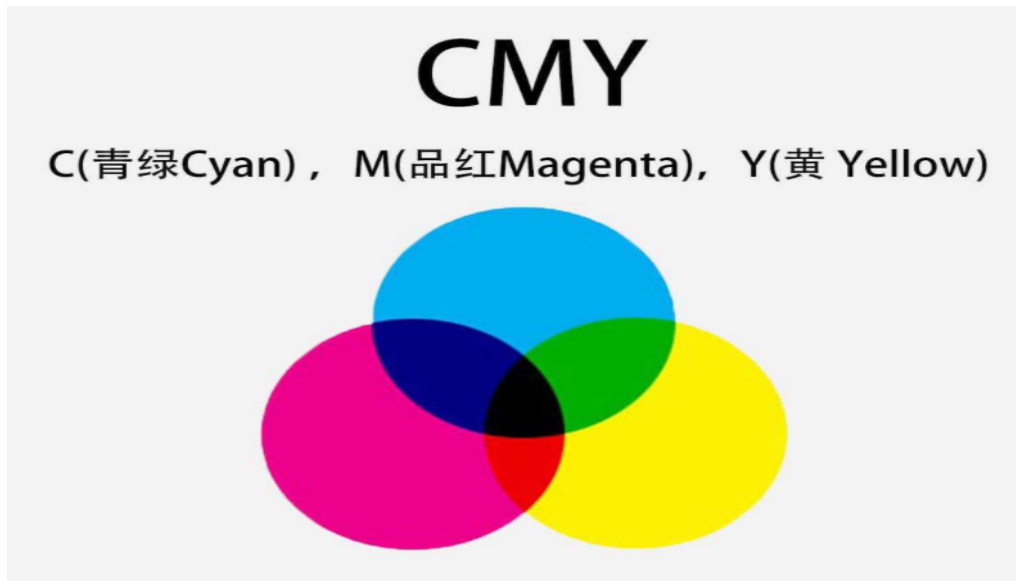




Linguistic Tricolor Conjecture: A Critical Thinking on Kachru's Concentric Circles

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Abstract: Based on Kachru's Concentric Circles, Linguistic Tricolour Conjecture firstly proposes: All languages are created equal, and each language has its unique native linguistic colour, and this unique colour will change in the interactions with other languages, that is, linguistic varieties. We need to strike a harmonious balance among the linguistic tricolour conjecture.

Key words: Linguistic Tricolour Conjecture, Kachru's Concentric Circles, linguistic varieties

Since languages were born, they have their magic unique power, and they are changing with time passing by in the interactions among different languages. Take “language” for example, we have “langue” in French,

“sprache” in German, “język” in Polish, “язык ” in Russian, “언어” in Korean, “ພາສາ” in Lao, “语言” in Chinese, etc. We can even refer to the intimate relationships between English and French, because “language” in English and “langue” in French are so similar in their spellings and writings. If we have a close look on each language, we discover that although people speak the same language, their spellings, writings, ways of expressions etc. may differ according to the people’s nationality, gender, age, statues, education background, ... Take English for example, according to geographic reasons, we have Britain English, American English, Canada English, Australian English, African English, or even Chinese English.

1. Kachru’s Concentric Circles

England is the cradle of English, and English is Britain’s most glorious contribution to the world. By the end of 19th century, Britain had established her “the sun does not set empire” with large areas of Crown colonies, protectorates, spheres of influence, self-governing dominions, etc., which covered a quarter of the world population. In the 20th century, due to the World War I and World War II, the world mould had been broken and Britain was dragged down in that historical plughole. With the rise of America as a leading world power, Britain was going downwards with a sign, except English language. English language, as a world language, is playing a more and more profound and prosperous role in this world, such as business, politics, tourism, cultural-exchanges, education,

etc.

In *How many millions? The statistics of English today*, Crystal (1985: 7-9) suggested that in the 1980s, there were more than 2 billion of world population could speak English, while only a fifth or even less population spoke English as a mother tongue. Just in the same year, American linguist Braj Kachru (1985) proposed his "World English" based on his study on Indian English and in the next year, he conceived his "Concentric Circles" to better demonstrate the emerging indigenized varieties of English in the whole world. In Kachru's "Concentric Circles", he has categorized world Englishes into three circles: they are the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle according to "the type of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages" (1986: 12)

(1) The Inner Circle of English

Kachru (1985: 366) described his "Concentric Circles" model as follows: The Inner Circle refers to the traditional cultural and linguistic bases of English and includes countries where most of the population speak English as the native language, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Countries of The Inner Circle group are all have a directly close relationship with England, in which English takes shape originally, in traditional and cultural heritage.

