

HPEN7004

Key Issues in Linguistics

Assignment 3: Essay

**Critique on Kachru's Concentric Circles Model
---- From the aspect of English norms**

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Abstract

This paper introduces Kachru's Concentric Circles Model from its background and theoretical development. Then, the paper focuses on the norms of English by critically assessing this specific aspect of Kachru's model, which is followed by further analysis on answering the key question – who should decide the norms of English? – using Kachru's model, and finds out that there are two different types of norms, namely, internationally intelligible form and highly-localised form, and it would be English expert speakers and those who are fluent in indigenised English varieties that mainly shape the two types of norms respectively. Moreover, the paper takes a bold attempt of proposing a revised model based on Kachru's Concentric Circles Model, which helps address one major limitation of Kachru's model while maintaining its advantages. The creativity and the practical implications of the revised model will be briefly discussed at last.

Key words: Kachru's Concentric Circles Model, norms of English, expert speaker

1. Introduction of Kachru's Concentric Circles Model

1.1 Background

The Three Concentric Circles model was firstly presented by Braj Kachru (Kachru, 1985), who was one of the elite figures in the field of world Englishes (Mufwene 2019). This theory was brought up against the backdrop of the wide and fast spread of English language world-widely.

Originated from the Anglo-Saxon language and appeared in the British Isles in around the fifth century, English grew up in the age of Discovery, the Industrial

Revolution, the Scientific Revolution, the age of colonialism, and many other significant historical events, through which English was introduced to many parts of the world and realised a pre-eminence position in becoming a global language (Crystal 2012, p. 29-30). For example, the first diaspora was English-speaking people migrating from Great Britain to countries such as America, Australia and New Zealand, and the second diaspora was the spread of English as the result of colonialism (Y. Kachru, Nelson 2006, p.9). Meanwhile, combined with other important socio-cultural aspects such as arts, media, international relations and education etc., English further became globally-promoted and developed into a language consisting of many varieties as each characterised by different distinctive use of sounds, vocabulary and grammar (Crystal 2012, see chapter 4). Therefore, English has undoubtedly become a global phenomenon and developed as “world Englishes” since it has been indigenized as well.

It is exactly with such background of English diffusion and “world Englishes” that Kachru proposed his Concentric Circles model in order to better capture both historical and sociolinguistic profile of English.

1.2 Model and theory

In his Three Circles Model, Kachru (1985) divided the English speakers into three groups according to their countries: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle.

The Inner Circle refers to the countries where English originally took shape and later was diffused globally through its first diaspora (Y. Kachru, Nelson

2006: pp.9). This includes the countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In those countries, English is the primary or sole language used in officialdom, education, society and every walks of life. English is used as the mother-tongue or, in most cases, the monolingual language.

The Outer Circle comprises the countries where English was introduced and transplanted during the age of colonialism (Y. Kachru, Nelson 2006, pp.10), and then nurtured by the majority of indigenous people in the process of “nativization” (B. Kachru, 1998: pp.68). The nations in the Outer Circle include India, Ghana, Kenya, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Nigeria, Philippines, Singapore, Pakistan, etc., where English is used as the second or official language.

The Expanding Circle is made up of countries where English is used as a foreign language. Countries in this circle include China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, most European, Latin American and Middle East countries, etc.

