
Researching Globalization of English

Joseph Sung-Yul Park

Abstract

Research on the globalization of English – how the English language, no longer the language of the Anglo-Saxons, spread throughout the British Isles, colonies of the English-speaking empires, and the rest of the world, to gain the status of a global language, spoken by more and more people around the world – has developed through various methodologies that focused on the form, function, and ideologies of English. Over the past several decades, a wide range of methods has been employed, ranging from structural description to corpus analysis, from sociological analysis of domains to analysis of media texts, from matched guise technique to ethnographic and interactional analysis. But recent studies, due to the influence of poststructuralist perspectives on language, have increasingly questioned the implication that each of the three aspects of form, function, and ideology can be separately investigated on its own. An increasing number of studies thus shift their attention from nation-states to communities and abandon the assumption of fixed and predefined language boundaries to focus on speakers' translingual practices as they draw upon multiple linguistic resources. Since the global spread of English is deeply implicated in the relations of power and inequality characteristic of neoliberalism, future innovations are likely to come from interdisciplinary perspectives that strive to move beyond the traditional scope of linguistics and language study toward interfaces with social dimensions that can illuminate the practical conditions of English in the world, such as language and materiality, or language and desire.

J.S. Park (✉)

Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore, Singapore, Singapore

e-mail: ellpjs@nus.edu.sg

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Introduction

Globalization of English here refers to the process by which the English language, no longer the language of the Anglo-Saxons, spread throughout the British Isles, colonies of the English-speaking empires, and the rest of the world, to finally gain the status of a global language, learned and spoken by more and more people around the world, a lingua franca that allows people from different corners of the world to communicate with each other. As a phenomenon that has a significant influence on the world, it has been a key issue for research on language and education. But because it is such a broad and complex phenomenon that involves multiple dimensions, including linguistic, social, cultural, and political ones, the research methods that have been employed to investigate the global spread of English have been extremely diverse. Indeed, it would not be an overstatement to say that there is no method for exploring language in social context that has not been adopted for the study of the globalization of English. This chapter, which reviews the research methods for the global spread of English, is thus necessarily selective; instead of offering a comprehensive picture of the widely diverse approaches adopted in the investigation of this phenomenon, it provides an overview of some of the major methodological perspectives that the field has employed in past and contemporary research. For this purpose, the discussion here centers on three different directions of research – approaches that focus on the form, function, and ideologies of English, respectively. It must be noted that this three-way distinction is not meant to be a categorization of the work of individual researchers or particular research traditions, as specific research projects in the globalization of English often deal with more than one of these three dimensions simultaneously; instead, the consideration of the form, function, and ideologies of English as a global language is meant to highlight the range of research methods that have been employed in the study of this phenomenon and to explore their implications for future research (for a more comprehensive review, see Berns [2012](#); Bolton [2005](#)).

Early Developments

Bolton (2005) identifies the earliest contributors to the study of the globalization of English as coming from several different fields of research. Some such as Quirk (1962) came from the field of English studies, with a background in the philology and history of English; others such as Joshua Fishman (Fishman et al. 1977), associated with the field of sociology of language, came from educational psychology and sociology; Trudgill and Hannah (1982) came from sociolinguistics, with an emphasis on the variationist framework; and Kachru (1982), who started the major field of world Englishes research, took a broadly sociolinguistic approach that focused on language contact and social functions of language. Though different in their emphases, these works generally attempted to establish the globalization of English as a new and distinct field of research by drawing attention to the growing diversity of English and its shifting roles and positions in the world.

These studies had several consequences. First, they clearly established the notion of multiple “Englishes”; they demonstrated how the English language cannot be seen as a single “variety,” but made up of multiple “varieties,” each with its unique and systematic structure, legitimate in its own right. Though this pluralization of English into “Englishes” was, as we will see below, later problematized, there can be no doubt about the impact of this conceptual shift. In terms of research methods, in particular, structural linguistic description of new varieties of English – describing their phonology, morphosyntax, lexicon, and pragmatics – became a key dimension of studying the globalization of English (Kachru 1983; Platt et al. 1984; Trudgill and Hannah 1982).

