THE FUNCTION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE EU

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Abstract: The objective of the present study is to describe the new function and the linguistic properties of the English language in the European Community. After describing the need for a new lingua franca and the situation of the English language in the past the author presents the model of world Englishes as introduced by B. Kachru in 1985 and as applied by another researcher, Berns in 1995 to the new sociolinguistic situation created by the European Community. These two models serve as a theoretical framework for the author’s further investigation in connection with the emerging new variety called Euro-English, which will differ from Standard English both in vocabulary and structure. It is supposed that English will perform multiple roles for various citizens of the community. It will function as a mother tongue, a foreign language and an international language. The final conclusion is that the linguistic situation concerning the function of English in the EU countries is so complex that it is impossible to accommodate it in the framework of the model. English is likely to become the primary language of the EU citizens in the future. Both its grammar and its vocabulary will undergo changes. As a result, EU English will bear certain characteristics of other European languages.

1. Introduction

Nowadays we witness the spread of English outside Great Britain, North America, Australia and New Zealand in a variety of social and cultural situations. The objective of the present study is to describe the various roles and linguistic properties English as a lingua franca has in the different countries of the world and in the countries of the European Union. The theoretical framework of the study is given by Braj Kachru’s model of world Englishes. Then this model is supplemented and extended by an American researcher, Margie Berns’ model, concerning the use of English in the European Community. After describing the linguistic properties of EU English, which is a result of investigations made at the University of Miskolc, Department of Applied Linguistics, the possible future of the English language in the European Union is predicted.

2. The need for a lingua franca

Through the Middle Ages Latin was the only means of education and that of transmitting culture in the Western countries. Between the 17th and the beginning of the 20th century French was used as an international language of diplomacy all over the world. An artificial language called Esperanto was worked out by a Polish eye-specialist Lazarus Zamenhof
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(1859-1917) with the aim of using it for international communication. According to Crystal Esperanto was taught at 600 schools and 61 universities in the 1970s (Crystal 1998:440). Up to the present day several newspapers have been published, conferences have been held, a number of books (among them the Bible, the Koran and the Nobel-prize winning book *Fatefulness* by the Hungarian author Imre Kertész) have been translated into Esperanto. Although this language competed to become the *lingua franca* in the world, it failed on the one hand because of its East-European origin. On the other hand, it is not a native language of a community, it does not have its own traditions, literature and culture. *Esperanto* is an artificial language lacking political, military and economic power. All over the world there is a need for an international language, because a common language is crucial, but it has to be a natural language and has to have all the qualities *Esperanto* lacks.

At the outset of the 21st century it is beyond question that the English language has become the *lingua franca*, the language used for communication between people living in different countries in the world. Whether a language is a world language or not is no longer decided on the basis of the number of its native speakers. If it were the only criterion, Chinese could undoubtedly become the lingua franca, because Mandarin (Chinese) is spoken by the greatest number of native speakers. English is not only the mother tongue of people living in the English-speaking countries, but also a world language. An interesting phenomenon can be observed in Europe: adults are not very enthusiastic about learning English and using the language when they go on holiday, but for children in Europe it is as clear as day that they have to cope with this task. If a German boy wants to speak to a French person, he has to speak in English. When on holiday, English-speaking children appear to be in charge, reserving hotel rooms, ordering food in restaurants or calling for taxis to the airport. Thanks to the development of technologies and political changes English has become an internationally used language of communication. The need for a lingua franca is most pressing in Europe for economic reasons. More and more workers want to take advantage of the integrated labour market and find jobs in the neighbouring countries. “Global technology players” also need a common language, a corporate language. Between German and French companies for example English even makes political sense, because, as pointed out by McArthur, the use of this language expresses “linguistic neutrality” (McArthur 2001: 2).

3. The situation of the English language – past and present contrasted

When Queen Elisabeth 1st reigned (1558-1603), the number of native English speakers in the world was between 5 and 7 million. When Queen Elisabeth 2nd came to the throne in 1952, 250 million people spoke English as their mother tongue and a further 100 million or so learned it as a foreign language. According to Crystal in the 1990s there was an estimated number of 300 million mother-tongue speakers of English in the world. But this number has been far exceeded recently by the number of people who speak English as a second or a foreign language. Unfortunately it is very difficult if not impossible to estimate the number of English speakers in the countries where English is not a mother tongue. No
one knows how many people have developed knowledge of English to a reasonable standard of fluency up to the present day.

