The Prospects of Global English as an Inclusive Language

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Abstract: English is increasingly a global language, as it is the world’s most popular second language and the primary language of international communication. The emergence of English as a global language raises many potential normative challenges, such as the risks that it will erode minority cultures and that it will give core English speaking countries an unfair advantage over nonnative speakers. I argue that global English can be made more inclusive for nonnative speakers and that the benefits of global English can therefore be realized without suppressing the cultures of nonnative English speakers. However, realizing this potential depends on overcoming the beliefs that English should be neutral and that there is a standard correct form of English.

Keywords: Language Policy; Global English; Cosmopolitanism; Nationalism.

Although the dominance of English as a global language is not assured, it is an increasingly likely prospect. The popularity of English as a second language, as well the ubiquity of English in business, science, mass media, and other fields, indicates that English will increasingly become the world language over the next century (Crystal 2003). The possibility of a truly international language coming into existence raises many normative problems. Among the most urgent problems are: whether global English will suppress non-English speaking cultures, whether it will unfairly disadvantage those who learn English as a Second Language, and whether English’s dominance will be considered legitimate by nonnative speakers.

Commentators tend to be sharply divided in their answers to these questions. The existence of an international language facilitates international communication in countless ways, making it easier to do everything from traveling to spreading awareness about political causes (Khondker 2011). Some are particularly optimistic about English’s potential to serve as a mechanism for global economic development (McCallan 1989; Coulmas 1992). These are compelling reasons to support the global use of English, but there is a serious risk that the benefits of global English will be realized unevenly, benefitting those in core English speaking countries more than nonnative speakers.
Critics of English language dominance have questioned the interests that English has historically served and the future costs that the widespread use of a single language may have. Many have called attention to the language’s historical association with colonialism, and its current links to economic and cultural globalization (Phillipson 1994, 2001, 2007, 2008; Pennycook 1995, 2007, 1998; May 2001). These scholars have shown that language is inextricably linked to power relationships and that the strengthening or weakening of languages, in terms of their prestige and institutional protection, can play a critical role in empowering or disempowering the languages’ speakers. Critics also argue that the spread of English threatens the survival of other languages, thereby endangering the minority cultures that are linked to those languages and providing another mechanism by which the citizens of core English speaking countries assert global dominance (Grenoble and Whaley 1998). These critics are right to call attention to the potential costs of linguistic hegemony and homogenization. At the same time, their arguments also suffer from several limitations. First, critics of global English tend to focus too much on English’s historical association with oppressive practices, such as colonialism and economic exploitation. Although it is important to be cognizant of English’s history, judging English’s future prospects based on its past uses reifies the language by insinuating that English is inextricably linked to the power relations that initiated its spread. Second, and even more seriously, critics of global English tend to overstate the extent to which English spreads at the expense of other languages and cultures. These critics tend to present the use of English as a zero-sum game, which prevents them from recognizing English’s potential as a means of protecting minority interests in the future.

The shortcomings of the arguments for and against English as a global language indicate the need for an alternative strategy for assessing the potential consequences of English language
dominance. The best strategy is one that recognizes the ways in which language supports certain power relations while also being attentive to the potential benefits of facilitating communication between people who would otherwise belong to distinct linguistic communities. I will argue that global English has the potential to become an inclusive language – in the sense of protecting rather than suppressing differences between groups– that can be partially detached from its existing power relations and used as a means for previously marginalized groups to express their interests to a global audience. Developing English in this way would make it possible to more realistically respond to the potential costs of linguistic hegemony while also making the prospective benefits of a global language more attainable.

Realizing English’s potential as an inclusive language depends on establishing three core premises. First, it is essential to abandon the idea that language is a neutral medium of communication and accept that languages reflect specific identities, values, and interests. The belief that a language can be neutral, in the sense of being free from connotations and cultural particularities, and not supporting certain power relations, is a cornerstone of arguments in favor of English as a global language. However, this belief in language neutrality is empirically flawed and actually hinders the normative argument in favor of global English. Critics of English dominance have challenged the idea of language neutrality, but many have made this point by assuming languages have a fixed and unalterable character, such that English is inextricably linked to practices of domination and oppression. This leads to the second important point: languages are malleable. Languages are open to reconstruction from the inside as users transform their languages to articulate different interests and identities. A language’s role in sustaining power relations or articulating particular interests can change if the language is transformed in ways that allow them to express different identities, interests, and values. Third,
reconstructing global English as an inclusive language depends on abandoning the idea of a standard version of English and instead recognizing the various Englishes used around the world as having equal status. Global English, reconceived as an open and alterable language that can exist in multiple forms, can serve as a means of overcoming linguistic barriers while also protecting cultures of nonnative speakers. This type of pluralistic global English can also be a force for minority protection. A global language allows marginalized groups to express their interests to an international audience. Mass competence in a single language can also help to ensure that language differences cannot be used as a basis for political exclusion.

