

Beyond The Postcolonial: A Project in World Englishes Literature

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Introduction

'World Englishes' reveals an area of study which concerns itself with the linguistic, socio-cultural and pedagogical aspects of Englishes around the world. This paper aims to give importance to an aspect of 'World Englishes', which although related to the linguistic, socio-cultural and pedagogical, is none of these *per se*. This paper will focus on the *literary* production of World Englishes which draws on these elements of World Englishes noted above particularly the linguistic and socio-cultural. I will take a moment here to explain how the term 'World Englishes' is used in this paper and how I see this in relation to Kachruvian theory as this theory is central to the debate I present later in the paper; the debate on the *literary* production of World Englishes, that is 'World Englishes literature'.

World Englishes

The term 'World Englishes' is used here to encompass the notions of 'new Englishes' and 'New Englishes'.¹ According to Jenkins, 'new Englishes' resulted from the first diaspora, which includes the United States (USA), Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.² Whereas 'New Englishes' (noting the capitalisation) resulted from the second diaspora, which is understood as being a situation where English has been learnt as a second language or has been a language within a wider multilingual selection of languages, such situations would include where Indian Englishes, Nigerian Englishes, Singaporean or Philippine Englishes are employed. In short not only is the linguistic production different between a notion of 'an English' and 'English as a Lingua Franca' (ELF) but the cultural, functional and ideological aspects are also different between the two.³

Jenkins's definition of 'New Englishes' and 'the second diaspora'⁴ may have been influenced by the earlier work of Platt *et al* who referred to the phenomenon as, a 'New English' (note the singular).⁵ Below are the four defining criteria for a 'New English' according to Platt et al:

1. It has developed through an education system. This means that it has been taught as a subject and, in many cases, also used as a medium of

¹ J. Jenkins, *World Englishes* (Oxford: Routledge 2006) 22-23.

² Jenkins 22.

³ See P.K.W. Tan, V.B.Y. Ooi and A.K.L, Chiang, 'World Englishes or English as a Lingua Franca? A view from the perspectives of Non-Anglo Englishes,' in R. Rubdy, and M. Saraceni, (eds.) *English in the World* (London: Continuum, 2006), for further discussion on the difference between EFL and the Englishes of the 'Expanding circle' specifically 84-94, as well as Braj B. Kachru, *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982) and Yamuna and Nelson *World Englishes In Asian Contexts* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006) for discussion on EFL versus ESL in an Asian context, specifically page 25.

⁴ Jenkins 22-23.

⁵ J. Platt, H. Weber and M.L. Ho, *The New Englishes* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) 2-3.

instruction in regions where languages other than English were the main languages.

2. It has developed in an area where a native variety of English was *not* the language spoken by most of the population.
3. It is used for a range of functions *among* those who speak or write it in the region where it is used.
4. It has become 'localised' or 'nativised' by adopting some language features of its own, such as sounds, intonation patterns, sentence structures, words and expressions.⁶

Thus the notions of Jenkins's 'new Englishes' and 'New Englishes' (which supersedes Platt et al's work) are included in the understanding of 'World Englishes' for the purpose of our understanding here.

Kachru's (1982) model of the Englishes of the world helps to highlight the extent of the meaning of 'World Englishes' since Kachru's theory and model of the Englishes of the world demonstrates that the 'Inner circle' (although it does include the UK), constitutes the 'new Englishes' (that is, the result of the first diaspora according to Jenkins) and the 'Outer circle' constitutes the 'New Englishes' (that of the second diaspora). Kachru's model also offers a third dimension to the production of Englishes globally, that of the 'Expanding circle'. In summary Kachru's model (Inner, Outer and Expanding circles) can be taken as wholly representational of what is meant here as 'World Englishes' language production. Thus for Kachru the Englishes of the world can be divided into 'The Inner, Outer and Expanding circles' and these three *roughly* correspond to the concepts of English as a native language (ENL), English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) respectively. The 'Inner circle' includes the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The 'Outer circle' includes nations such as: India, Kenya, Malaysia, Singapore and the 'Expanding circle' includes nations such as: China, Egypt, Israel, Japan.⁷

