

## **A Note on Labeling World Englishes:<sup>\*</sup>** **The Case of Euro-English**

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### **1. Introduction**

In addition to the political problems surrounding Brexit, concern has been raised among linguists about the fate of English in the European Union (EU) after Great Britain leaves. While the EU has announced policies for the preservation of linguistic diversity, English is used in nearly every situation inside the Union. Some linguists have pointed out that a variety called Euro-English is emerging among English users in EU communities. Recent studies of World Englishes have shed light on the discussion of Euro-English. This paper examines the discussion of Euro-English and the controversy surrounding the concept, and considers whether such arguments have any contributions to make to sociolinguistics.

### **2. English in the EU**

Due to globalization and the increasing level of human mobility in the world today, the English language has been undergoing significant changes. In 2018, one of the most significant changes to affect the English language is Brexit. In a 2016 referendum, the citizens of Great Britain voted to leave the EU.<sup>1</sup> This serious decision implies not only changes in Great Britain's system of government, but will also potentially alter the linguistic circumstances inside the EU. Thus, the future of the English language in the EU merits research attention. The organization will lose the gate-keeper of its official language, English, which serves as one of its primary and working languages. In such a situation, non-native speakers of English will soon outnumber native speakers from Great Britain. This section will thus describe the prospects of the future of English in the EU after Brexit.

The EU is a political and economic organization with 28 countries comprising its official members. The national languages of each of its member countries are certified as the official languages of the EU. In working for the EU, delegates and officials from the member countries can use their official national languages in any meeting or conference

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<sup>1</sup> There are several important issues concerning politics, economics, and culture between Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the republic of Ireland. However, to examine this issue in detail would take us too far away from the purpose of this paper. Rather, this paper aims to examine the state of affairs of Brexit and the English used within the EU. Thus, to discuss this problem as a whole is beyond the scope of this paper.

and even for documentation, which must all be translated. The translation and interpretation system supports the diverse linguistic environment of the EU. Evidently, English, as a working language, is employed much more frequently than any other official language in the EU. While the Union has adapted to its diverse linguistic environment using translation and technology, EU delegates and officials tends to use English as a medium of written and verbal communication. Therefore, English plays a significant role in the EU compared with other official languages.

### **2.1. The Impact of Brexit**

As discussed in the previous section, English serves as a chief functional language in every aspect of the Union. Thus, Brexit presents a significant problem. Now that Great Britain has decided to leave the union, controversy has arisen over the use of English. Internationally, linguists have wondered if English will be going at the point of this political as well as presumably linguistic alternation. The questions concerning the fate of English in the EU fall into three categories.

To begin, Great Britain's exit from the EU is said to equal the absence of English native speakers in EU organizations. However, it seems that EU members already do not strictly follow the rules of British English. It is for this reason that Great Britain and its citizens are no longer the linguistic guardians of English. Without the presence of the guardians, linguists have endeavored to determine what will happen in a post-Brexit EU. Will English remain in the Union? If so, will English undergo any linguistic changes? If so, what kinds of changes might occur?

The most important addition to be made to what the paper has said about English in the EU is investigating the significance of the discussion on assigning certain linguistic varieties and identifying each of them by name. Once giving a label to a certain variety such as Euro-English, does the label have special meaning? Who wants the label, especially in the EU? It is rather doubtful that there is any possibility of the generation of more varieties of English in this rapidly globalizing world.

Considering the case of English in the EU, more research attention is required to determine its contribution to sociolinguistics. The Union is not merely a site of linguistic diversity, but also the largest English as a lingua franca (ELF) community in the world. Thus, a proper perspective to examine the issues concerning ELF is necessary. The influential tripartite model advanced by Kachru (1992) is probably not applicable to the ELF issues that will likely face the EU after Brexit. Studies on World Englishes since the 1970s require updating, or a new paradigm is needed to accurately represent the current global situation of ELF.

While the matters discussed above are open to argument, time is needed to observe progressive changes in the EU and English after Great Britain leaves. As many sociolinguistics have discussed (cf. Trudgill, 2000), changes in language reflect changes

in the society in which it is used. It cannot be denied that changes in the EU and the English it uses have already begun to occur as a result of Brexit. Euro-English is also still discussible. Various issues concerning Brexit appear to be much more urgent than Great Britain's withdrawal itself from the EU. Unfortunately, sociolinguists must wait for a long time if they intend to study the linguistic 'variety' of English that will emerge as a result of Brexit. Currently, no one knows whether Great Britain will actually leave the EU in one month when it is scheduled to leave, and if it does, what will become of English in the EU in the future.