The first section of this essay will raise the problem of whether it is possible for English to be considered a neutral language that lacks association with political ideologies or that is free from power relations. In the second section, I will argue that language neutrality is illusory. Contemporary English cannot be detached from the political context in which it achieved its status as a global language or from the power relations that helps to support. The third section will show that the impossibility of English language neutrality is actually advantageous. Abandoning the ideal of language neutrality opens the possibility of developing multiple Englishes that are oriented toward reflecting cultural differences rather than being engaged in a continual struggle to achieve neutrality. In the final section I will argue that global English can be a progressive force to the extent that the idea of Standard English is abandoned and English is developed as a pluralistic language. When framed in this way, global English can serve as a means of international dialogue while still being sufficiently adaptable that it can incorporate, rather than suppress, cultural differences.
English Language Neutrality

One of the central points of contention in the debate over global language is whether any language can be considered a neutral medium of communication, either in the sense of either being detached from relations of power between language users or lacking any association with political ideologies. Claims that language itself or specific languages are neutral are extremely important when evaluating the desirability of a global language. If language is intrinsically neutral, then all languages may be considered equally suitable as global languages. By contrast, if some languages are neutral and others are embedded in power relations or have ideological baggage, then the former would seem to be much better candidates for international use than the latter. The possibility of language neutrality particularly important in the debate over global English, as some invoke English’s neutrality an explanation for why English is uniquely suited for international use. Moreover, the argument that English is neutral is not only powerful because it provides grounds for accepting the spread of English but also because it strongly implies the correlative argument that languages other than English are inferior or problematic because they are not neutral.

Fishman (1977, 1989, 1992) is among the most notable scholars to describe English as a neutral language. He develops this point with historical and sociological analyses of English. In his historical accounts of English, Fishman describes the language’s transmission to non-English speaking countries as being largely the result of peaceful mechanisms. Non-English speakers spread the language by choosing to use English because it provides opportunities for social and economic mobility, while English speakers spread the language through immigration and travel. Fishman’s sociological argument is that English is generally perceived as being neutral by those living in areas where English usage is growing. For example, he says that “in much of the Third World, and elsewhere as well, the image of English may well be ethnically and ideologically
quite neutral, so that it may be related more to appreciably generalized, de-ethnicized, and de-ideologized process variables” (Fishman 1977: 119). The historical and sociological arguments are closely linked. Fishman presents the contemporary acceptance of English as being the product of English’s unique process of transmission. Adding to English’s neutral status, Fishman finds that other languages carry much stronger associations with political ideologies. For example, he thinks that Spanish is associated with “conquistador Catholicism,” Chinese with Maoism, Russian with communism, and Arabic with Islam (Fishman1989: 246). These associations make these languages appear to be unattractive as potential global languages.

Khubchandani states a more moderate version of the neutrality thesis by distinguishing between different paths that language transmission can take and considering the alternative connotations that these paths can result in. Khubchandani finds two major traditions of English as a contact language: one based on colonialism and another based on the post-WWII spread of mass media (2002: 312). Khubchandani argues that the former was an overtly oppressive use of English language education, as it was based on excluding local languages and legitimizing English by mythologizing it. This mechanism of spreading English gave the language a negative connotation that compromised its prospects of being considered neutral, especially among those who directly experienced English as a being an instrument in colonial domination. However, Khubchandani argues that the spread of English through mass media appears to be far more benevolent because it happens primarily through voluntary engagement with English on the part of those who consume English language mass media. Unlike the colonial route of language transmission, Khubchandani thinks that a language that gains influence by being peacefully accepted through free choices may have a neutral or even a positive connotation among those who learn that language. Thus, like Fishman, Khubchandani conceptualizes language neutrality
as a matter of how a language is transmitted, rather than an intrinsic characteristic of language. However, Khubchandani distinguishes between how the language is viewed by different populations based on their own experiences with English education and the power structures supported by English language use.