Researchers point out that the importance and fortunes of languages rise and fall. The variety which has a great international influence today “on a scale never seen before, was once of very secondary importance and restricted utility” (Edwards 2001: 5). It holds true for English as well, since the rise and dominance of English in the world has profited from historical circumstances. If we consider other great lingua francas, for example Greek and Latin, we can realise that they seemed imperishable, but faded away with the declining power of their speakers. Historical precedent would have suggested that the decline of British power meant the decline of the English language. But the power moved to the other side of the ocean, and English received a renewed lease on life. Later English received a further injection of life from a wider world, which it has already penetrated. Edwards quotes Burchfield, former editor of the Oxford English Dictionary and consultant to the 1980s television series The Story of English, making the point that “English dominance seems assured, well into the future, unless something truly cataclysmic – a nuclear ‘winter’, for instance – were to occur” (Edwards 2001: 5). English is spoken by more and more people in Europe, because we experience that this language is becoming the binding agent in our continent. The current status of English needs documentation as well as scientific investigation. Researchers like Kachru, Berns and many others contributing to such publications as English Today give us new insights into the nature and function of English inside and outside the countries where English is a native language. Researchers also propose models that help us to understand the new status of English. The best model was introduced by B. Kachru (Kachru1985, 1992).

4. The characteristic properties and the function of world Englishes

Kachru proposes a model which serves as a framework for studying the various roles English plays in different countries of the world and in various sociolinguistic situations. The model consists of three concentric circles: inner, outer and expanding. Each circle represents the type of spread, patterns of acquisition and functional domains in which English is used in different countries and cultures.
Figure 1. Concentric Circles of World Englishes, adapted from Kachru 1985

The **inner circle countries** are the ones where English is spoken as the mother tongue of the inhabitants, where it is a primary language. These countries are Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. These countries are the traditional bases of English and provide standards and norms for non-native speakers, to which they have to conform.

The **outer circle countries** include Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Zambia. This circle is distinguished by the following features:

- the place of English in the linguistic repertoire (where it is only one of two or more codes) and
- the status of English in the language policies (whether it is an official language like in Nigeria or one of the state languages like in Zambia or an associate language like in India).
Other functional characteristics of English are also mentioned by Kachru, for example its function is extended to a variety of social, educational, administrative and literary domains. The language norms in the outer circle countries are determined by two factors:

- their own institutionalised varieties and
- the norm-providing varieties used in the inner-circle countries.

A variety of countries, for example China, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Zimbabwe, and countries of the former Soviet Union belong to the third circle which Kachru calls the expanding circle. In these countries English functions as an international language and the speakers develop performance varieties. They learn English as a foreign language and are also dependent upon the norm-providing inner-circle countries. Their situation differs from that of the outer-circle countries as well, because they did not have the colonial past of outer-circle users of English. In these countries English is becoming more and more influential and the number of its learners is increasing rapidly.

In this model individual countries are identified, not regional groups. Each country represents a distinct sociolinguistic unit. But when examining the linguistic situation of the European Community researchers suggest regional grouping on the following grounds: doing so creates a unit like the multicultural and multilingual situation of a country such as India. As in India, in the EC there are a number of languages and dialects used by a wide range of speech communities. Both for Europeans and the people living in India English is the language of wider communication. The European Community has been a political and economic unit since the economic integration in 1992. There is a sense of unity through a common culture.

The European Union is established as a political and economic unit, recognised and treated as such by its neighbours and trading partners. The success of the EC as an economic union depends greatly on the way the member states can develop European identity. That is why the Community has devised language and student exchange programmes like LINGUA, TEMPUS and ERASMUS. The purpose of these programmes is to bring together people living in the member states with those living in the accessing countries.

Belonging to the latter group of countries, Hungary also intends to prepare its citizens to the accession. Both teachers and students of Hungarian schools and universities are enthusiastic about taking part in European exchange programmes. For example the Department of Applied Linguistics, a unit of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Miskolc also joined the ERASMUS project. The department established partnership with the Language Centre of the Tampere University, Finland in 1998 and the School of Translation and Interpreting of Modern Languages of the Trieste University, Italy in 1999. The Department of Applied Linguistics signed a student and teaching staff mobility agreement with these two universities and since 2000 our students have the opportunity to spend one semester at the Trieste and Tampere universities. In Tampere they can join the intercultural communication courses offered by Nancy Aalto and Irja Piätilä. Our exchange partner in Trieste is David Katan, a representative of two cultures, with his roots in Great Britain. His main field of research is connected with the cultural aspects of translation. Since 2000
eleven students of the University of Miskolc have studied or done research for their diploma works in the library of the Trieste University and five of them have spent one semester at the Tampere University. The exchange of teaching staff has important impacts on co-operation in the field of intercultural communication. The most important thing for Hungarian students is that they can develop their professional skills and language proficiency to the level that meets European needs.