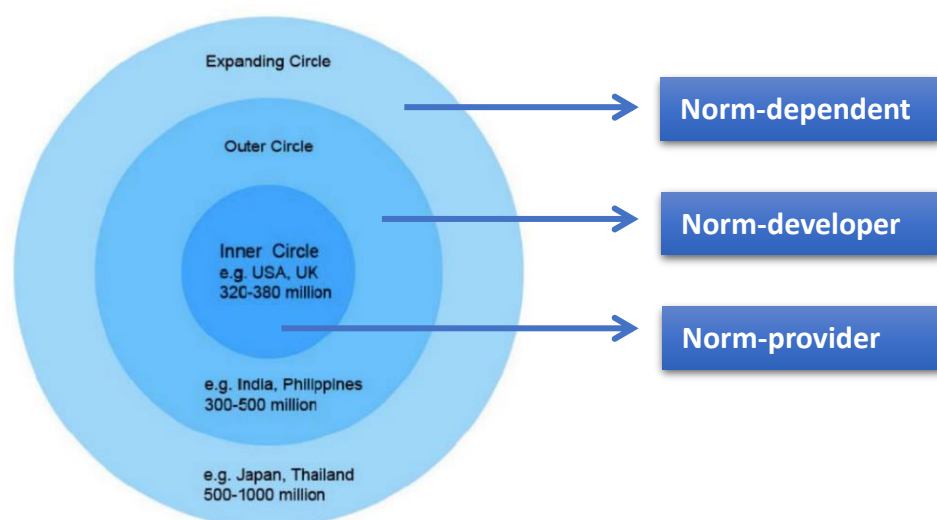


Figure 1. Kachru's Concentric Circles Model of World Englishes.
Adapted from Crystal (1997, p.54)

This model, pointed out by Kachru (1985) himself, provides a useful way of conceptualising the pluri-centricity of world Englishes. The three circles in the model represent “the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages” (Kachru, 1985, p.12).

1.3 Focal point: norms of English

It is undoubtedly that Kachru's Three Circles Model is a ground-breaking theory in the field of world Englishes, for its recognition of the roles that countries in the Outer and Expanding Circle play in the adoption, adaptation and development of English language.

One important aspect that this theory talks about is the standard and norms of English: who should decide the norms of English? In his first version of this model, Kachru (1985) described countries in the Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circle respectively as norm-providing, norm-developing and norm-dependent. Whether this is still the case in today's world?

The reason of choosing this specific aspect is the outstanding paradox between the variety and the standardisation of English nowadays. On the one hand, further accelerated by internet and globalisation these years, for example, globalisation in trade, education, social media, films, etc., English is now used as an official or second language in more than 100 countries in all 7 continents, and is used in more than 85% international organisations as an official language (Crystal, 2012). Therefore, today's English has truly become

a “globalish” that associates with so many varieties in the process of English “indigenisation”, showcasing the vibrancy and diversity of different cultures, and it leads to the changing and more diverse, but at the same time more complex, linguistic profile of English.

On the other hand, when it comes to practical issues such as what is the right word(s) to use in a particular context, what is the correct grammar to learn? what is the right pronunciation when read and speak, or what is the proper way of translating the semantic meaning of a certain sentence from English to other languages, we realise that a widely accepted norms of English is very important. However, mentioned by Crystal (2003), unlike Italian or French, in the case of English, there is no academy or institution established to set the codification of norms of English after two failed attempts in the UK and USA.

Therefore, it is necessary to examine the validity of Kachru’s model and his logic on this aspect. That is to say, we need to discuss who, from these three circles or any other groups, should decide the norms of English?

2. Kachru’s Model on English norms

2.1 Kachru’s model and its modification

In his original proposal of the Three Circles Model in 1985, Kachru (1985) stated that the norms of English should be provided by the English speakers in the Inner Circle, and developed by English speakers from the Outer Circle, and the people from the Expanding Circle would be norm-dependent. It is because such “indigenisation” is more like an adaptation that the local non-heritage

population imported English, then use it as a communication tool to reflect their own cultures, and moreover, those people are proud of making new changes of English norms to distinguish their cultural identity from the speakers in the Inner Circle especially in the post-colonialism period (Mufwene, 2009). Therefore, Kachru believed the Outer Circle speakers serve as the “norm-developer”.

However, later in 1996, he revised his own model and re-conceptualised the English fellowships by including speakers of the Outer Circle in the norm-providing users as well (Kachru, 1996). That is to say, both L1 and L2 speakers in Inner and Outer Circles would be categorised as the norm-provider, and the Expanding Circle remains to be norm-dependent. The main reason of this change is the fast development of local norms of Outer Circle and their increasing engagement in the English acquisition, teaching and creating work (Rajadurai, 2005).

2.2 Model strength from the perspective of English norms

2.2.1 Recognising English varieties

One strength of this model is that it recognises the varieties of English and brings people’s attention to world Englishes (see Kachru, 1998; Mufwene, 2019; Seidlhofer, 2009). It is natural that the Inner Circle would decide most norms of English as these countries are where English originated. Meanwhile, Kachru was quite right about the changing norms of English, especially in the Outer Circle, and more importantly, such norm-change does not confine itself only in the Outer Circle, but has penetrated to the rest. There are plenty of

back up evidence, for example, words such as “gonna”, “wanna”, “ain’t” are coming from African American Vernacular English (also known as Ebonics) It was the result of many kinds of mixture and simplification of Creole formations which were originally spoken by Creole-speaking slaves who were imported from Caribbean (the Outer Circle) (Rickford). Such varieties are now widely accepted and integrated into American English (the Inner Circle). Moreover, point out by David Crystal (s), two key drivers that shape a language are understanding – for communication purpose, and identity – to represent who we are, and the latter fast grows into accents and dialects. Therefore, to show such identity is an important reason why many L2 artists, singers, scriptwriters for example, are very keen on expressing their art pieces using certain English variety (Crystal, 2015), either vocabulary or pronunciation, consciously or unconsciously, boosting the spread of “new Englishes” world-widely.