Focusing on the 'Inner circle' where English is the native language (USA, United Kingdom [UK], Canada, Australia and New Zealand), although it may be the native language of these countries, other languages are spoken within this 'Inner circle'. In order to demonstrate how these languages are different from the language in its native country, I will identify them as 'diaspora community languages'.⁸

In the USA, Spanish, Italian, Hebrew are spoken (and written) as community languages. In the UK, languages such as Hindi, Punjabi, Gujrati, Bengali, Urdu and Jamaican Patois are spoken (and often also written), all of which I will refer to as 'diaspora community languages'. Numerous other languages of diaspora communities settled from first generation to third or fourth generation in Canada, Australia and New Zealand can also be included here. Moreover, any amalgamation of either a 'diaspora community language' or a language *per se* with the 'English' of an ENL country will therefore produce yet another 'English'. For example in England: British

⁶ Platt et al 2-3.

⁷ See Melchers and Shaw, *World Englishes* (London: Arnold, 2003) which deals with the varieties of the three circles in detail. A chapter is designated to each of the three circles).

⁸ See V.S. Kalra, R. Kaur and J. Hutnyk, *Diaspora and Hybridity* (London: SAGE, 2005) for diverse discussion on notions of 'diaspora and hybridity'.

Asian English is categorized by its own lexemes, phonology and grammar. However, British Asian English shifts and changes dependent on whether the variety of British Asian English is spoken by people of Pakistani origin or of Indian origin. Equally, it differs depending on where in the country the variety is spoken (regional accent, grammar and lexemes).

In addition, within the 'Inner circle' there are languages which do not fit into the category of being one of Kachru's Inner circle's Englishes (American English, British English etc), or one of the 'diaspora community languages' (Hebrew, Punjabi etc.). The languages that do not fit into either of these two categories can be defined as being Indigenous languages, although this term can hold its own semantic problems. For the USA these languages are (American) Indian languages, for the UK they are Scots, Welsh or Gaelic, and for the case of Australia and New Zealand there are languages of Aboriginal origins. There are many Indigenous languages that I have not mentioned here and this is because I hope that this brief overview of the language situation(s) in the 'Inner circle' has illustrated sufficiently the complexities of Kachru's notion of 'Inner circle'.

Defining World Englishes Literature

It is clear that Kachru's model is helpful in conceiving of the Englishes of the world and accommodates, to an extent, the complex situation of the multi-Englishes of the Inner circle. Can, therefore, this notion simply be transferred to the formation of 'literary' uses of World Englishes? My own answer to this question, perhaps curiously, is no. Indeed, I would wish to dismiss the 'Inner circle' notion, which is undeniably applicable to language use, as unhelpful in explicating World Englishes *literature*. When the *linguistic* voices (of World Englishes speakers) become *literary* voices (of World Englishes writers), it is my own view that, while Kachru's 'Outer' and 'Expanding' circles remain useful concepts for an explanation of what World Englishes literature is, this is not so of the 'Inner' circle: in my definition, that is, World Englishes literature is *never* produced from the Inner circle.

The issues at stake in this argument are not simple questions of geography, spatial proximity to the English 'Standard', or characteristic linguistic properties: it is more how these matters, in a certain combination, produce varied kinds of writing, some of which I would call World Englishes literature, and some of which I would not (although they are all in play). The lines of this debate have long been drawn up in historic theoretical arguments around colonialism and postcolonialism and the conceptual role played in these debates by the voice of the 'subaltern'.⁹ Likewise, there is often an assumption that writing from the Outer or Expanding circles is always to be explained by the nature of the 'gravitational pull' of the language of the Inner circle. But in my view the multiple features which determine the voice of a World Englishes writer are not defined by the notion of the voice being that of the

⁹ Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988). 'Postcolonialism' or 'postcolonial studies' is understood to span many disciplines (history, cultural studies, ethnography), but for our purposes the term refers to its deployment within literary studies. The term will also be used without the (often deployed) hyphen. Elleke Boehmer in *Colonial And Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 3, distinguishes between 'postcolonial' as being pre-Second World War and 'post-colonial' as being post-war. I shall not deal with 'post(-)colonial' notions of literature to the extent that differentiations of such nicety will be required.