For teachers a study tour to a European country also makes it possible to be participants of another culture, but in addition opens up new perspectives. In 2002, as a result of an ARION project, the author of the present study had an opportunity to take part in a study tour to South Cyprus, a faraway country also applying for EU membership. The visit was organised by the Ministry of Education and Culture and hosted by the Directorate of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education in Limassol with the active participation of Charalambos Constantinou, inspector for technical and vocational education, his colleagues, Stelios Christophides, Constadinos Georgiou, Efstatios Ionnides and Ms Antonia Prodromou, Cyprus co-ordinator for ARION. Their objective was to familiarise European experts in teaching and education with the intention and ambition of the Cyprus people to identify with Europe, to show and discuss the measures they take in the interest of becoming Europeans. The Ministry of Education and Culture has recognised that if Cyprus wants to join the European Union, the content of education has to be changed. They joined an ambitious programme of curriculum reform, part of which was the reform of language teaching. Since English is the first foreign language and an obligatory subject in secondary schools, the Inspectors of Foreign Languages undertook the responsibility to design new curricula including new methods and teaching strategies. Teams of teachers (Marios Parides, Christos Zographos, Costas Stylianou, Koula Papadopoulou and Stella Conti) under the supervision of their inspector (Costas Markou) and the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry of Education and Culture write English language books which serve the needs of special groups of students, for example waiters, cooks, hotel staff and electricians. It is a unique enterprise on the part of practising teachers who are familiar with the learners’ needs and abilities. The production of these new books is a good example that should be followed in our country, too. People in Cyprus have recognised that if they want to be part of the EU, they have to improve their knowledge of English. They do not want knowledge of English certified by language proficiency exams. They are of opinion that a foreign language, first of all English has to be taught so that the learners can use it for communication in real-life situations. Cypriots are convinced that they will have more visitors to the country if those involved in tourist trade can communicate freely with foreigners. The new course-books meet new requirements, are topic-based and encourage communication, which is necessary for mutual understanding. They contribute to the English language being more widely used in Europe than earlier. This activity of the English teachers helps Cyprus to meet European cultural and sociolinguistic needs.
5. The sociolinguistic situation of a unified Europe

The model of the various world Englishes shows the different functions the English language performs in different parts of the world and in different sociolinguistic situations, for example in Africa, Asia or the Middle-East. Although the spread of English in Europe can be considered as part of a global process, the model concerns neither Europe nor some European countries. Due to the spread of English and the variety of functions the language performs it would be necessary to extend the model to Europe. Before doing so, we have to describe in detail the sociolinguistic situation of the unified Europe.

We can find a wide range of speech communities in Europe. Each community has its own culture but at the same time constitutes part of the cultural heritage of Europeans. Each speech community has its own language and dialect, which is one of the number of different languages and dialects spoken in Europe. In spite of the fact that each community has its own mother tongue, English is a language of wider communication. The knowledge of English is essential for citizens of the member states to move freely across borders, to live, work and get training outside their homeland. In the European Union the goal is political and economic integration and this objective leads to unification in language use, which in turn creates a unique sociolinguistic situation. According to Berns this situation can be characterised by three key features. They are as follows:

The first characteristic feature is the multiple roles English plays for various citizens of the community. In the unified Europe English functions as a mother tongue, a foreign language and an international language. For citizens of Great Britain and Ireland English is a native and a second language, in other countries it is a foreign or an international language, but in Luxembourg together with French and German, English is regarded as a primary language. In the Netherlands English is so widely understood that it is considered by some as one of the languages of this Dutch-speaking community. English is a compulsory school subject in primary and secondary education. In the other countries of the EU English is generally regarded as a foreign and an international language.

The second development English is undergoing across Europe is nativization or Europeanization. It means that Europeans introduce innovations on the basis of their mother tongue. At the same time they de-Americanize and de-Anglicize English, which involves a number of linguistic processes. The most striking features are lexical borrowings. Words like eventual having the meaning probably, perhaps or actual meaning current, topical are examples of the continental use of English. Conventions of the native language and culture are also maintained in texts which use English language and syntax. This phenomenon concerns rhetorical pattern, argument structure etc. and is called discoursal nativization. The outcome of these productive processes reflects the particular sociolinguistic contexts of use.
6. Acquisition and use of English in the EU countries

In Great Britain and Ireland acquisition of English as a mother tongue takes place in natural circumstances. In the other EU countries English is studied both in and outside the classroom. Teaching English is present in education at all levels.