In the Inner Circle, English, as the primary native language, is

largely used due to a migration of English speakers. Many residences or citizens in the countries of The Inner Circle, such as people in USA, Canada, or Australia, have some degree of blood heritage with people in the United Kingdom, especially with people in England. This natural advantage of kinship plays an essential role in the shaping of their languages, cultures, education systems, and so on. It is intrinsically blood-bonded in their daily language. That is to say, the relationship among the countries of the Inner Circle is inborn.

(2) The Outer Circle of English

Next comes the Outer Circle of English. This circle refers to the English varieties of the states where English has been passed down through generations during the expansion of colonization. Countries of The Outer Circle group, such as India, South Africa, Pakistan, Ghana, Kenya, Malaysia, Zimbabwe, etc. are predominantly using English as an official or second language, though English is not used as the first language, it plays a significantly important role in their national and international official conferences in politics, legislatures, economics, education, tourism and so on.

In the Outer Circle, most of the countries, like India, Singapore, Malaysia, are former colonies through the Great Britain's imperial expansion overseas which facilitated the transport of English to these areas and regions and thus led to the emergence of the Outer Circle's second-

language tongues.

(3) The Expanding Circle of English

Far from the Inner Circle, the Expanding Circle use English as a foreign language, rather than in the Inner Circle as a native language, or in the Outer Circle as a second language. The performance varieties of English are used in EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts, such as in China, Korea, Japan, Indonesia, France, Germany, Egypt, Denmark, Russia, Israel, as well as many countries in South America, etc.

In the Expanding Circle, English is not valued as the native tongue in countries of the Inner Circle or as an official second language in the Outer Circle. English is frequently and widely used as an international communicative skill and people in these countries treat English as an extremely important lingua franca in the international globalization. In other words, English is paid more attention on its communicational function rather than its linguistic and cultural charm by people in countries of the Expanding Circle.

Kachru's "Concentric Circles" (Table 1) demonstrate the spread and growth of the English language as a world language and the interacting phenomenon of "World Englishes" under the process of globalization. Its most significance lies in the admission that English belongs to whoever uses English to communicate, which gives a considerable respect and recognition to the new localized varieties both in the Outer Circle and the

Expanding Circle. Kachru (1986: 29) regards local innovations contextually appropriate in that they bear specific connotations to the local English-using community and that such items are part of their linguistic repertoire, take “head tie” meaning headscarf in the regions of Africa for example. According to Kachru (1992: 364-365), English is not necessarily taught as a tool to understand British culture or American culture but used as a media to impart local cultural values. To approach English teaching around the world, Kachru (1986: 21) also suggests two alternative models, namely exo-normative model, and endo-normative model: the exo-normative refers to a native model while the latter follows a local educated variety as the model for teaching and learning.

	Location	English Statue	Countries
The Inner Circle	In the core areas	As a native language	UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand
The Outer Circle	In the middle areas	As a second language	India, South Africa, Pakistan, Ghana, Kenya, Malaysia, Zimbabwe etc.
The Expanding Circle	In the far-fetched areas	As a foreign language	China, Korea, Japan, Indonesia, France, German, Egypt, Denman, Russia, Israel, etc.

Table 1. An understanding of Kachru’s “Concentric Circles”

2. The Historical Shortcomings of Kachru’s Concentric Circles

To be the world language, English has gone through a lot of historical events which have further developed it in depth and width. On the one hand,

English is reinforced in the United Kingdom for centuries. On the other hand, English is expanding with the “sun never set” empire and is playing a wider and wider role in world globalization. According to the historical development and expansion of English as a world language, three historical periods as milestones of English as a world language are highlighted as follow:

(1) The 16th century: the foundation of English as a world language

In the 16th century, Henry VII made England a national state with a centralized government with super efficiency, who transmitted British national system from feudalism to capitalism, which stimulated English commercial and maritime enterprise. In 1492, American was discovered as “the lost paradise”. So, the 16th century also witnessed a firmly Protestant England under the reign of Elizabeth I (1533 - 1603), in whose ruling time, England established its super control over the sea. England advanced so fast and overwhelming in foreign trade, exploration, literature, and cultural exchange that far from England, in American, the American State, Virginia, is named after the virgin Queen: Elizabeth I. During this age of exploration, the English navy even got the better of the Spanish Armada, which established the dominating position of England as a major sea power but also paved the way for the oversea expansion of English language.