Most of the claims of English neutrality seen to come from the policymakers whose actions shape the spread of global English. As Phillipson (1994) points out, over the past two centuries, leaders of core English speaking countries, especially the United States and Britain, have attempted to propagate the use of English and have justified this effort with claims of English neutrality. Officials presented their language policies as unambiguously benevolent attempts to civilize foreign populations. Similar reasoning appears in contemporary claims that English may serve as a means of social and economic mobility for nonnative speakers. This argument, which holds that individuals, collectives, and entire countries, can improve their status by learning English and taking part in the global economy, provides a compelling case for supporting global English. Individuals may have access to higher paying jobs if they can learn English, and countries with high English literacy can make themselves more attractive to foreign firms (Coulmas 1992). Although this argument may be developed without any explicit claims of English neutrality, those who raise it tend to assume that English is a neutral language. After all, if the economic opportunities that English introduces are to benefit nonnative speakers, they must be opportunities that are broadly accessible to those who learn English as a second language. This in turn demands that the language must not be responsible creating or reinforcing for any power asymmetries that would hinder upward mobility.

Proponents of global English are right to point out that an international language can have many potential benefits. These not only include facilitating free trade and introducing nonnative
English speakers into the global market but also promoting transnational political organizing and cultural exchange. However, as I will show in the next section, claims of English neutrality are empirically problematic and actually hinder the case for global English by overestimating the importance of neutrality.

**Contesting English Neutrality**

Arguments against the claims of English neutrality generally focus on English’s historical link to colonialism and the way it continues to protect the interests of the core English speaking countries. Phillipson (2008) argues that English is inseparably linked to the core English speaking countries’ histories of colonialism, and that English language instruction in foreign countries promotes reliance on the core countries and the suppression of other languages. He also blames international organizations like the European Union for being complicit in English’s linguistic colonization of other countries by uncritically accepting English’s increasing influence by promoting its usage (Phillipson 2008). Some have countered Phillipson by arguing that he overlooks the many other, more significant ways in which imperialism takes place and that he is guilty of promoting a conspiratorial view of language policies (Holborow 1999; Spolsky 2004). However, Phillipson has responded to this by maintaining that linguistic imperialism appears in conjunction with various other forms of imperialism, while still maintaining his position that English is one of the primary forces of domination (Phillipson 2007).

Pennycook takes a position similar to Phillipson’s, as he argues that English’s current popularity must be seen in light of the cultural and political forces that propagated it. English was, he says, “a major language in which colonialism has been written” (Pennycook 1998: 9). This has left an enduring mark on those who were pressured into learning the language by colonial administrations. Moreover, even in the post-colonial world, the spread of English into
non-core English speaking countries is linked to foreign political control and economic exploitation (Pennycook 1998, 1995). Pennycook also worries that the rise of global languages threatens to produce cultural homogenization (2007: 79). Because language is an important component of culture and a basis for individual and group identity, homogenization threatens to suppress or even destroy the cultures of non-English speaking people. This claim that homogenization is intrinsically harmful without respect to the specific mechanisms of spreading English goes beyond the critique of the mechanisms of English language transmission to assert that any global language is inherently dangerous, regardless of the means by which it achieves dominance.

Some of the opponents of the English neutrality thesis maintain that the economic incentives for learning English help to legitimize a harmful, hegemonic process. Phillipson calls the belief that English has economic benefits “the functional argument.” He rejects this argument on the grounds that it is simply an excuse for “linguistic imperialism,” and considers it a way of hiding the harms of global English without actually addressing them (Phillipson 2001). May also challenges the link between English and economic prosperity and sought to demonstrate that English is by no means a neutral language, saying that this “acts to reinforce the dominant economic and political position of nation-states such as Britain and the USA in the modern world (May 2001: 215).