Second, they highlighted the shifting functions of English as it became not only the language of a handful of English-speaking countries but also a global language that is used and adopted across many different countries and domains. If it was previously assumed that English was purely a language of what Kachru (1985) identified as inner circle countries, it was now becoming unsurprising to find English showing up in the “distant” places of Africa or Asia. A major methodological impetus this led to, then, was to investigate the shifting functions of English in the world in terms of its macro-social distribution. Tracking the growth of numbers of English speakers across the world, the insertion of English into patterns of multilingualism in different societies and the expansion of sociolinguistic domains associated with English became a key methodological approach (Fishman et al. 1977).

Third, the ideological challenge that such studies brought to the received order of linguistic legitimacy was significant. Many of the above researchers clearly aimed to problematize and contest the idea that such new varieties of English were merely learner errors or deviant forms of language where English is haphazardly mixed with local languages. By foregrounding the systematicity, creativity, and local adaptability of English, they tried to present new Englishes as legitimate varieties in their own right, thus questioning the implied authority of Standard English based on norms of the “center,” understood to be represented by the inner circle. While the ideological critique of English as a global language was not made explicit as a research methodology until late in the 1990s when frameworks such as linguistic imperialism

(Phillipson 1992) and critical applied linguistics (Pennycook 2001) appeared, earlier contributions did set the stage by identifying the broad political stance that most researchers would adopt – that research on the globalization of English would support and defend the legitimacy of new Englishes by demonstrating their systematicity and adaptability.

Major Contributions

Our discussion above shows how early developments in the field have focused on three particular aspects of the globalization of English for its methodological basis: the form, function, and ideologies of English as a global language. It was along these three dimensions that various methodological approaches were adopted to further the research on the globalization of English. In this section, we look at the specific methodological frameworks and tools that were employed in later research that built upon each of these dimensions.

Form

Linguistic description of new varieties of English continued to be a prominent contribution in linguistic research. As noted above, this line of research adopted linguistic analysis as its basis, offering structural descriptions in terms of lexis, phonology, morphosyntax, and pragmatics, to characterize the variation and diversity that exist among new varieties of English. The work accumulated over the past several decades is now substantial, including large reference volumes such as Kortmann and Schneider (2004), book series such as *Varieties of English Around the World*, and numerous articles in the journals *World Englishes* and *English World-Wide*.

Research focused on linguistic form does not only involve synchronic description of a single variety but also work that derives from the perspective of language contact. In this line of work, features of new varieties of English are seen as arising from the mutual influence between English and other language varieties, and linguistic analysis is employed to trace such influences to understand the development of new Englishes. For instance, Ho and Platt (1993) account for the continuum among subvarieties of Singaporean English used by Chinese Singaporeans in terms of contact with language varieties such as Chinese languages and Baba Malay. Research building upon contact linguistics can also take on a more historical perspective, considering patterns of contact between English-speaking colonizers and the local indigenous population as key factors for shaping the development of English. Schneider's (2003, 2007) work attempts to build a general model for the evolution of new varieties of English by consolidating the normative patterns of contact situations in colonial context where English served important communicative roles.

Another important research method that has been employed in the structural description of English as a global language is that of corpus linguistics. Building corpora of national-level varieties for purposes of lexicography or grammatical description has been significant in the study of varieties of English. One of the major projects in this direction is the International Corpus of English (ICE), which since the late 1980s has been gathering one million words of spoken and written English texts in the local varieties of countries or regions including Australia, New Zealand, Kenya, Tanzania, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Great Britain. The development of such large parallel corpora has significant methodological implications for the structural studies of English, as it allows for more systematic analysis of similarities and differences in linguistic structure across varieties (Greenbaum 1996). But it is not just comparison across varieties that makes corpus-based research useful. The Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) led by Seidlhofer (2010) has compiled one million words of spoken interaction among nonnative speakers across different contexts in order to explore how people use English in lingua franca situations. The methodological implication here is that it allows researchers to identify specific areas of communicative problems that might occur in such mode of communication and to make practical suggestions for facilitating greater mutual understanding.

Function

The shifting function of English in the world has been actively studied by observing macro-social patterns and their correlations with the global spread of English. The approach of sociology of language was most directly involved in such mode of research. For instance, adopting statistical tools and building upon a large body of secondary sources, Fishman et al. (1977) try to identify various social factors that can best predict the establishment of English as an “additional language” in non-English mother tongue societies. The factors they investigate include experience of colonial rule, linguistic diversity, degree of material incentives gained by learning English, urbanization, economic development, educational development, religious composition, and political affiliation of the society.

