate vocabulary. George Orwell remarked, in his essay 'Politics and the English Language' (1946): 'Bad writers, and especially scientific, political and sociological writers, are nearly always haunted by the notion that Latin or Greek words are grander than Saxon ones.' But whether you approve or not, the fact of the matter is that English has these contrasts already within its boundaries. So it will not be surprising to see these boundaries steadily extend.

So, where have we got to? We have a situation in which the English language is becoming increasingly heterogeneous - messier, if you prefer, and if you'll pardon my French. Within individual countries, mixed accents and dialects are growing. New Englishes have appeared in many places, and are gradually getting established internationally. Code-mixed English is becoming increasingly widespread, happening simultaneously in communities all over the world, to produce what McArthur calls a 'latter-day Babel' which nonetheless 'manages to work' (1998: 22). What were once sporadic situations, such as the baby born to an English lingua-franca family, are becoming more the norm. 'Oh brave new world, that has such people in it!' At the same time, there are forces working in the opposite direction, and it is important to appreciate that these also exist. Languages do seem to have their own system of checks and balances. The desire for identity fosters increasing linguistic diversity; but the desire for mutual intelligibility, at an international level, fosters increasing stability. As McArthur puts it (p. 2), 'stability and flux go side by side, centripetal and centrifugal forces operating at one and the same time'. So far, I have illustrated centrifugal, diversifying forces. What about the centripetal, uniting ones?

It is time for another story. I have told it once or twice already, in various public arenas, so forgive me if it is familiar to you - but it is worth retelling, because I believe it is highly typical of the chief centripetal force operating in English at present. Some time ago, I was attending an international seminar at a European university. Around the table were representatives of some 20 countries. There were two people from the UK, two from the US, and one from Australia, with the others all from countries where English was either a second (official) language or a foreign language. The lingua franca of the meeting was English, and everyone seemed to be using the language competently - even the native speakers. We were well into the discussion period following a paper which had generated a lively buzz of comment and counter-comment. Someone then made a telling remark. There was a silence round the table, which was broken by one of the US delegates observing: 'That came from out in left field'. There was another silence, and I could see some of the delegates turning to their neighbours in a surreptitious way, as one does when one does not understand what on earth is going on, and wants to check that one is not alone. But they were not pondering the telling remark. They were asking each other what 'from out in left field' meant. My English-as-a-



second-language neighbour asked me, as an English-as-a-first-language speaker; he felt confident I would know. I did not know. Baseball at that time was a closed book to me - and still is, very largely.

One of the braver of the delegates spoke up: 'out where?', he asked. It took the US delegate by surprise, as plainly he'd never had that idiom questioned before; but he managed to explain that it was a figure of speech from baseball, a ball coming from an unusual direction, and what he had meant was that the remark was surprising, unexpected. There were nods of relief from around the table. Then one of the UK delegates chipped in: 'You played that with a straight bat', he said. 'Huh?', said the American. 'Oh, I say, that's not cricket', I added, parodically. 'Isn't it?', asked a delegate from Asia, now totally confused. The next few minutes of the meeting were somewhat chaotic. The original theme was quite forgotten, as people energetically debated the meaning of cricket and baseball idioms with their neighbours. Those who could added their own local version of how they said things like that in their part of the world - the sports metaphors they lived by. Eventually, the chairman called everyone back to order, and the discussion of the paper continued. But my attention was blown, and I spent the remainder of the session listening not to what delegates were saying, but to how they were saying it.

What was immediately noticeable was that the native speakers seemed to become much less colloquial. In particular, I didn't sense any further use of national idioms. Indeed, the speakers seemed to be going out of their way to avoid them. I made a small contribution towards the end, and I remember thinking myself while I was doing it - 'don't use any cricket terms'. Afterwards, in the bar, others admitted to doing the same. My British colleague said he'd consciously avoided using the word *fortnight*, replacing it by *two weeks*. And, as the evening wore on, people began apologizing facetiously when they noticed themselves using a national idiom, or when somebody else used one. There was one nice moment, I recall, when the US, UK, and Australian delegates were all reduced to incoherence when they found that they had disbarred themselves from using any of their natural expressions for 'the safe walking route at the side of a road' - *pavement* (UK), *sidewalk* (US), and *footpath* (Australian). In the absence of a regionally neutral term, all they could do was play about with circumlocutions. But they *were* intent on playing.