The critics of English language neutrality have provided strong evidence that English usage has spread through practices of colonialism and selective economic incentives that have promoted western interests, and they are right to maintain that this undermines English’s neutrality. Moreover, even when English spreads through the relatively peaceful means of mass culture, it may do so at the expense of media produced by speakers of other languages, making it
threatening because of its capacity to suppress cultural differences (Nettle and Romaine 2000). It seems doubtful that any language, especially one that rises to prominence to become a serious contender for the position of a global language, could be truly neutral in the sense of not creating or sustaining power asymmetries. Even if it were possible for a language to be freed from association with the repressive or exploitative practices that may have led it to become a dominant language, that language might still be seen as a foreign product that may lack the capacity to articulate particular identities, especially cultural identities that have a linguistic component. This is especially likely if attempts are made to maintain a language’s neutrality by preventing it from being reshaped by any particularistic interests nonnative speakers might attempt to introduce by reshaping usage.

However, the case for global English does not have to rest on the claim that English is neutral. On the contrary, I maintain that the case in favor of global English can be made even more persuasively if the hope for neutrality is abandoned. Instead, the focus should be on exploring how the power asymmetries reinforced by English use or the political ideologies associated with English can be transformed in more inclusive ways. A neutral language would be one that is bereft of the particularistic marks that allow language serve as a meaningful cultural artifact. English’s lack of neutrality is part of what makes the case for global English compelling, as it raises the possibility that nonnative speakers may transform the shared language to reflect their own cultures and interests, and that these will therefore not be lost as English usage spreads. By abandoning the hope that English may be a neutral language, it becomes possible to think about how the power asymmetries created by English language dominance may be renegotiated and restructured in more inclusive ways.
The Standard Language Ideology

Languages differ dramatically in their grammatical structure, word order, and the size of their vocabulary. Differences in vocabulary can create the impression that some languages are better suited for certain tasks and that some are objectively better than others, but this impression is deeply misguided. As Milroy and Milroy argue, “all languages and dialects will, when compared with others, appear to have ‘gaps’ in the system at some point” (1999: 12), even when those languages include the resources necessary to express the same ideas. Moreover, any genuine advantage a language might have over others would be fleeting. Languages are constantly changing and extremely malleable. If they lack the vocabulary to communicate certain ideas, new words and ways of speaking can be incorporated into the language to increase the range of expression. This is evident in the way that English and many other languages have been able to introduce countless new words to describe emerging technologies; vocabulary has steadily changed to reflect changes in speakers’ lives. The alterability of language has two important consequences. First, languages are open to transformation by their users and can be adjusted to conform to speakers’ expressive needs. Second, because languages can be changed to meet speakers’ needs, no language is uniquely suited to capturing a particular identity or culture.

Studies of the relationship between language and social practices reveal that languages can be adapted to express a range of values, even fairly complex and politically significant values. For example, Richard Anderson links Russia’s transition from Soviet autocracy to democracy to a linguistic shift that matched the population’s changing values (Anderson 1996). He argues that changes in the way political words like “citizen” and “politician” are used instigate conceptual changes, which in turn shape political attitudes (Anderson 2001: 98). Anderson attributes the undemocratic nature of the Soviet Union to the language of the elites. “In the Soviet case, authoritarian communist rulers practiced a quantitatively distinctive discourse whose features
distanced the speaker from the population by elongating utterances and by removing the speaker from the deictic center” (Anderson 2001: 124-5). As Anderson shows, Russian is equally capable of expressing authoritarian and democratic ideas. Anderson’s research, as well as other studies of the political and social function of language, shows that languages can be adapted to express a range of values (Laitin 1977, 1992). Similarly, Gal (2005) shows that English and Russian employed much different metaphors for expressing the concepts of public and private during the Cold War, with the former characterizing these geographically, as distinct spaces or spheres, and the latter characterizing these with concepts relating to individual status. However, Gal also demonstrates that these different types of metaphors emerged in relation to the political contest between capitalism and communism and that both languages remained capable of conceptualizing the other’s metaphors for public and private.

The malleability of language is critical to bear in mind when considering the prospects of global English. As the examples of language change in response to changing economic and political circumstances show, languages can be remade by their speakers in ways that allow a language to articulate different concepts, interests, and values. Thus, even if English has historically been associated with repressive practices and is currently a means of maintaining political and economic power structures, as the critics of global English maintain, it nevertheless is possible for the language to develop in ways that overcome these limitations. English has the potential to develop into an inclusive language as it spreads if those who use it are able to adjust the language in ways that allow it to reflect their own particular interests. The potential threat posed by English language dominance is not primarily with the mechanism by which the language has historically spread or with its connotations among those who currently learn English as a second language, which are often the focus of the debate over whether English
usage can be considered ideologically or culturally neutral. Rather, the most serious problem emerging as English becomes increasingly widespread is that the core English speaking countries will continue to assert control over the language by either preventing other English speakers from transforming the language or discrediting their efforts to do so.