While the attempt at large-scale predictions relying on statistical tools was not necessarily inherited in later research, the investigations of the role of macro-social factors and political relations that contribute to the spread of English remained a key concern for many studies, especially those in language policy and planning. For instance, Tollefson's (1991) historical-structural approach to language policy critically examines the institutional conditions of investment in English language learning in countries like Iran and China to reveal how they work to reproduce barriers that inhibit the economic and political development of those countries. Studies that attempt to chart the macro-scale future trajectory of English as a global language still continue, however, through the work in the “futurology” of English. Most clearly represented by the work of Graddol (1997, 2006), this direction of research combines analysis of social, economic, and cultural trends with computer modeling of

demographic data to predict what the future status of English will be. For instance, Graddol (2006) forecasts a near future in which the market for English language learning will be saturated, leaving only young children and students with learning disabilities as the pool of new English learners.

Other studies focus on understanding the function of English within specific cultural or discursive domains. One productive area of research in this direction is the study of English in the media. Bhatia (1987), Piller (2001), and Martin (2002) are some representative examples of studies that look at the patterns in which English is used along with other languages in commercial advertisements. By analyzing the relative distribution of English and other languages within the text, these studies identify the different social meanings attributed to English and the social identities it projects for the audience as consumers. Another example is studies that adopt the framework of linguistic landscapes, a recently developed subfield of sociolinguistic research that focuses on the analysis of language use in public signage (Bolton 2012; Rowland 2016). Again, the exploration of the relative distribution of visible English in such public spaces not only offers an account of the extent of the spread of English in different societies but also reveals the shifting functions and cultural meanings of English.

Ideologies

Investigating local speakers' perceptions of English and how they relate to the acceptance of or resistance toward English has been a key method employed in the study of the globalization of English from early on. For instance, Fishman et al. (1977) used typical tools (i.e., questionnaires, interviews, and matched guise tests) for language attitude research to understand the perceptions of speakers in countries including Israel and Rhodesia, such as their feelings about English and speakers of English and their motivations for learning English. Such approaches, based on methods of social psychology, were useful in gathering information on speakers' perceptions of English in a controlled manner. But later studies came to see those methods, which tend to treat such perceptions as a matter of individual's inner psychological evaluations, as restricting, for they recognized that evaluations and beliefs about the value of English in relation to other languages are much more deeply rooted in social relations of power (e.g., Pavlenko 2005). As a result, there was a gradual shift from investigation of language attitudes to language ideologies, which also implied a shift in research methods.

Critical studies of the global spread of English were most influential in this shift. Phillipson's (1992) work on linguistic imperialism not only investigates the historical and political economic conditions that reproduce the hegemony of English but also identifies linguistic imperialist arguments (i.e., the ideological ways through which the power and hegemony of English is rationalized and sustained) through analysis of academic and institutional discourse about English as a global language.

Similarly, Pennycook (1998), while avoiding the term “ideology” in favor of “discourse,” explores how ideological distinctions between self and other constructed through colonial texts such as travel writing lead to reproduction of inequalities in English language teaching, as the nonnative English learner is constantly positioned as backward, irrational, passive, reluctant, and incompetent.

If the influential critical studies of researchers like Phillipson and Pennycook were grounded on historical and textual data, more recent work has increasingly been adopting ethnographically and interactionally oriented analyses of language ideologies. For instance, Henry (2010) investigates the ideological construction of “Chinglish” – a label used to depict the incorrect and often nonsensical local variety of English in China – by carefully investigating what kind of English gets labeled as Chinglish and what kind of speaker gets associated with Chinglish. His close observation of the metadiscursive practices of language scholars, foreign visitors, foreign English language teachers, and local English language learners reveals that Chinglish cannot be defined in terms of specific linguistic features at all; rather, it functions as an interpellative term that is used to denounce the linguistic legitimacy of Chinese English speakers and to reify the authority of native speakers. Park (2009), on the other hand, identifies ideologies of English from the interactional practices of Korean speakers engaged in metalinguistic talk about English. Seemingly mundane practices such as sequentially delaying occasions to display one’s competence in English can reveal important underlying beliefs that speakers hold about English, for instance, their belief that Koreans can only be illegitimate speakers of English who must defer to the authority of native speakers in judging the validity of linguistic expressions in English.