One thing, however, is certain: English will remain in use in the EU, even after Great Britain's exit. There is general agreement that English is now the most widely used lingua franca around the world. Thus, the continuation of English use in the EU has no connection to the political issues surrounding Brexit because English has already established its position as a historically unique lingua franca.<sup>2</sup> English is ubiquitous in everyday conversations, business e-mails, and international summit meetings, not only in the EU. Currently, even after Great Britain exits the Union, it would not be efficient for EU members to introduce a new lingua franca. Even though Great Britain may leave on March 29, 2019, English will most likely keep its standing as the major common language in the EU, as well as in the world. However, questions remain unsettled concerning what will happen to English in the EU community and whether Euro-English will emerge as a new variety of English.

## 2.2. The Controversy of Euro-English

In 2001, three ELF researchers, Modiano, Jenkins, and Seidlhofer (2001) were the first to point out that there was something resembling a new variety of English, which they labelled as Euro-English. Their findings might have been fresh or attractive to sociolinguistics researchers. However, their study did not attract much attention at the time.

Sixteen years later, Brexit has become big news. Modiano (2017) confirmed the existence of Euro-English among members of the EU. His study garnered much attention from ELF researchers. Within the last year, the sociolinguistics journal, *World Englishes*, has featured various articles on Euro-English. In these articles, researchers raised objections<sup>3</sup> to Modiano's projections concerning the development of Euro-English in a post-Brexit EU. Among the various critiques of Modiano's arguments, the most

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<sup>2</sup> This requires some further explanation. However, this is irrelevant to the main subject of this paper. For more on this topic, please refer to Akimoto (2018).

<sup>3</sup> Crystal (2017); Deneire (2017); Gerristen (2017); Jenkins (2017); Saraceni (2017); Schneider (2017); Seargeant (2017); Seidlhofer et al. (2017).

influential criticism, which this paper intends to discuss as its main agenda, will be introduced below.

First, Jenkins (2017: 343) stated, “His narrative is premised on the notion that English as a lingua franca (henceforth ELF) is a ‘variety’ of English.” It might be an error to recognize one ELF situation to be a case of a variety of English. As Jenkins proposed, ELF is quite a different phenomenon from English as a variety. Thus, Euro-English should be analyzed as an ELF, not a linguistic variety. Based on this point, Modiano’s (2017) analysis of Euro-English is unsatisfactory and does not adequately describe the ‘variety’ used by EU members. Thus, there is a need for a new paradigm to better observe and understand cases of ELF.

Next, Jenkins stated, “I would argue that this is the *only* kind of continental European use of English” (2017: 344). She goes on to explain the language features of ELF, which Seidlhofer (2009: 242) called ‘observed regularities,’ characteristics that are shared by all speakers of the ELF. The speakers, even those who belong to a long-term community, use these characteristics with flexibility and variation. She also pointed out that these characteristics do emerge but are not inscribed. There are certainly some characteristics that ELF users have in common. On the other hand, these characteristics are too unsettled to identify an ELF as an English variety. What qualifies an ELF are not necessarily its linguistic features but rather the accommodation skills of its users. Jenkins (2017) argued that skills, which are different from linguistic features, are paramount. Skills are the driving force that creates characteristics shared by ELF users in an ELF community.

According to Jenkins, it is not too far from the truth to say that Euro-English, as proposed by Modiano (2017), may rather be certain collected components of English practiced by ELF speakers in the EU. It is possible that there are some collected aggregates that ELF speakers in EU communities share. Still, the aggregates are not the same as features, which is something that Indian English speakers in ELF communities share. It is thus premature to identify Modiano’s (2017) Euro-English as a variety typical to the ELF speakers of the Union.

### **3. Reconsidering the World Englishes Model**

In future research, it may be noted that existing definitions can be applied to newly emerging cases of World Englishes. Thus, could the term ‘variety’ be precisely analyzed in this rapidly changing world? It is indispensable that modern societies around the globe are changing much faster than ever before. Researchers must reconsider the existing definition and research methods for new phenomena before conducting analyses. The difference between ELF and English as a variety is clearly difficult to distinguish, even for World Englishes researchers. If a definition does not accurately describe a phenomenon, analyses will be inaccurate.

This section offers suggestions for future research on World Englishes. As English has become the modern global lingua franca, present research and the analytical methods used to investigate World Englishes require some reconsideration.

### **3.1. Seeking the Meaning of the Models**

English is clearly different from other lingua francas of the past. One of the reasons is that ELF users are more diverse than ever before. Several World Englishes models have been developed since the 1980s to comprehend the situation of the times. It is problematic to obtain an accurate description of current World Englishes. If one model is considered to be inappropriate, another researcher will develop a new model.