In the classroom there are artificial, formal learning settings. In Hungary between 1949 and 1990 Russian was used as the first foreign language in primary and secondary schools as well as in higher education. After the political change interest in learning a “Western” language began to grow and by the 2000s English has become the most widely studied foreign language. At some universities, among others at the University of Miskolc, English is the medium of instruction in technical and economic fields. English is also frequently used to read scientific literature and to keep up with research. In these situations English means access to information and functions like a second language.

It is also possible for EU citizens to have contact with English outside the classroom. In most of the member countries learners are exposed to the English language by the media: there are films, TV programmes, news broadcasts, sports and music programmes, commercials and newspapers in English. Besides this there are opportunities for interaction with native as well as non-native speakers of English. And as pointed out by Berns “It happens that Europeans speak English with one another as well as with speakers of other native Englishes. And this occurs not only among high level national leaders and diplomats, such as EU officials themselves. ‘Everyday’ Germans, Italians and Dutch with varying levels of education also use English to interact with one another. This can be the German family vacationing at an Italian beach which gets acquainted - through English – with an Italian vacationing family, or the Europeans in business, trade and tourism who rely on English to get business done with one another and their clients and customers” (Berns 1995: 7). Without speaking English it would be impossible to trade, do business, do scientific research, go abroad etc. All these areas of life create situations where English functions as an international language. By means of English it is possible for native and non-native speakers to understand each other.

Besides the various uses and functions mentioned above it is important to pay attention to a function of English used for intra-European communication. In this situation the users of English are neither the native speakers living in Great Britain nor the English speakers of one particular EU country. In the territory of Europe there is a European-English-using speech community. “And this community represents speakers of a non-native English, one that has been referred to as European English or Euro-English. The label European English identifies those uses of English that are not British (and not American or Canadian or Australian or any other native variety), but are distinctly European and distinguish European English speakers of other varieties” (Berns 1995: 7). Parallel to the multiculturalism and linguistic diversity characterising the EU countries there is a common language, a variety of English that functions as a lingua franca in the European Community.
The Function of the English Language in the European Union

7. Vocabulary and structure of Euro-English

The changing status of the English language in Europe is reflected by and can be observed both in its vocabulary and its structure. The new lexical elements demonstrate *euro-mania*. It means that the vocabulary contains a lot of words with the element *euro*. The new currency is referred to as the *euro*, *euro notes* are the valid currency used in the *Euro-zone* or *Euro-area* which consists of those *Member States* which have joined the EMU (Economic and Monetary Union). The *euro-mania* got control over the politicians, the economists and of course the media. One of the recently established words is *Euroland*, which refers to the area of the Member States. Since 1998, when the exchange rates of the euro and the national currencies were fixed, everyone has obtained an *euro calculator*. In the Member States there was a real movement to popularise the euro. The Dutch government presented a set of *euro-models*, called *euro-kits*, to its citizens. In Belgium, the government encouraged the companies to give mini-eurokits to their employees. The Spanish government sent special *euromobils* equipped with educational rooms to every part of the country in order to make its citizens acquainted with the euro. Austria solved it with *eurotrains*. France launched a campaign called ‘Euros bienvenus’ to stimulate the French to pay in euro from the very first day. It is not by chance the language of EU politicians, that *is* *Euro-crats* is referred to as *euro-speak*.

The tradesmen also had to prepare for the introduction of the euro. The large supermarkets prepared their employees to the introduction of the new currency in order to avoid the *euro jams* at the cash desks. Several trades accused each other of raising their tariffs highly. The hairdressers were expressly called *euro profiteer*. They said: Attention! *Euro-raises*! After that the citizens of the euro zone got over the euro New Year’s Eve, they wished a Happy New Year and a lot of euros to each other. This event can be called *euro euforie* (Szalóczi 2002: 20, Czinke 2002: 40).

Of course it is not only the words that contain the element *euro* that enrich the vocabulary of the new variety of English. We find that in Euro-English, instead of the terms *state, country* or *nation* the expression *Member States* is used. This difference is only a subtle one, but it has important political implications. Another example illustrating this type of a subtle distinction in Euro-English is the using of the term *internal market*, which is slightly different from *domestic market*. European citizens often use the term *additionality*. It means the demand for matching funds from national or local authorities when money is provided by the European Regional Development Fund. The new vocabulary also contains the word *Berlaymont*, the name of the Commission building in Brussels. The word *Berlaymont* is used to refer to bureaucratisation and red tape (Modiano 2001: 13).

