

An international cultural linguistic institute: implementing Kachru's vision

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In September 1984, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the British Council and its contribution to English Studies, 42 figures from 38 countries came together in the University of London to participate in a conference. It was published by Cambridge University Press a year later under the title of *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures* (Quirk and Widdowson, 1985). Braj Kachru contributed a paper to the opening session called 'Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: the English language in the outer circle'. It was a wide-ranging paper, and one of his recommendations is as relevant today as it was over 40 years ago (all quotations from pages 25-7):

I believe that the time is more than ripe now for an international institute for the study of and research on English across cultures.

Such an institute, he says, would have several elements, including graduate teaching programmes, research programmes, and international exchange programmes, but it is his first category that I want to draw attention to: Archives for English across cultures.

What would actually be archived? Kachru's vision encompassed six components:

- Empirical sociolinguistic studies of English in the three circles
- Pedagogical studies of cross-cultural data
- Resource materials, agencies, surveys, etc
- Survival registers: English for international purposes, such as Seaspeak
- Functional domains: localized norms as they have developed in various culture-specific roles
- Formal studies: the characteristic formal features of nativized uses of English from various text-types

He saw his institute as

a suggestion for initiating collaborative efforts between the native and non-native users of English for monitoring, as it were, the direction of change in English, the uses and usage, and the scope of the spread and its implications for intelligibility and communication.

Who would sponsor it? Given the context of the conference, it was only natural for Kachru to suggest that such an institute would be partly 'collaboration between the British Council or other British institutions and interested agencies in the USA', and partly globally. He believed that 'the time is more than ripe now' for such a development. If that was the case in 1984, the ripeness metaphor is well past its sell-by date now. For there is still no such institute.

A specific idea

I tried to take this idea forward in a webinar for IATEFL/TESOL in 2016, and wrote it up as a paper for the inaugural issue of the journal *Teaching Language and Culture*). I then proposed it again in November 2018 to a joint committee of IATEFL and the British Council, exploring ways of fostering collaboration, as I felt the combined reach of those organisations was so wide that such a project could be implemented with little cost, other than website construction and editorial management, and would give the notion of collaboration a practical reality. It wasn't taken up, and since then I don't know of any further initiative.