(2) The 19th century: the peak development of English as a world language

In the 19th century, the industry revolution took place mainly in England, which made her known as the “workshop of the world.” Meanwhile, the industry revolution system also spread to the United States and the rest Europe. During Queen Victoria’s reign, Britain became the most powerful country in the world.

By the end of 19th century, the British Empire had quickly climbed to its peak with 1/5 of the world’s total dry land, which was about one hundred thirty-seven times as large as Great Britain. No wonder it was boasted as “The sun never sets.” But British development suffered a lot during World War I and World War II. One of the most influential effects of these two world wars was that they accelerated the end of Britain’s empire.

(3) The 21st century: the colourful polycentric varieties of English as a world language

since the 20th century, multi-culture is the main steam of linguistic globalization, and British English was no longer viewed the as solo standard of English language, for more and more people recognize the hybrid of English and local language in non-English speaking countries. Take studying abroad for example, we have *International English Language Testing System* (IELTS) with a standard British English for the students who want to study in the United Kingdom and *The Test of English as a Foreign Language* (TOEFL) as a standard American English for the students who want to study in the United States.

Both British English and the American English are thought to be standard. They are just colourful polycentric varieties of English as a world language.

Especially in the 21st century, people are more open-minded and more tolerate to the “World Englishes”, or the polycentric varieties of English. Take Chinese English for example, once if a word-to-word literal translation of Chinese expression violates the grammar rule or regulation of English language in English translation, it was thought to be wrong. But in the 21st century, if the quantity of Chinese users has amounted to a certain large group, their creative English expressions may be thought as an English variety to express a local expression. For example, Long time no see. (好久不见。I have not seen you for a long time), No zuo no die. (不作死就不会死。No zuo no die why you try and no zuo no die why you cry. Let it go!) Niubility. (牛逼。You are so cool.) Zhuangbility. (装逼。You are so faking it with false expressions and posts.) For example: Many people think they are full of niubility, and like to play zhuangbility, which only reflects their foolishness and arrogance.

From the historical reflection of the development of English language, we have found the answers to these questions: How can English, as a language of an island, be developed into a widely used world language? How can English, as the first choice of languages used in commercials, politics, educations, and research frontiers? Why English is so active and creative in its vigorous expanding with various “World Englishes”?

however, a historical reflection of the development of English language also evolves some deep thinking on the shortcomings of Kachru's "Concentric Circles."

(1) The history of English is often divided into three phrases. They are the phrase of Old English (449 - 1100), the phrase of Middle English (1100 - 1500) and the phrase of Modern English (1500 - now). Kachru's "Concentric Circles" can only describe things happen in the phrase of Modern English since the 16th century, because Britain was not so powerful as a world language during the phrase of Old English and the phrase of Middle English. What is more, there was a long bi-linguistic period in England with French as the official language since 1066 when Duke William of Normandy invaded England from France. Since then, French began to be spoken among the upper class or the ruling class, while English was spoken in the lower class. For example, kings, aristocrats, ministers, lawyers, professions at that time would use the word "pork" instead of "pig" which was widely used in the lower class. King Richard I (1157 - 1199) spoke little English, although he ruled Britain for ten years. Because he just stayed in England for six month and most of his time was spent in France, he never set English as his first language or as the official language in Britain. Although English regained its dominant position in speech by the end of 14th century for a heroic war with France which lasted for 100 years, England was civilized by Noman way of living for centuries. Even in the

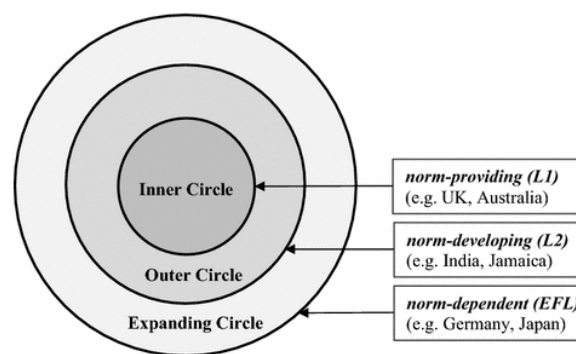
phrase of British Renaissance (1500 - 1660), the royal family and her aristocrats would like to speak French. But this bi-linguistic period represents that United Kingdom is not always settled in the centre of The Inner Circle in Kachru's "Concentric Circles". Time flies. The world is changing all the time. And English is of no exception. Therefore, it is not right to put Britain always in the Inner Circle of English.