Euro-English contains several terms which are peculiar to European experience. Users of English living in other parts of the world generally do not understand them. The process through which common expressions of European languages make their way into Euro-English is called *discoursal nativization*. It is important to mention that words of European origin are first understood only by those people who know the languages from which the new words were taken. Later all users of EU-English will accept it and as a result of nativization the new forms get communicative legitimacy (Modiano 2001: 13-14).
Another phenomenon contributing to the formation of Euro-English is the process of fossilization, which means that “non-standard structures become acceptable forms of language” (Modiano 2001: 13). Expressions used in other European languages are slowly making their way into Euro-English. The examples Modiano mentions are taken from Swedish. In Swedish, if people want to neglect something they say they hoppa över it. In Sweden it might happen that we hear a sentence like this: I am going to hop over lunch today. Another example illustrating the phenomenon is the literal translation of the Swedish structure We were five people at the party instead of There were five of us at the party. Both native speakers and citizens of other EU countries would be at a loss to hear such statements. But in time such usage could become more commonplace and it could be accepted by users of English not familiar with Swedish.

Besides the new vocabulary EU-English is characterised by a great number of abbreviations which are easy to remember, concise and convenient to use. They are often applied instead of long official names, save time in speaking and space in tables or written texts, they are used in groups of statistics, technical and scientific texts, indices, footnotes, bibliographies and by experts of similar professions. There are three types of abbreviations: clippings, acronyms and blendings. Clippings are lexical structures, in which part of a word is standing for the whole. For example EURATOM meaning European Atomic Energy Committee. Acronyms are formed from the initial letters of words that make up a name, for example EIB (European Investment Bank). Blendings are formations in which a compound is made by blending one word with another(for example eurocrat) so that the whole remains fairly analysable (Quirk 1991:175). We have to admit that blends are very rarely used in Euro-English.

8. The function of English in Europe

If we want to apply the model of world Englishes to the EU countries, we have to use the inner circle as a starting point with Great Britain and Ireland occupying this circle on the grounds that in these countries English is spoken by native speakers and recognised as either the primary language or one of the two languages. The variety of English spoken here is norm-providing. But the situation in the non-norm providing countries is not as simple as that.

In the outer circle countries of Kachru’s model speakers used non-native varieties like Indian English or Singaporean English. But this status does not exist in the EU countries, there is no Spanish or Swedish English. But we can find some similarities between the outer circle countries of the original model and that of the EU countries: English plays an important role in the visual and sound media and in interpersonal communication.

In the expanding circle of the original model English has the status of international language, is taught in schools as a foreign language and speakers develop performance varieties. In addition to acquiring the language, learners have to acquire the appropriate forms of behaviour accepted in the inner circle countries. As Berns points out, “English in
Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain match these characteristics and thus can be identified with the expanding circle" (Berns 1995: 8). And so can Finland and Austria, the countries which joined the EU later than the study by Berns was published. As regards the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany and Sweden, it is difficult to identify them with the expanding circle in spite of the fact that English does function as an international language in these countries. If we contrast these countries to Japan, which occupies the expanding circle in Kachru’s model, we find that people living in these European countries have more opportunities to use English and more contact with native speakers than do Japanese. Germans for example do not have to go abroad or work for international firms to use English, but Japanese do. After the war there was an influx of military personnel to Germany where people were exposed to American products, culture and the language. But we cannot state that Germany belongs to the outer circle either. In the original model the outer circle is occupied by countries which had been colonised by users of English. In India for example English is an official language and a second (or third) language of the population and it has developed an institutionalised variety. But although in Germany English is a first foreign language taught at schools, it is not declared as an official or state language. Nor has it developed an institutionalised variety. To this Berns adds the following: "and while proficiency of English among users is not as widespread as in Singapore, it is greater than in Japan. In addition, it is hard to dismiss English in Germany from the outer circle given the functions it serves there (that English in Japan does not) in various social, cultural, commercial, and educational settings” (Berns 1995: 9). The situation of shared characteristics holds for the Netherlands and Luxembourg, too.

Figure 2. The Concentric Circles of European Englishes adopted from Berns 1995.
9. Summary

We find that the outer and the expanding circles cannot always be clearly demarcated from each other. There are overlaps between the areas of the outer and the expanding circles. So we either state that the linguistic situation concerning the function of English in the European Community is so complex that it is impossible to accommodate it in the framework of the model. Or we can draw another conclusion: due to its multiple function English is likely to become the primary language of the citizens of the EU. In the future it will be even more widely used as a vehicle for intra-European communication. As a result of nativization and fossilization the language Europeans will use will bear the characteristics of the broader European context.

Bibliography