In the cold, sober light of later days, it seemed to me that what I had observed taking place at that seminar was of some significance, as far as the future of the English language was concerned - and probably was taking place regularly at international gatherings all over the world. I was seeing a new kind of English being born - a variety which was intended for international spoken usage, and which was thus avoiding the idiosyncrasies associated with national varieties of expression. Such a variety is not yet with us, as a living entity with standardized usage, but it still needs a name. I have called it Emerging World Standard Spoken English. Although this does not exist as an institutionalized variety, its written equivalent does - traditionally called Standard English, but in the present context perhaps better called World Standard Printed English. It is sometimes forgotten that what we call Standard English is essentially a written - and primarily a printed - variety of language, and moreover one which has developed as a standard precisely because it guarantees mutual written intelligibility, first within individual countries, then internationally.

It is easy to see what is happening. As more regional standards emerge, so the need for a neutral means of expression also emerges. We always want to have our cake and eat it, in language. We want to say, at the same time, 'Yes, we want to talk to each other, to understand each other, we have things in common to talk about', and 'We aren't like each other, I'm me and not you'. Varieties of a language, and of course different languages, enable this to happen. Within Britain, my control over Welsh English, and of Welsh itself, means I can identify with my own people; my control over standard English means that I can talk to everyone else. By having several varieties, and more than one language, at my disposal, I am in a much more powerful position than if I were monolingual or monodialectal. Bilingualism and bidialectism between them solve, in principle, virtually all

sociolinguistic ills, because they point the way to a world in which the demands of intelligibility and those of identity can co-exist. I say 'in principle'. Although three-quarters of the world's population are naturally bilingual, the echoing presence of the empire-building nations - and empire-builders are intrinsically monolingual in temperament - makes it extraordinarily difficult to turn such principles into acceptable practice. The countries which have shown an active interest in such proposals as the Barcelona Declaration of Linguistic Rights are still outnumbered by those which have not.

The future of English, as I see it, is one of increasing multidialectism. Not just bidialectism: tridialectism, at least, in the foreseeable future. The scenario I have outlined suggests that one day there will additionally be an international standard of spoken English, to be used as a means of international communication in an increasingly diversified world (as well as, possibly, a marker of Earthly identity, once we have boldly gone and established a community presence on other planets). In further due course, the different kinds of standard may evolve their written equivalents, and we will end up with two educated standards in writing as well. But a world in which there are two educated standards of spoken English - one international, one national - seems inevitable.

That is one of the reasons why, when people ask the question, 'Will the English language fragment into mutually unintelligible languages?', the answer has to be No. The history of language suggests that fragmentation has been quite a frequent phenomenon (as in the well-known case of Latin); but the history of language is no longer a guide. Today, we live in the proverbial global village, where we have immediate access to other languages and varieties of English in ways that have come to be available but recently; and this is having a strong centripetal effect. A British Council colleague told me recently that he had just come back from India where he had seen a group of people in an out-of-the-way village clustering around a television set, where they were hearing what? - CNN News beamed down via satellite. None of these people, he felt, would have heard first-language speakers of English before - at least, not in any regular way; they would have known only the Indian variety of English used by their school-teacher. With a whole range of fresh auditory models becoming routinely available, it is easy to see how the type of English spoken in India could move in fresh directions. And satellite communication being, by definition, global, it is easy to see how a system of natural checks and balances could emerge in the case of world English. The pull imposed by the need for identity, which has been making Indian English increasingly dissimilar from British English, will be balanced by a pull imposed by the need for intelligibility, on a world scale, which will make Indian English increasingly similar - to CNN, at least! And this could happen anywhere.

I have not forgotten the T in TESOL. We have to teach it, this hydra-headed language. Well, when I say we, I mean you. My job is different. I am just a linguist. We are desperately short on facts about these new varieties of usage, and linguists need to go out and get them. That is what I try to do. In the meantime, you still have to teach next week. There are easier jobs. In fact, I do not think there has ever been a more difficult time to teach the English language - not since the Middle Ages, anyway, when English first emerged as a standard, or perhaps the 18th century, when standards of correctness for English first came to be imposed in schools. When a language is moving so fast, in so many directions at once, it is difficult to know what to do for the best. This, of course, is why organizations like TESOL play such a valuable role. Faced with an English-language steamroller apparently out of control, it is critical to share experiences and practices, which is why meetings of this kind are so important - and why there are so many such organizations in different parts of the world.