(2) In Kachru's "Concentric Circles", countries in the same group circle may have different influential power in different periods of time. For example, in the 19th century, English was set as a solo standard with the rise of the British Empire, when English was worshiped as a fashion of world language with many people who wanted to learn the original taste of English Culture. But the two world wars in the 20th century changed the pace of English with the emerging of American English, Australian English, Canadian English and so on. The world becomes a multi-cultural melting pot that all kinds of "World Englishes" spring up like mushrooms. With the United States becoming the most powerful country in the world, millions of people rush to learn American English, which means British English is not so popular as it was before. This polycentric phenomenon of English as a world language begun in the 1980s (the time coincident with the time when Kachru made his "Concentric Circles"), is now worldly recognized. In other world, with time passing by, the influential power of the countries in the same group of Kachru's "Concentric Circles" may vary.

For example, American English is originated from British English, but it has gained more and more discourse power than it had before, and it is competing British English as a world English, to some extent. In other words, Kachru's "Concentric Circles" fails to have a detailed description on the relationship between countries of the same concentric circle.

(3) In Kachru's "Concentric Circles", the Inner Circle is placed in the core or the centre of this concentric circles, which is easily mislead people to think that the Inner Circle is the most important and countries of the Inner Circle have the most power in speech. It is unfair, especially for the people living in countries in the Expanding Circle. As we all know, all men are created equal. That is why Kachru's "Concentric Circles" are always criticized for its English Hegemony. English hegemony includes two pieces of meanings: English leadership and English imperialism. On the one hand, English's status as a world language is closely related with the rise of the British Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries. Since the 18th century, British English stepped out of the gate of Britain with its advance of overseas colonization policy. In other words, it is the "Sun-never-sets" British Empire that makes the "Sun-never-sets" British English. On the other hand, the colonization of British Empire is also the sin of its systematic language hegemony. Since the "Sun-set" of British Empire in the end of 19th century, history witnessed a lot of new-born countries from the British empire chose English as their official language or bi-lingual

official language, which makes British English be more prosperous after the collapse of the British empire. That is to say, the development of a language as a world language has a close relationship with the power of its native country, but it is not so intimately related. We see a new English variety --- American English is coming into power. In other words, Kachru's "Concentric Circles" fails to describe the polycentric English situation after the 1980s.



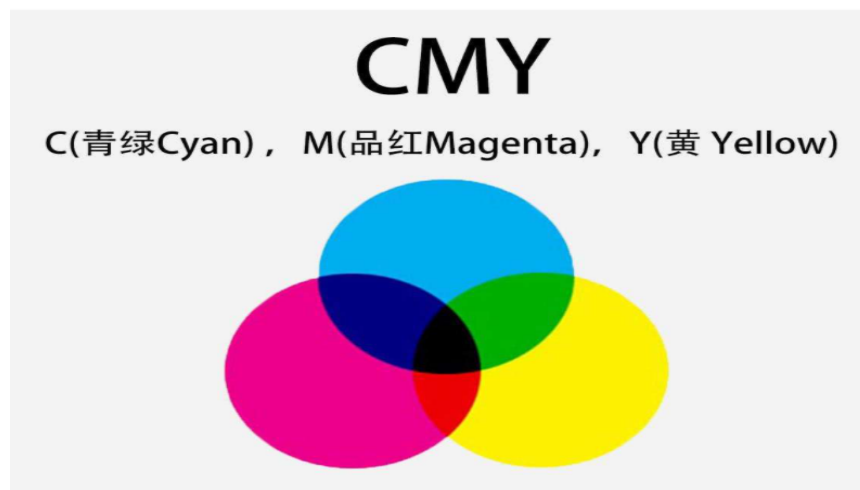
Picture1: Kachru's "Concentric Circles"

Here are the suggestions for Kachru's "Concentric Circles": firstly, everything changes with time. And English is of no exception. Therefore, it is not right to put Britain always in the Inner Circle of English. A time limitation should be added in Kachru's "Concentric Circles." For example, in the phrase of British Renaissance, UK is not among the group of Inner Circle. Second, Kachru's "Concentric Circles" just gives us a rough division, and it fails to have a detailed description on the relationship between countries of the same concentric circle. For example, although India, Malaysia, Kenya, Pakistan Singapore, Zimbabwe, and South Africa

belong to the Outer Circle, their influences in making English as a world language are different. Third, Kachru's "Concentric Circles" fails to describe the polycentric situation after the Cold War. There is no denying that British English was the core of the Inner Circle in the 19th century, but it is not the case now, for American English, Canadian English, Australia English are growing so fast that some of them seems has the potential to take place of British English.