Work in Progress

While we saw how the three aspects of form, function, and ideologies of English provided methodological directions for the research on the globalization of English, recent developments have increasingly problematized the implication that these three aspects can be explored separately. Particularly influential here were poststructuralist views on language, which led to fundamental rethinking about language, identity, culture, and power, ideas that had constituted the key basis for earlier research. If in the traditional view, language was commonly understood as having a clearly delineable boundary and stable structure and inherently associated with particular identities and cultures understood in essentialist ways, poststructuralist thought questioned this understanding, viewing language as rooted in social practice rather than rigid structure. From this perspective, what we view as grammar is sedimentations of recurrent patterns of language use, and language is always in flux, constantly being reproduced and transformed through language users’ engagement with conditions and material realities of social life. Likewise, identity, culture, and power do not exist as a priori categories but are outcomes of discursive practices

(Park and Wee 2012). The implication for research on the globalization of English is that the English language is not so much a preexisting entity that is simply transplanted across the world, evolving into multiple subvarieties; it resides in the way speakers across the world use various semiotic resources to engage in everyday activities and refashion themselves in different ways. Relevant here is the notion of performativity, in which identities associated with English are not pre-given but constructed, negotiated, and reconstituted through the use of English (Pennycook 2007).

This theoretical perspective had significant implications for research methods, which are reflected in various current projects. First, it has led to a shift of focus away from nation-states and varieties to communities and practices. As we have seen above, the predominant focus of earlier research has been to describe the systematicity of national-level varieties of English. In this case, the internal variation that exists within the boundaries of a country was often ignored, and a normative variety of English that represents the use of English within that country was commonly posited. In this sense, such work had the inherent problem of unwittingly reproducing the monolithic image of English, as it did not question the ideologically constituted entity of English itself and only pluralized it in terms of national-level varieties of English. In contrast, new studies informed by the poststructural perspective shift their attention toward communities, understanding them not as bounded, homogeneous collectivities of speakers, but as a network of language users whose shared practices provide a basis for negotiations of identities. This methodological shift is evident, for example, in Pennycook's (2007) research on global hip-hop, which does not start from a predefined community of speakers but traces the linguistic resources of rap and hip-hop (including appropriations of English) as they are circulated transculturally, to be used in different yet interconnected ways by hip-hop artists around the world to perform and refashion their identities.

Second, questioning of a priori boundaries between languages has foregrounded research methods that can properly address the flexible and dynamic ways in which speakers appropriate linguistic resources from multiple sources. This can be seen in several lines of research. Research on lingua franca English adopts an interactional approach to study the way multilingual speakers consider English not as a unified system but as part of the pool of resources they can draw upon to negotiate meaning in conversation, a practice often identified as translanguaging (García 2009). Canagarajah (2013), for instance, relies on concepts from interactional sociolinguistics (including framing and footing) to analyze the translanguaging practices that speakers use in communication mediated by English as a lingua franca. Leimgruber (2012), in contrast, employs the sociolinguistic notion of indexicality to account for Singapore English speakers' flexible shift between styles of local English. Instead of attempting to analyze stylistic variation by positing distinct varieties (e.g., Standard Singapore English vs. Colloquial Singapore English), Leimgruber focuses on the indexical meaning that each individual linguistic feature might evoke in interactional context, explaining variation in terms of speakers' acts of stance-taking as they participate in interaction.

Problems and Difficulties

The discussion above shows how methods for research on the globalization of English have evolved to more appropriately deal with the nature of language as complex and fluid practice, rather than a fixed and bounded entity. Yet many challenges remain. Globalization of English is an important topic of research in our age not only because it is such a prominent phenomenon but also because it is an issue closely intertwined with massive problems of power and inequality. The history of the global spread of English is a history of imperial conquest, and while it is often argued that with the retreat of colonialism English has also lost its imperial implications, clearly English is still a crucial resource through which global level relations of inequality are reproduced, for instance, through the persistent hierarchical opposition between native and nonnative speakers of English. Particularly in the context of neoliberalism (Block et al. 2012), in which English is widely promoted as a necessary language of global opportunity and material success, such inequalities are only exacerbated. This calls for new perspectives on English as a global language that can effectively critique such problems of inequality and seek alternative possibilities, as well as research methods that can bring such perspectives into full fruition (May 2014).