Strevin (1980) classified the English speakers of the world in the World Map of English. This model fosters the conventional idea that all World Englishes are based on the fundamental Englishes: American English and British English. However, such a model is not historically accurate, which had formed a certain English variety by one group. McArthur (1987) suggested another model, the Circle of World English, in which World Standard English, as McArthur illustrated in his diagram, is positioned at the center, or as the “hub of the wheel” (Galloway and Rose, 2015: 15). This model is based on geographic location but does not represent the true connections of history, politics, and language between World Standard English and other English varieties.

Kachru (1992) advanced his model of World Englishes that is based on the classification of ENL, ESL, and EFL users. The model has three circles, labelled the “Inner Circle,” “Outer Circle,” and “Expanding Circle.” Kachru adopted the kinds of English speakers as his criteria for the model.

Kachru’s (1992) model has been very influential in World Englishes studies. Despite such approval, much criticism has been made against it (cf. McArthur 1998; Bruthiaux 2003; Jenkins 2009). The central criticism is that his model is too focused on colonial history. It has also been pointed out that Kachru’s model does not explain the genuine role of English in multi-ethnic and multilingual communities.

Furthermore, the problem concerning increasing global mobility cannot be overemphasized. As globalization accelerates, people are migrating more frequently around world. In such a globalizing world, the meaning of mobility must be reviewed once again. This mobility takes many forms, such as traveling, studying abroad, international business, and immigration. Thus, the simple, three-circle division of Kachru’s model does not apply to people in the modern world, who easily cross over the boundaries of the circles.

Accordingly, parameters that have been employed in research, for instance the borders of countries, languages, and cultural identities, remain subject to debate. As human mobility accelerates, the more such dividing lines will be blurred. Although international borders must unquestionably exist for political and security reasons,

researchers must not fixate too much on them because of increasingly human mobility in a globalized world. Kachru stated:

The individuality of the Third World varieties, such as the *Indianness* of its Indian variety, is contributing to the linguistic mosaic which the speakers of the English language have created in the English-speaking world. The attitude toward these varieties ought to be one of appreciation and understanding.

(Kachru 1965: 236)

Kachru's influence on World Englishes research is praise-worthy. His ideas have also succeeded to next-generation scholars in this research area. While his argument about English varieties and the identities associated with them leaves no room for doubt, much is to be gained by considering globalization, the rapid development of Internet technology, and ELF in the contemporary world.

World Englishes research has imposed labels upon English varieties and studied them in connection with history, culture, ethnicity, and identity. Researchers have tended to search for new varieties and name them. This kind of discovery is tempting. On the other hand, it may lead to misunderstanding. Let us return now to the case of Euro-English.

The EU is an immense ELF community independent of the presence of Great Britain. As Jenkins (2017) mentioned, the features of what is considered to be an English variety should not be confused with the features of an ELF community. It is significant to specify the determinative difference between these two linguistic phenomena. Additionally, it is doubtful whether the ELF speakers in the union really need a label for their speech. English is simply the best tool for communication among members of different EU countries with very different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The language thus serves as a lingua franca. For this reason, the ELF features observed in one group of speakers can change flexibly and variably depending on the situation and ongoing communication. In a globalizing world, these features will be rather unsettled. People connect with each other via the Internet such as SNS. They inescapably encounter people who do not share their language, ethnicity, religion, way of thinking, culture, and more. Interconnectedness is accelerating due to technology. In this rapidly changing world, globalization and the Internet are enabling the English language to become much more diverse. World Englishes researchers are often expected to seek out new varieties of English simply to label them. In addition to this task, they should also explore new theories and research methods that will help to clarify the current state of World Englishes.

In a rapidly changing world, World Englishes research requires new perspectives. Scholars should propose new models that are more appropriate to the current state of World Englishes in this era of globalization and increasing human mobility.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper investigated two controversial issues and suggested future research directions concerning Great Britain's withdrawal from the EU and the future of English, both in the EU and the world.

Concerning the question of Brexit and the fate of English in the EU, the most plausible answer is that English will remain even if Great Britain leaves. There are several reasons for this. First, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Malta have insisted on their desire to remain in the EU if Great Britain leaves. Both countries recognize English as an official language. Needless to say, the vast economic power of the U.S. and colonization by Great Britain have had a great influence on the diffusion of English as a lingua franca. It also cannot be denied that people regard English as a useful tool for global communication. On the other hand, it is debatable whether each ELF community has a specific identity.

Sociolinguistic researchers should closely observe the linguistic consequences that English will face in a post-Brexit EU; more, sociolinguistic studies themselves should be closely observed, including the definitions, analytical methods, and theories employed, to ensure an accurate depiction of English in our rapidly changing modern world. As mentioned earlier, current ELF users do not conform to Kachru's simple three circle model. Bruthiaux (2003: 175) stated that 'Much is to be gained by focusing less on where speakers of English come from and more on what they do – or don't do – with the language.' Sociolinguists are thus encouraged to observe changes in society by analyzing changes in language.

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