‘subaltern’ – whether geographic, linguistic, cultural, ideological, or all of the foregoing. World Englishes writers are less and less interested in their putative subalternity to a former colonial power and increasingly interested in what constitutes, positively, the identity of the culture from within which they write as well as issues transcending national cultures. Similarly, they are less and less likely to worry as to the relation of the English they use to the notionally ‘original’ English of the Inner circle.

I might therefore best encapsulate my definition as follows: *most (but not all) World Englishes literature explores the culture(s) of the country and people from which it is written (these countries belong to Kachru’s Outer and Expanding circles); usually the literature employs the English of that place (to a lesser or greater degree); and, moreover, the writer chooses to write in that English over other languages in which she could alternatively write.*

This notion of ‘World Englishes Literature’, although somewhat unwieldy, is offered over the use of the terms: ‘World Literatures in English’, ‘World Literature written in English’, or ‘New Literatures in English’ because it recognises and to a degree, venerates, the ‘Englishes’ of the place (cultures) in question as well as the geographies, given the original link to Kachruvian theory. The resistance to employing the term ‘New Literatures in English’ is due to the use of the word ‘new’ here; the ‘shelf life’ of the literature’s ‘newness’ is a very complex one to assert in relation to an ever-changing literary scene.

It follows that World Englishes literature is not a synonym for postcolonial literature, although many countries with a history of (for example) British colonialism produce World Englishes literature. The voice of World Englishes literature is not one that necessarily laments postcoloniality or one that wishes for the ‘subaltern to speak’.¹⁰ Rather, World Englishes is (as it were) post-postcolonial, and although its writers may remember and even celebrate a defining moment of political independence from a colonising power (as in India in 1947, Nigeria in 1960, Kenya in 1963, or the Philippines in 1946), it also includes a generation of writers who do not. In short, the paper suggests that ‘World Englishes Literature’ no longer seems analogous of ‘postcolonial literature’ as per the definition of Boehmer: ‘*postcolonial literature* is generally defined as that which critically or subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives.’¹¹

Beyond the Postcolonial: the anthologies project

This paper has suggested that World Englishes literature, as outlined above, is manifest of being ‘beyond the postcolonial’ and I will now detail how an anthologies project aims to explore the link between World Englishes literature and the state of being ‘beyond the postcolonial’.

The anthologies project focuses on the production of new fiction writing in English, specifically new World Englishes Literature, and on writing which is newly sourced, edited and presented with a critical introduction.

Each country anthology of new writing goes through a sequence of processes; firstly, a call for short stories is launched electronically through email lists of writers,

¹⁰ Spivak.

¹¹ Boehmer 3, original emphasis.

writing groups, universities and other relevant organisations. Once submissions have been received and read, a journey to the respective country is arranged in order to meet with the writers who have submitted their work as well as to offer an opportunity for others who have not yet heard of the project to come along and learn about it.

Making the journey to the country in question is paramount. The journey to meet the writers is one that is made in order 'to listen' and not 'to tell'. It is important that the anthologies are products of listening to those who are writing the literature *now*. This stance is in complete divergence with anthologies that are compiled by using already published (and recognised) literature as well as anthologies which are compiled from 'the Western armchair' – in a position of mind-set as well as the very literal, physical 'positioning'.