While these issues have been raised before (for instance, Park and Wee 2012), there still needs to be greater methodological innovations that can integrate poststructuralist perspectives on language with critical examination of the power of English in the capitalist economy. For instance, while interactional approaches adopted by studies on translanguaging are effective in helping us avoid and contest a priori linguistic boundaries, they tend to highlight the linguistic creativity and adaptability of individual speakers, and as a result, the question of how such translanguaging practices relate to the reproduction or problematization of the global level hegemony of English is often insufficiently addressed. In fact, the ideological processes by which the fluid and porous nature of English is erased to construct the image of an authoritative “standard” form of English are likely to be an important component of the mechanism by which such hegemony is established. Developing research methods that can be used to observe and question such processes by linking microlevel interactional practices to larger-scale working of ideologies in an empirical way is thus highly desirable.

Future Directions

For the reasons discussed above, it would be important for research on the globalization of English to expand its horizon of inquiry and to seek increasingly interdisciplinary approaches. As we have seen through this chapter, majority of the approaches took language (a category to which English belongs) as a preexisting entity and based their research methods upon that entity, attempting to understand the forms of English, functions of English, and attitudes to English. But as more

recent studies based on the poststructural perspective have shown, questioning the dominant notion of language can in itself provide us with an important way forward in achieving a better understanding of the globalization of English as it relates to the everyday experiences and practices of speakers on the ground. Because of this, there is a great need for interdisciplinary approaches that can move us beyond the traditional scope of linguistics and language study toward interfaces with social dimensions that illuminate the practical conditions of English in the real world.

One example of this might be various approaches that explore the materiality of language (Shankar and Cavanaugh 2012). Problematizing the way language has been conceptualized in abstract terms, various directions of research have begun to consider language as inherently material, grounded in the physical and embodied realities of communicative action. This is particularly a useful perspective for researching the global spread of English, which is necessarily connected with the dimensions of space and mobility invoked by globalization. For instance, Pennycook and Otsuji (2014) attempt to deal with the materiality of communicative practice through their analysis of the way language, activities, and space are intertwined as speakers engaged in specific activities (e.g., working in the tight spaces of a busy restaurant) must find their way across various spaces and simultaneously draw upon multiple linguistic resources. In contrast, Park (2014) considers the larger-scale movement of speakers across different spaces on the transnational level, treating such dimensions of mobility as closely mediated by ideologies of English.

Another example of a potentially fruitful interdisciplinary direction of research is that of language and desire. Inspired by Spivak's (2002) work, Motha and Lin (2014) argue that desire has been undertheorized in research on English language teaching, despite its obvious importance in helping us understand the place of English in the world; desire for power, material benefits, and distinct identities have always shaped the way people relate to and reach out for English. In fact, Motha and Lin argue, large part of the inequalities that are reproduced through the hegemony of English derives from the way desire for English is manipulated and distorted, arguing for more liberatory practices of English language learning that can be used to intervene in the problematic social relations generated by the global spread of English. Focusing on the intersubjective processes through which such desires for English are shaped, circulated, and negotiated can thus provide a powerful methodological basis for addressing the issues of power in the globalization of English.

While such interdisciplinary approaches seem to displace English from being the privileged center of analytic focus, the kind of shift in perspective they offer is indeed indispensable for methodological innovations that can open the door to a more holistic understanding of the complex phenomenon of globalization of English.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Ethnography of Language Policy](#)
- ▶ [From Researching Translanguaging to Translanguaging Research](#)

- ▶ [Investigating Language Education Policy](#)
- ▶ [Sociology of Language and Education: Empirical and Global Perspectives](#)
- ▶ [Theoretical and Historical Perspectives on Researching the Sociology of Language and Education](#)

Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education

- Christina Higgins: [Language Education and Globalization](#). In Volume: Language Policy and Political Issues in Education
- Sally Magnan: [Foreign Language Education in the Context of Institutional Globalization](#). In Volume: Second and Foreign Language Education

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