Furthermore, the influence of English varieties on English norms is not only rooted in the history, but also lies in the future – such trend has become increasingly evident as catalysed by a mix of scientific, technological, economic and social factors, especially the internet booming and globalisation. Therefore, I find Kachru particularly far-sighted as he set out this model and explained the development of English norms as early as in 1980s, even earlier than the invention of WWW which was in 1989. Internet and globalisation have brought our world into a global village and enabled speakers from different circles to communicate in “new Englishes”, and to spread it much faster than before. For instance, you can get access to and learn particular linguistic rules of a certain type of English variety of a small remote country in Outer Circle even without knowing where that country is on the map.

2.2.2 Core status of original native English

Another good point of this model is that Kachru makes the model as concentric circles, instead of three separate ones, and the rationale behind it is the core essential status of original native English which was mostly spoken in the Inner Circle. Some scholars may argue that the “inner” and “outer” concept would lead to divergence and superiority of certain countries over the other (See Phillipson, 1992; Graddol, 1997; Modiano, 1999). However, what is crucial is that, though using country to group could be problematic¹, the purpose Kachru’s model is not about the superiority of a particular group of countries (Mufwene, 2019), but to highlight the importance of native English over non-native English, and of international intelligible form (Nelson, 2019) of English over locally understood colloquial form, in shaping the norms of standard English. Just like Kachru (1984) himself stressed, the Inner Circle is made up of “the traditional cultural and linguistic bases of English”.

The idea of putting native English in the Inner Circle as the core essential English or the most significant part of the traditional English norms can also be found in people’s favourable attitude towards the pronunciation of native English in the Inner Circle. For example, Scholars argues that, in spite of the pride in their own English varieties which reflect their cultural identities, speakers in a number of studies have quite often expressed a yearning and preference for traditional variety norms and for the native-speaker accent (Jenkins, 2005; Timmis, 2002; Dalton, et al. 1997). In addition to the Outer Circle, this native English and old norms-favourable attitude can also be found

¹ which will be discussed in more details later

in Expanding Circle too. For example, in China's official textbooks for College English course, the content reflecting British English and its culture as well as American English and its culture represent 68.7% and 53.1% respectively, whereas that ratio of Australia and New Zealand are very low, let alone Englishes spoken in the Outer Circle, which number is literally zero (Wang, 2010). That's to say, the traditional native English norms are still the most popular and widely-accepted rules that dominate the English world and serve the function of "norm-provider".

2.3 Model Limitations from the perspective of English norms

As mentioned before, to categorise circles or English speakers by their countries can be tricky. This is because, although countries can, to some extent, reflect the historical and cultural roots which is one of the important drivers to shape a language (Crystal, 2015), it might be over-simplified and out-dated to group by countries, given the intricate and fast-changing language environment involving political, economic, social and cultural aspects, etc.

2.3.1 Within one circle

Firstly, we look within the circles, and there are diverse varieties in different regions and therefore lead to different norms of using English. In Inner Circle Great Britain, for example, only about 9% to 12% of its population speak Standard English, and even still with some extent of accent (Trudgill, 1999), and Crystal (2003) records that less than 3 % of its population speak pure form of Received Pronunciation (RP). Although countries in the Inner Circle are always deemed as language monoliths, the reality is not the case: you can find

“intricate language mosaics” in the forms of divergence or hybridisation, and it can be noted in places with different cultural characteristics such as Wales in the UK and Texas in the USA, or more melting-pot “world cities” such as London, New York, Sydney and Montreal (McArthur, 2001).