The critical introduction to each anthology benefits from this act of 'listening' and, in doing so, aims to present an accurate portrait of the writing emerging from the country in question. The visit to the country also affords the editor an opportunity to research the history of writing in English in that place, emerging criticism and contemporary literary events, all of which concern themselves with writing in English. All discussions with writers, readers, teachers and other interested parties who contribute to the debate of writing in English are audio-recorded in order for the material to be reproduced in a sensitive and accurate manner.

The final process is a re-opening of the call for submission within a limited timescale. This is conducted because very often, new writers come to hear of the project later on and wish to submit their work. On return to the UK, the selection of entries is made by the editor as well as a second editor at the press.

The anthologies' stories range from 3000 to 10,000 words in length. The idea behind presenting an anthology of short stories is to offer the reader an accessible and manageable 'taste' of a country's contemporary fiction writing in English. The short story also allows a country's writers to explore a variety of contemporary themes and concerns as well as exhibiting the linguistic diversity of the country in question. Most of the writers presented in the country anthologies are not 'known' to the Western reader and also possibly to readers of their own country. This is a basic tenant of the anthologies; to promote new, emerging writers, often unknown to the West, writers who have not been 'endorsed' by Western publishing houses, but whose writing tells wonderful new stories in wonderful, new ways.

In essence, the anthologies project as a whole is handled as an empirical, ethnographic project, in that the writing which is sourced is treated and respected as 'data'. The call for the submissions (part of a process which is detailed above) asks for submissions which concern themselves with 'Cameroon' or 'Nigeria' etc. In developing the call for submissions it was rationalised that anything more than the straightforward concern of the respective country, using the country name, i.e 'Kenya', would be leading and would therefore potentially direct the writers to tackle themes dictated by the UK-based editor; 'the Western Armchair'.

Moving 'Beyond'

Four anthologies of new writing have been published to date: *'The Spirit Machine' and Other New Short Stories From Cameroon* (2009), *'Daughters of Eve' and Other New Short Stories From Nigeria* (2010), *'Butterfly Dreams' and Other New Short*

Stories From Uganda (2010), and *'Man of The House' and Other New Short Stories From Kenya* (2011).¹² An anthology from Malaysia is to follow in mid-2011. Already the writing from the four published anthologies – Cameroon, Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya – reveals new trends in writing in English.

The writing in these anthologies demonstrate that, although differences in both style and content are present between West and East Africa (and indeed between the countries in these regional areas – Nigeria and Cameroon or between Kenya and Uganda), it is clear that the writing as a whole is different from what has come before, the writing badged as 'postcolonial literature'.¹³

As Table I below demonstrates, the genre of crime writing is popular (see Nigeria in particular), as is writing on urban-political issues (see Kenya in particular). This is not to say that the genre of crime writing has not appeared *ever* before in Anglophone 'postcolonial' fiction: the works of Pearson and Singer (2009), Matzke and Muhleisen (2006) and Christian (2001) all demonstrate that the genre has been in existence since the early days of postcolonial writing.¹⁴ Rather, the observation here is more on trends and developments that seem to be concerning authors who are writing *now* and the media (or genre) through which these narratives are conveyed.

¹² All these anthologies are edited by Emma Dawson and published by CCCP Press, Nottingham, www.cccpress.co.uk.

¹³ Boehmer 3.

¹⁴ Nels Pearson and Marc Singer (eds), *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009); C. Matzke, and S. Muhleisen, S. (eds), *Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction From A Transcultural Perspective* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2006); E. Christian (ed.), *The Post-colonial Detective* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave, 2001).

