

# Braj Kachru's vision of world Englishes

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Braj Kachru devoted his life to the idea that the English language is a plurality. In the course of his long academic career, spanning three continents, he developed the view that the English language is best termed and perceived in the plural, 'Englishes,' and, because of its potential for inclusivity and commonality across the world, 'world Englishes.' Braj's work in conceiving and implementing the vision of world Englishes originated from his multilingual upbringing and education in India, and was further developed by his study of Indian English as a graduate student in Edinburgh in the late 1950s. At that time there was a growing interest within British linguistics, in the study of varieties of English in various parts of the world. Braj's article on 'The Indianness of Indian English' in *World* in 1965, shows his clear awareness of the distinctiveness of this variety, and the constellation of cultural reasons for this distinctiveness. In his view, the English language, transplanted to an area outside its traditional range, is nativized to answer to the communicational needs and sociocultural identities of its users. Pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse serve the needs of speakers in their sociolinguistic reality, and new varieties emerge in new contexts. English (singular) is now Englishes (plural).

Or is it? The applied linguistic literature of the 1960s and 1970s shows a reluctance to accept or even to acknowledge the reality of this position. Explicitly or implicitly, specialists argued or assumed that 'there could be only one' model for learners. Or perhaps, that there could be only two models that counted, Model B (British), and Model A (American). The academic field of world Englishes was conceptualized in response to this enduring ideology of the primacy of the native speaker. Larry Smith organized a conference at East-West Center in Honolulu in April, 1978; Braj Kachru organized another conference at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in June-July, 1978; and the ensuing discussions became the basis of volumes edited by Smith (1981) and Kachru (1982). Kachru and Quirk (1981) concluded that these two conferences 'blazed the trail for':

*a new approach which provides a realistic framework for looking at English in a global context, and for relating concepts such as appropriateness, acceptability and intelligibility to the pragmatic factors which determine the uses of English as an international or intranational language. (Kachru & Quirk, 1981, p. xx)*

During the 1980s, Braj and Larry, with the support of Yamuna Kachru and the involvement of their students, colleagues, and associates, organized colloquia at the International TESOL meetings, at the Georgetown Roundtable, and other venues. At the International TESOL Meeting in Chicago in 1988, the Interim Committee, itself formed in 1986 in Honolulu, created the International Committee for the Study of World Englishes. This body went on to found the International Association for World Englishes at the 'World Englishes Today' conference in Urbana in April, 1992. Since then, IAWWE has held 23 conferences in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America, and the 24th IAWWE Conference will take place in 2019 at Limerick University. Hand-in-hand with their organizational efforts, Braj and Larry undertook weighty publication responsibilities when they rebranded the Pergamon journal *World Language English* as *World Englishes: The Journal of English as an International and Intranational Language*, beginning with Vol. 4 Issue No. 2 (1985). In their editorial, they set out the principles of the newly reorganized journal:

'Englishes' symbolizes the functional and formal variation in the language, and its international acculturation, for example, in West Africa, in Southern Africa, in East Africa, in South Asia, in Southeast Asia, in the West Indies, in the Philippines, and in the traditional English-using countries: the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand [...] In methodology, WE does not subscribe to any one method or approach, for, as yet, the claim of universality for any approach is suspect [...] Native and nonnative users of English [are] equal partners in deliberations on users of English and its teaching internationally. (Kachru & Smith, 1985, pp. 210–211)

Braj and Larry went on to edit 22 volumes of the journal, publishing hundreds of articles (always referred to as 'papers' in Braj's usage) examining English in a world-wide range of contexts and utilizing an array of methodological approaches from sub-fields including discourse studies, the sociology of language, applied linguistics, areal studies, contact linguistics, corpus and 'features based' approaches, critical linguistics, bilingual creativity, lexicography, and pidgin and creole studies (Bolton & Davis, 2006). *World Englishes* is now a Wiley journal and has just reached Volume 38, Issues 1 and 2, with Braj and Larry at the top of the masthead as co-founding editors.

Throughout this astounding redefinition of an entire field of human inquiry, Braj remained matter-of-fact, kind, calm, humorous, witty, and incisive (Sridhar, 2016). He negotiated academic, professional, and personal relationships seamlessly. In retrospect, it is hard to understand how he did it, although part of the credit must go to his academic and personal relationship with Yamuna Kachru, and another share of credit must go to his friendship with Larry Smith. And another large block of credit must go to his genius, the voice that in quiet moments we are fortunate to remember, questioning and laughing. The impact on our lives was profound yet subtle. Braj Kachru changed our approach to and understanding of the sociolinguistics of the English language. He also changed the lives of so many of the students and colleagues with whom he came into contact, as the papers and tributes in this special issue give some indication.

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