Such differences in English norms will be even more obvious in the Outer Circle and Expanding Circle because English will be used either as a foreign language or influenced by other spoken languages and local cultures. An interesting story told by David Crystal in his presentation at Cambridge University press (2019) was about the word “Robert” being used very frequently and widely for the meaning of “traffic light” in South Africa, but would make no sense to other countries or even to a native speaker from the Inner Circle. This is because English can be so culturally-embedded when indigenized in different parts of the world, and therefore many local colloquialism or local norms just cannot be used in the context of Standard or internationally accepted English. That’s why I intend to disagree with Kachru’s modification of making Outer Circle as norm-provider in his model.

2.3.2 Among the circles

Secondly, we look among the three circles. Researches have unveiled the fact that, on the one hand, there are people in the Outer Circle, who are only familiar with highly localised form of English, speaking poorer English than those fluent speakers in Expanding Circle (Rajadurai, 2005). On the other hand, there are people in the countries of Expanding Circle speaking very fluent or even native-like English. Many of such examples can be seen in

Europe where share many linguistic and cultural similarities with the UK. Germany is a very good example in this case, because English and German share many linguistic similarities as English itself is a Germanic language which is categorised in the Indo-European language family (Grammarly blog), making it much easier for German people learn English, and English has been used extensively and intensively in Germany for quite a while (Graddol, 1997) that many German population can speak English like other L2 or Outer Circle countries. Moreover, given Germany's central position in the European Union and the neighbourhood with the Great Britain, English has been served in various political, commercial, educational and cultural settings (Berns, 1995), which is really hard to still keep Germany in the Expanding Circle.

Furthermore, education is a primary part of setting English norms, and when it comes to TEFL or TESOL, it will also support the argument that English norms can be provided by the speakers from all three circles, rather than being constrained only in the countries of Inner Circle or Outer Circle. For example, Belgium supplies English teachers to Morocco, while Pakistan teachers teaching English in Arabian Gulf States, recorded by Strevens (1992). Similarly, Seidlhofer and Jenkins (2003) notice that the English norms and standards that developed locally from a number of countries in either Outer Circle or Expanding Circle have been used not only domestically but also "exported" to other places through ESL/EFL teachers, textbooks and training sessions, etc.

In conclusion, Kachru provides two key valid points in the rationale behind his model, and they are 1) the importance of recognising English varieties, and 2)

stressing the significant role of Standard English on shaping the norms. However, at the same time, grouping by countries is a major widely argued drawback of the model. Every language has a life cycle, and the status of a language can change very dramatically as a result of various reasons, especially in a multilingual society (Bolton, 2005). So, it is natural if a language model needs to update to echo the times. Therefore, in the next part of the essay, based on Kachru's Three Circles Model, I will make further analysis in answering the key question of norms authority, offer some suggestions and attempt to propose a revised model in which the strength of Kachru's model could be remained whereas limitations could be dealt with.

3. Further analysis: who should decide English norms?

To rethink this focal question, I believe two essential aspects need to be addressed. One is "who" and one is "norms".

3.1 The "Who" aspect

Regarding the "who" aspect, in Kachru's model, it is certain countries that provide the norms. However, as we discussed above, there are problems of using countries to define the English-speaking population. The purpose of using nationality is to distinguish the native speakers. Scholars such as Richards and Tay (1981) define three key requirements in order to become a native English speaker: "1) grammatical well-formedness, 2) speech-act rules, and 3) functional elaboration and code diversity, instead of only identifying them by either their birthplace or whether they come from one of the traditional English native-speaking countries. That's is to say, it is more about the

language competence and proficiency, rather than the nationality, that characterise “native speaker”. Such definition makes it possible for native speakers of English to be found in all three circles. This can well explain the aforementioned observations of TESOL teachers can also come from Outer and Expanding Circles, and not only solve the issues such as in which circle should people like ABC (American-born Chinese) or BBC (British-born Chinese) be placed, but also rightly remove the speakers who are only familiar with the localised English varieties but belong to Inner or Outer Circle, from the group of “norm-provider”.

Furthermore, to avoid possible confusion of readers, another terminology can be more helpful. Rampton (1990) proposes the idea of replacing the term “native speaker” with “expert speaker”, highlighting the concept of language competence instead of nativeness. Therefore, it can reasonably answer the “who” question through characterisation of “expert speakers”. In this way, while breaking down constraints brought by nation boundaries, it is also in line with Kachru’s logic of picking up people competent in English as “norm-provider”.

