Chapter 4

English or Englishes?
A Question of Multilingual Reality

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ABSTRACT

The discipline of World Englishes has been one of the most thriving branches of English linguistics. This branch has become the focal focus of considerable debate. The chapter mainly aims to show the multilingual reality of English. It is an attempt to answer the question “Do we have English or Englishes?” The chapter tries to study the recent situation of English as a lingua franca. It first gives an overview of the spread of English and the emergence of new Englishes. Then, it presents the principals of traditional applied linguistics and second language acquisition. It also discusses the concepts of World Englishes, multilingualism, and pluralism. After that, the chapter presents the World Englishes debate to show the gap between monocentrists and pluralists. Finally, the study sheds light on the fact that Englishes reflect the multilingual reality of English.

INTRODUCTION

English has now become the “global language” (Crystal, 2003, p.1). Its spread has evolved into the emergence of world “Englishes” which raises a controversial debate between those who support traditional applied linguistics and those who argue for plural Englishes and multilingualism. Kachru (1990) discusses this point, as follows:
the limitations of traditional applied linguistics perspectives on world Englishes, suggesting that these had been skewed by the ethnocentrisms of inner-circle practitioners, reliance on interlanguage and error analysis frameworks, and misconceptions concerning the sociolinguistic realities of multilingual outer-circle societies. (as cited in Bolton, 2004, p. 389)

This debate shows that multilingual English has questioned monolingual bias. Multilingualism is for the idea of multilingual competence. Aronin and Singleton (2012) state that:

The whole history of multilingualism studies indicates that multilingualism cannot be understood simply by breaking phenomena down into their component parts and cannot be reduced to clear-cut rules, forms, and explanations. Rather, multilingualism has been shown to be a dynamic and self-organizing system, displaying emergent qualities. (p. 183)

This chapter is an attempt to explore the spread of English as an international language and the emergence of its new varieties. It is also an attempt to show the multilingual reality of English. It starts with an overview of applied linguistics and second language acquisition. It then tries to define world Englishes, multilingualism and plurilingualism. Finally, the chapter tries to discuss the plural reality of English.

THE SPREAD OF ENGLISH

Widdowson (1997) declared that “English has spread to become an international language” (p. 135). Platt, Weber and Lian (1984) express this idea, “the spread of English to so many parts of the world and the increase in the number of those learning it and using it has been the most striking example of ‘language expansion’ this century if not in all recorded history. It has far exceeded that other famous case, the spread of Latin during the Roman Empire” (p. 1).

Kachru (1996) states that the spread of English is attributed to a number of phases. The first phase involves the spread of English in Britain, including Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The second phase includes the expansion of English in North America and New Zealand. According to Kachru, the third phase has an immense impact on the sociolinguistic profile of English. During this phase, English became an integral language in South Asia and South West and East of Africa. Due to this spread, English is regarded as a pluricentric language. Kachru (1996) states that pluricentricity “is not merely demographic, it entails cultural, linguistic, and literary reincarnations of the English language” (pp. 136-137). In other words, the spread of
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