My impression, as I travel around and listen to people reporting on their experiences, is that there is growing recognition of the need for a new mindset, in order to cope with this situation - one of rapid linguistic transition. You will have your own views, but in my ideal mindset, six elements would be central.

The first element is no more than the old adage: the first step in solving a problem is to recognize that it is there. There is, I suspect, still a large body of opinion which reflects the state of mind of the proverbial ostrich faced by an emergency. If I bury my head in the sand, the problem will go away. Believe me, this one is not going to go away. And it is a bigger issue than we thought.

The second element in the ideal mindset is also an old adage: where one person sees a problem, another sees an opportunity. If our job, as English language teachers, is to do the best for our pupils, to put them in the most powerful position possible to cope with the demands of an increasingly complex world, then - the more we can familiarise them with varieties of the language, the better. And the more we can prepare them for the realities of tridialectal English-language use in the 21st century, the better. We still have to work out how best to do it; but at least our awareness can perhaps provide some motivation. And motivation, we are told by the learning theorists, is critical.

The third element in the ideal mindset is to be prepared to re-evaluate traditional notions. In particular, the new situation is forcing us to re-evaluate the relationship between production and reception skills in language teaching. From a production point of view, there is a strong case for pedagogical conservatism. If you are used to teaching standard English and a General American accent, this argument goes, then you should continue to do so, for a whole range of familiar reasons - the linguistic knowledge base is there in the various analyses and descriptions, there are copious course-books and materials, and there is a well understood correspondence between the norms of spoken and written expression (important for examination purposes as well as for reading literature). In short, there is a general familiarity with this variety; people feel comfortable with it. But from the viewpoint of listening comprehension, there is an equally strong case for pedagogical innovation. Given an English language of staggering diversity, teachers need to prepare their students for it. Somehow, they need to expose them to as many varieties of English as possible, especially those which they are most likely to encounter in their own locale. The curriculum for speaking and the curriculum for listening, accordingly, are going to increasingly diverge.

The fourth element in the ideal mindset is the presence of flexible attitudes towards principles of usage. I could point to several curricula - the new National Curriculum for English in the UK is one - where an absolutist concept of 'proper English' or 'correct English' has been replaced by relativistic models in which traditional literary and educated norms are seen to maintain their place alongside other norms, some of which depart radically from what was once recognized as 'correct'. Teachers - and examiners - have to become increasingly flexible about what counts as a feature of standard English, otherwise their recommendations will become increasingly distant from contemporary usage. The issue is not uncontentious, of course. I can feel the spirit of William Safire in the room, as I say that.

But the language is going to carry on changing, whether we like it or not. Features we know and love may disappear. To give just two specific examples. Would you place good dollars on the long-term survival of interdental fricatives in standard English - the *th* sounds - in a world where there will be five times as many English speakers for whom *th* is a pain as those for whom it is a blessing? And secondly, What long-term chance has the tag question got, in its full array of grammatical concord, faced with the simplifying tendencies which can be heard everywhere. Is it just an impression, or have young people all over the world stopped using traditional tag-question structures, in colloquial speech? I am talking about their replacement by an unvarying particle, such as *right?* *I am going, right? You are going, right? They will have been going, right? They might not have been going, right?* Nothing unusual about this, of course. The French have talked like this for centuries, *n'est-ce pas?*

The fifth ideal element in my mindset is a readiness to take on board the competing demands of intelligibility and identity, in classroom pedagogy. There has, I think, been a definite shift in attitude, in recent years. We are much more likely, these days, to encounter an inclusiveness of approach, where students are not presented with a variety of language appropriate for intelligibility, at the expense of one appropriate for identity, but where both varieties are allowed to coexist. In fact, the only way I know of being a happy language-using individual (or community) is to plan life so that both dimensions are seen as necessary and complementary - two sides of the one linguistic coin. If I were in charge of this brave new world, I would people it with wise language planners who recognized this truth. Unfortunately, ministers for language planning are not a widely encountered species, in world governments.

Well, that's it. Broadway is beckoning, and we have the birthday of Barbie to celebrate. (Well, I like alliterative endings.) Oh, but I said six elements in my ideal mindset, and I have only mentioned five? Ah, well, of course, in my ideal world, the lingua franca would be Welsh, and I would be talking in New York to an organization called TEWOL - teaching Welsh to speakers of other languages. Dream on, Crystal, dream on!

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