3.2 The “Norms” aspect

In Kachru’s original model, he argued that only native speakers can provide norms of English. Other scholars such as Rajadurai (2005) agree with this point by saying no matter how we try to conceptualise the development of Englishes, it is still established on Inner Circle’s norms, and this is best captured in written form in some formal varieties of English. Again, to stress the central place in deciding the norms is not about superiority of certain

countries, but rather, authorisation of expert speakers.

Cambridge Dictionary (online) defines “norms” as “generally accepted standard”. In terms of a language, this should refer to the notion of English’s “intelligibility” – whether the way of speaking English can be understood by listeners from the same speech community (Smith, 1992). Moreover, Smith (1992) argues that not all varieties of English would necessarily be intelligible to each other. So, it brings us a question, should the way of a person who is only fluent in pidginised English, colloquial or highly localised English uses in English speaking count as English norms?

This is the central logic in Kachru’s own modification of his model in terms of “norm-provider”. If we take a deeper thought about the definition of the “norms” in the two versions of his model, a tricky but crucial point is that the two “norms” are two different types because he was talking about two different speech communities – the “norms” of the original model refers to internationally accepted standards which mostly come from the native English speakers, whereas the “norms” of the modified model refers to both internationally and locally accepted standards which mostly derived from L1 and L2 countries respectively.

Although adding Outer Circle to “norm-provider” in Kachru’s modified model can better illustrate the significance of World Englishes, some norms of various local varieties of English can be too restricted to be intelligible by English speakers of other community, sometimes even including expert speakers.

Jenkins (2000) also notices the difference in norms and therefore suggests any attempt to build a new model of norms needs to take such difference into account. Widdowson (1998, pp.399-400) also agrees on this point by arguing that English “cannot be international and national at the same time”.

4. Proposal of a revised model

After the detailed analysis of Kachru’s model, I would attempt to propose a revised model in which the aforementioned arguments would be reflected.

