

A *mahan vicharak* who brought people and their Englishes together

Jamie Shinhee Lee

It is not an exaggeration for me to say that Prof. Kachru truly changed my life.¹ In the acknowledgements section of my dissertation, I wrote:

His seminar on Sociolinguistics of world Englishes in my very first semester at the University of Illinois ignited my intellectual curiosity and desire to learn more about sociolinguistics. I needed 'just one' course with him to know that this is what I want to do for the rest of my academic career.

Prof. Kachru had this remarkable ability to inspire people. It seemed that everyone who met him in person instantly became his fan. I certainly became one immediately after I met him, a very enthusiastic and lucky fan who had the privilege and pleasure of working for him as his research assistant. He was charismatic, but it was not one of those ostensibly overpowering kinds. As a professor, he was passionate about the subject matter, and his enthusiasm was contagious. I always looked forward to going to his classes and just watching him 'in action.'

In the summer of 2016, less than a month after Prof. Kachru passed away, I received an email regarding a written interview request about him. The email read, 'I am writing you as an interviewer of the "NNEST of the Month".' (NNEST refers to the 'non-native' English speaking teachers blog at TESOL.) The email continued, 'Due to the unfortunate news of Braj Kachru's passing, our *World Englishes* community would like to honor him by devoting a series of interviews to scholars who had the opportunity to work with him, like your case. Featuring your interview would help us to continue inspiring other scholars interested in the area of *World Englishes*.' Prof. Kachru would not have approved of the term 'non-native English speaking' but I appreciated their plan to honor him by 'devoting a series of interviews' and I was pleased to be chosen as one of the interviewees. Their interview questions helped me think about Prof. Kachru's influence on me as a scholar, thesis advisor, and mentor.

One of the questions they asked was 'We know that Dr. Kachru is an influential authority on *World Englishes*. What was he like as a teacher, mentor, or just as a person? Could you share any vivid memories of working as a graduate student under the tutelage of Dr. Kachru?' My response to this was:

Prof. Kachru was a brilliant scholar and an amazing human being. He was one of the greatest teachers and mentors that I know and anyone can hope for. But he was not a hands-on thesis advisor. He encouraged me to think independently about my academic endeavors and allowed me to initiate projects on my own. He was there for me when I needed his advice and guidance, but I was never explicitly told what to do when it came to my own research. We discussed general plans, so he was involved in drawing a big picture. However, regarding specific decisions, I was pretty much in charge and he rarely stepped in. Some students may not work well under this kind of minimum supervision, but it worked for me. I was grateful for his faith in his student.

One of the most cherished possessions I have is a copy of his book *Asian Englishes: Beyond the canon* in which he kindly and generously acknowledged me in the preface 'to Jamie S. Lee for her skill and dedication beyond the call of duty in the preparation of the manuscript with a contagious smile and for her help from the beginning to the end of the project' (Kachru, 2005, p. xviii). I may not have achieved 'chwulsey' ('success' in Korean) by worldly standards, but I can comfortably say that my academic career has been a success simply because I got to know Prof. Kachru in person,

worked for him closely for five years of my life, and continue to do research on world Englishes, to be specific, Asian Englishes. Prof. Kachru's position on Asian Englishes is unequivocally articulated as follows:

In the Asian, and indeed in world contexts, the modifier and noun relationship as in 'English language' has contextually, pragmatically, and ideationally altered substantially. Now the appropriate modifier-noun relationship is Asian Englishes, not Asian English, and world Englishes, not world English, or global English, or international English. (Kachru, 2005, p. 255)

In the preface to the second edition of his book *The other tongue*, he honors Dr. Peter Strevens, who used to be on the faculty at the University of Edinburgh when Prof. Kachru was a graduate student, as follows: 'Peter possessed abundant energy, intellectual keenness, and great skill as a teacher. One was envious of this unusual gift of bringing people together, which he did with great charm and sensitivity' (Kachru, 1992, p. xx). I can also say the same thing and much more about Prof. Kachru. He brought people together as well as their Englishes. Academia is not the same without Prof. Kachru. However, with a humble heart, we continue to carry on with his vision and mission. I am here because of him, and I am forever grateful!

NOTE

¹ Some parts are incorporated from my tributes presented at the symposium commemorating the life and research of Prof. Kachru organized by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in November, 2016.

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