3. Lizhen's Linguistic Tricolor Conjecture based on Kachru's Concentric Circles

Based on a historical reflection on Kachru's "Concentric Circles", linguistic tricolour conjecture is proposed here as a creative thinking. The original ideas are that: (1) All languages are created equal. So, we never draw this model in concentric circles. Instead, we view each language as unique and draw multi-circles coincide. They have their native characteristics, and they also have their similarities. All we need to do is to use a colour to specify each of them.



(2) We apply three circles with three primary colours to demonstrate three different catalogues of human languages. They are the languages of earth, which represent with yellow, the languages of sea, which represent with cyan and the languages of space, which represent with magenta. The languages of earth include Chinese, Egyptian and so on whose language is like picture-drawing. Yellow is worship in these countries. For example, all Chinese people admit that they are the descendants of the Yellow Emperor. The colour Yellow was forbidden to be used by ordinary people in Chinese feudalistic age, for yellow represents superpower and royal status in China. Egyptian worship the colour of green, which is a blended colour of yellow (Yellow stands for earth.) and blue (Blue stands for sea). Blue, as the colour of sea, is suitable to represent the languages of sea, for example, languages of UK, USA, Australia, France, Holland and so on, which are all coastal countries and their languages are produced based on their pronunciations, rather than picture-drawing. Just as the Chinese saying goes: Indigo blue is extracted from the indigo plant but is bluer than the plant it comes from. If we set British English as a language of light blue, then American English is a language of dark blue. It is not only because American English originated from British English, but also because American's great contribution in space, which is represented with the colour of magenta. And if we blend the colour of cyan and magenta, we get the colour of purple, which is closely like dark blue. The language

of space is computer language, which is represented with “0” and “1” in an electronic way, is far from the languages of earth and the languages of sea we use today. The combination of “0” and “1” in an electronic way makes the information transmitting much faster and more efficiency. That is the future of world languages.

(3) If we can strike a balance among the languages of earth, the languages of sea, and the languages of space, our world will be more and more harmonious and prosperous. In this linguistic tricolour conjecture, three circles are blended closely together, and influencing each other. They are all in a vigorous and dynamic way. Language is a soft power of a nation. We should be conscious of its native characteristics, meanwhile, we should be open-minded to respect its diversity, according to different geography, history, politics, economy, and cultures. Linguistic tricolour conjecture is a hypothesis of harmony between linguistic nature and human interaction.

Conclusion:

Kachru’s “Concentric Circles” divide “World Englishes” into three circles. The Inner Circle includes countries in which English is set as a native language, such as UK, USA, Austria, New Zealand, Canada, etc. The Outer Circle includes countries in which English is set as a second language, such as South Africa, India, Kenya, etc. The Expanding Circle includes countries in which English is set as a foreign language, such as China, Russia, France, Germany etc.

From a historic reflection on Kachru's "Concentric Circles", its shortcomings are obvious: First, it is not right to put Britain always in the Inner Circle of English. A time limitation should be added in Kachru's "Concentric Circles", for once French was the native language for the royal family in the Britain. Second, Kachru's "Concentric Circles" just gives us a rough division, and it fails to have a detailed description on how languages intermingle with each other, especially in the Outer Circle, where English is actively blended with its local language. Third, Kachru's "Concentric Circles" fails to describe the polycentric situation after the Cold War. British English was the core of the Inner Circle in the 19th century, but now American English, Canadian English, Austria English are growing so fast that some of them seems even have the potential to take place of British English.

Linguistic tricolour conjecture first proposed in this thesis cherish that all languages are created equal. Three equal circles with three primary colours are applied to demonstrate three different catalogues of human languages with yellow to represent the language of earth, cyan to represent the language of sea and magenta to represent the language of space. Chinese language belongs to the language of earth, whose words are created like pictures, English language belongs to the language of sea, whose words are created according to its pronunciation, and computer language with "0" and "1" in an electronic way belongs to the language of

space. These three equal circles are blended closely together and influencing each other. What we should do is to strike a harmonious balance among them. The significance of linguistic tricolour conjecture is to avoid English hegemony successfully, to represent the truthiness of language evolution efficiently from the perspective of linguistic equality and democracy.

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