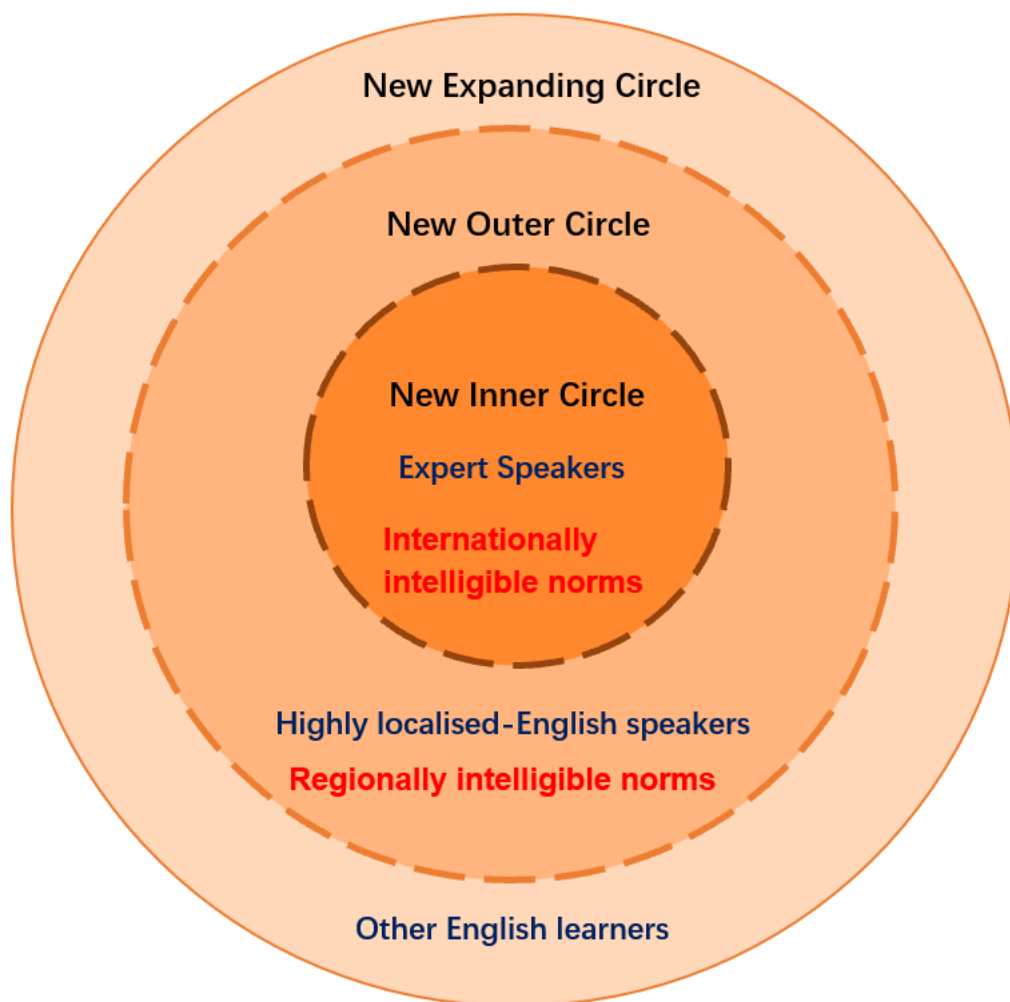


Figure 2: Proposed revised model based on Kachru’s Concentric Circles Model

4.1 Key points of the proposed model:

- (1) In the revised model, there are still three concentric circles but meaning differently. They are: “New Inner Circle”, “New Outer Circle” and “New Expanding Circle”. Unlike Kachru’s model where circles referring to different countries, New Circles in the revised model represent English speakers.
- (2) The criteria to decide which circle(s) would an English speaker fits are the English language proficiency and intelligibility.
- (3) The people in the “New Inner Circle” are the expert speakers of English, who can speak native Standard English, and it is internationally-intelligible norms that being used in this circle. They are the “internationally-intelligible English norms provider”.
- (4) The people in the “New Outer Circle” are speakers who are fluent in highly localised varieties of English, and it is regionally-intelligible norms that being used in this circle. They are the “regionally-intelligible English norms provider”.
- (5) The people in the “New Expanding Circle” are the rest of English learners, including beginners, and they are trying to access to either the “New Inner Circle” or “the New Outer Circle” through following a certain type of English norms of their own choices.
- (6) The dotted-line shows the flows and dynamism of English speakers in three circles, and each circle is not exclusive.

4.2 Explanation of the revised model

As we discussed in 2.3: categorising English speakers simply by their

countries is one limitation of Kachru's model, so the language proficiency and intelligibility are used instead in the revised model, and analysis in 3.1 proves the new grouping way will not only address the uncertainty or ambiguity in placing some countries in circles, but also underline the key role those expert speakers play in shaping the English norms.

Meanwhile, we discussed two advantages of Kachru's model in 2.2, including recognising the localised English norms and at the same time highlighting the core status of the norms of the standard English. Then, the analysis in 3.2 distinguishes two types of norms ---- international norms of English which refers to internationally-accepted standards and regional norms of English which associates with the standards that only regionally accepted. The revised model, therefore, clearly points out these two types of norms and argues that the international norms are decided by expert speakers of English in the "New Inner Circle" and the regional norms are shaped by the people who only speak highly localised/indigenised variety of English in the "New Outer Circle".

Moreover, another creativity in this revised model is the dotted line between the circles. This means 1) each circle is not exclusive and can have overlaps, for example, there are people who are fluent in both internationally-intelligible form of English and highly-indigenised local varieties of English; 2) there can be flows among different circles. Unlike Kachru's model where people are confined in one circle once you are born, this revised model allows a dynamic identification according to the level of language proficiency, or the speaker can adjust his language by switching between international norms and regional

norms according to context, such practice has been recorded in Crystal's book (2003). For instance, people tend to speak the same dialect as the one used by the people with whom they have conversation, and they can be "bidialectal" (Rajadurai, 2005); 3) for English beginning learners in the "New Expanding Circle", they can choose themselves which kind of norms that they would like to follow, which will then lead them to different circles. This can exert many practical implications on English learning, for example, people who work in an international environment, diplomatic front, transnational enterprises or an interpreter, are more likely to seek learning internationally intelligible norms of English, but for a pedlar on the street, on the other hand, a more localised colloquialism would probably be more suitable. More implications can be made on the choice of native English-speaking teacher (NEST) and non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) in the classroom.

Of course, this is still an initial idea of modelling, and it's inevitable to have flaws, such as what the criteria are for becoming an Expert speaker of English and get into the "New Inner Circle", which would need further research. But in general, by proposing this revised three circles model, we solve one major limitation of Kachru's model, and at the meanwhile, inherit the two important advantages of his model.

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