The primary means by which core English speaking countries maintain their control over English is by promoting the ideology of the standard language. This is the belief that there is a single authentic version of the language and that other variants of the language are dialects that reflect improper ways of speaking. This belief can be characterized as an ideology because it is an empirically questionable belief that is perpetuated under the guise of being common sense, and that functions to legitimize existing relations of political, social, and economic power between various users of English (Woolard 1992: 237). As Silverstein (1996) shows, standard language ideology is largely perpetuated by the many social commentators who criticize linguistic degeneration or offer advice, and is often based on faulty empirical claims. “Numerous columnists and other occasional writers, with zero actual expertise, devote great numbers of column inches to talking of the ‘obfuscations’ of truthful reality evidenced in social dialects, chic or trendy usages, and so forth” (Silverstein 1996: 292).

The standard language ideology plays a critical role in allowing languages to be means by which actors can assert power. If core English speaking countries have the most authentic version of the language, then they are in the best position to arbitrate usage and to give preference to those who speak “proper English.” This provides the basis for doing everything from favoring proper English speakers for jobs to establishing a privileged space for cultural artifacts encoded in proper English. This ideology also creates an image of Standard English as what Silverstein calls a “gradiently possessible commodity” that is the key to social mobility.
This encourages those who speak other Englishes to aspire to learn Standard English rather than maintaining their own variants of English, thereby hindering efforts to improve the language’s capacity to express identities and values of cultures other than those of the core English speaking countries.

Standard languages have long been a way of demarcating one group from another and of expressing marginalized identities. Many histories of language and the rise of nationalism find that the standard language ideology was a means of homogenizing populations and favoring those who spoke the ‘proper’ version of the language. Pinker (2007: 386) traces the criticism of inauthentic use of English to eighteenth century London and finds that it was done in response to the language’s widespread use abroad. The creation of Standard English was a way of differentiating different groups of English speakers and imposing a normative framework on these groups, according to which those who were further away from the standard were less civilized or less intelligent. Standardization was further reinforced by aspirations of social mobility. Those hoping to raise their status were eager to analyze and emulate elite speech, thereby reinforcing the belief in the standard language’s superiority (Pinker 2007). Constructivist studies of nationality trace similar histories of linguistic standardization (Deutsch 1953; Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1992; Gal 2006). For example, Gellner argues that the creation of standard languages was essential to the rise of nationalism. As he shows, languages that were elevated to the status of being standard forms through their use in government and industry became marks of high culture, thereby empowering the elites that used those languages and encouraging others to emulate the standard language. Similarly, Anderson argues that national identities emerged with the decline of sacred languages like Latin and the rise of vernacular languages (Anderson 1983). These vernaculars were standardized through their use in
print media and became a model for national languages, which were able to serve as marks of
group identity, unifying members of nations and distinguishing them from outsiders.

Although the attempt to standardize language may be a means of formulating national
identities, true standardization is an unattainable goal. As the constructivist theories of
nationality show, the ideology of a standard language may help to give unity to disparate groups,
yet it nevertheless remains an ideological construct that obscures the variety of languages and of
group identities. Language change is an inevitable process that may be slowed, but that cannot be
avoided entirely. Ordinary usage invariably conflicts with attempts to establish a single correct
version of the language. As Pinker says, “at all times, in all communities, language changes,
though various parts of a language may change in different ways in different communities”
(2007: 249). Changes in written and spoken English, even in the core countries, are evident over
relatively short periods. This is one of the consequences of the linguistic malleability discussed
previously. While alarmists continually warn that the language is declining, linguists point out
the futility of assessing language change in pejorative terms. Changes are neither evolutionary
nor retrograde, as they are neither random nor progressive steps toward a better language (Pinker
2007).

Holborow writes at length about the problems associated with Standard English and shows
how misguided it is to oppose linguistic change (Holborow 1999: 153). To borrow one of her
examples, many identify English with the literature of great English literary figures like Chaucer
and Shakespeare. These, and other great English writers, give the English language a sense of
tradition and authority, but as Holborow points out, these writers used a much different form of
English than the kind used by contemporary English speakers. The literature of Chaucer and
Shakespeare adds prestige to the language, but only because they are ancestors of contemporary
English and not because the language has maintained its old form. Thus, because languages are dynamic, changing forms of communication, strong attachments to a particular version are bound to be upset.