Table I: (C) = Cameroon, (N) = Nigeria, (U) = Uganda, (K) = Kenya

	Love story	Crime-horror	Bildungsroman	Urban-political	Satirical	Family relations	HIV	Other
The Spirit Machine (C)			•					• (death)
My First Million (C)								•
The Betrayal (C)								•
Kakamba (C)							•	
Jury Of The Corrupt (C)				•	•			
A Lie Has A Short Life (C)			•	•				
The Lost Art (C)								• (futuristic, urban fantasy)
The Visit (C)			•			•		
Sour Juice (C)								•
Night Calls (N)		•						
The Discovery (N)		•						
Daughters of Eve (N)		•		•				
Lightless Room (N)	•							
Pay Day (N)				•				
Road Rage (N)				•	•			
Fragile (N)							•	• (sexuality)
No Woman Left Behind (N)							•	
My Little Stream (N)								•
Haunted House (N)		•		•		•		
Guitar Boy (N)	•	•						
Butterfly Dreams (U)			•	•				
Impenetrable Barriers (U)	•					•		

	Love story	Crime-horror	Bildungsroman	Urban-political	Satirical	Family relations	HIV	Other
The Wedding Ball (U)					•			
The Good Samia Man (U)				•				
iLove (U)	•							
1 4 the Rd ... till 4am (U)				•				
Living Hope (U)	•			•				
The Naked Excellencies (U)					•			
Man Of The House (K)			•	•				
Kissing Gordo (K)						•	•	
The Last Supper (K)								•
Screaming Thunder (K)				•				
Shaba Park (K)					•			
Reality Cheque (K)				•	•			
Taking Care of Suzanna (K)				•				
Recharge (K)	•							
A Season of Pain (K)						•		
Three Sides Of A Coin (K)						•		
Innocent Guilt (K)				•				
Square Peg, Round Hole (K)								•
Days Long Gone (K)				•				
What Does A Woman Want? (K)								•
A Night In Hell (K)		•		•				

The departures that are being observed in the anthology manuscripts are echoed in the wider, already-published world of this arena of fiction; themes of homosexuality, modern-day technology, entrepreneurship and crime, as examples. Adichie's recent collection of short stories: *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) deals with sexuality in a number of its stories. Nwaubani's Nigerian novel, *I do not come to you by chance* (2009) also demonstrates new directions in writing in English, charting contemporary 'innovative' Nigeria. The shift is also present in the (global) world fiction trend of 'crime writing' (encouraged perhaps by the mass publishing of the Alexander McCall Smith series *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*). 2009 alone has witnessed the publication of Shamini Flint's *Inspector Singh Investigates: A Most Peculiar Malaysian Murder* (2009), followed by *Inspector Singh Investigates: A Bali Conspiracy Most Foul* (2009) and *Inspector Singh Investigates: The Singapore School of Villainy* (2010). Nii Ayikwei Parkes's debut Ghanaian whodunit, *Tail of The Blue Bird* (2009) is also an example of the interest in the genre of crime writing, as is the 'Lalli Mystery' series from India by Kalpana Swaminathan. Shifts in form can also be seen in Chetan Bhagat's second novel *One Night @ The Call Centre* (2005) with excerpts of SMS messages, emails and faxes; and as the title suggests, Bhagat sets the narrative in the modern day call centres in India. Another Indian writer, Amit Varma in his debut novel *My Friend Sancho* (2009) employs email narrative, Indian English and although it is not crime-fiction *per se* the narrative revolves around a crime reporter and a lizard that occupies his flat! Departures in 'Weird Fiction' are also recent developments with Indian writers such as Samit Basu (*Turbulence*, 2010), Ashok Banker both, in the SSF genre, and with the graphic novelist Sarnath Banerjee: see *Corridor* (2004) and *The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers* (2007).

In summary, this paper has explored the meaning of World Englishes literature and offers this as a manifestation of literature that I suggest is a move beyond the postcolonial. Having built on Kachruvian theory to define what constitutes World Englishes literature and what does not, the paper has then demonstrated what, in terms of content and style, is manifest of the sense of being beyond the postcolonial. The anthologies project outlined in the paper has been designed to investigate the literary production which the paper suggests is *following* the period we have called 'postcolonial' in terms of literary production, asserting that some World Englishes literature is 'beyond' this (theoretical) marker. It is, however, only the future which will show these new directions in full.