Even if establishing a standard version of English were not at odds with much of the research on how languages develop and with the historical evidence of linguistic change, it would be undesirable because of the heavy costs of codifying and protecting a language. Recent attempts to deliberately impose a language by controlling education or imposing sanctions on those who use alternative languages have been largely unsuccessful, and may even have exacted unintended social costs. French is among the languages most strongly linked to linguistic protectionism. Starting in 1620, non-French vernaculars were restricted and official French was promoted as the national language; linguistic standardization has been one of the state’s highest cultural objectives ever since (Cohen 2003). During the 20th century, the French government continued its policy of promoting French abroad and domestically by eliminating minority languages and promoting a pure version of French that minimizes English influence (Eriksen 1992). Nevertheless, this concerted effort has been unsuccessful in excluding English or preventing French from changing. The defenders of Standard French are therefore engaged in a perpetual struggle against ordinary usage, and because this struggle fails to prevent the language from changing, it primarily serves as a mechanism of protecting the prestige of certain groups of French speakers.

As these examples show, change is inevitable for any language; it is nearly impossible to preserve a standard form of a language for a prolonged period of time. The idea that core countries might be able to protect their own standard version of English as the language spreads to other countries is therefore empirically inaccurate. Because of the futility of arresting change,
the primary function of language standardization is not to preserve a pure version of the language but to preserve the normative categories that are linked to the standard language. For English to become an inclusive global language that loses its imperialistic or hegemonic functions, changes in the English used in core English-speaking countries must be considered legitimate and an important part of reshaping the language to fit a diverse array of interests and identities.

**Contesting Standard English**

People who live outside the core English-speaking countries are in a strong position to contest the core countries’ control of the language. These non-core countries have such high numbers of nonnative speakers that they can exert a powerful influence on the development of the language and on perceptions of what qualifies as proper usage. Crystal estimates that around 337 million people speak English as a first language and 350 million as a second language (Crystal 2003). Moreover, between 100 million and 1 billion people have learned English as a foreign language. These are remarkable figures, as they indicate that the core English-speaking countries have a more tenuous control over the language than the standard language ideology implies. With a continually growing number of nonnative English speakers, those who speak Standard English are in an ever weaker position for using it as a means of exclusion, or to dictate the methods of English language education. The core countries’ declining power over English is made more inevitable now that some countries that promote English as a foreign language, like India and China, have far more English-speaking citizens than any of the core countries (Mesthrie 2008). These numbers suggest that control over the English language may be contested and that the language can be transformed if those outside the core English-speaking countries succeed in challenging the standard language ideology and reshaping English in ways that allow
the language to reflect their values and interests. In some ways, non-core countries have already undermined the strength of Standard English to the extent that they have created their own Englishes that do not conform to Standard English.

The millions of nonnative English speakers reshape English by creating alternative Englishes often do so in ways that reflect the speakers’ native languages and cultures. Transfer, the tendency of nonnative speakers to import ways of speaking from their native language, is one means by which this occurs. Transfer can be accidental or deliberate. Accidental transfer tends to happen when nonnative speakers inadvertently import words or ways of speaking from their native language without any intent to change the new language. The less exposure nonnative speakers have to the language as it is spoken by natives, the more likely they are to transfer their own ways of speaking into the new language (Towell and Hawkins 1994). Deliberate transfer is the effort to intentionally transform the new language. In either case, transfer builds connections between English and other languages, while increasing the diversity within English. The result is that English becomes a more inclusive language, in the sense that it can more effectively reflect the cultures and identities of the nonnative speakers.

Mesthrie and Bhatt’s (2008) research reveals that it is misleading to think of English as being a uniform language. Instead, they emphasize the diversities of Englishes and the way each evolves to reflect sociological differences. To use their example, “Sri Lankan English is not simply ‘English in Sri Lanka’, but a variety with a certain regional and social identity” (Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008: 200). Of course, this is far from the only example. Many others have found evidence of distinct Englishes emerging to reflect the particular local or minority interests (Kachru 1985, 1990; Bhatt 2005). These studies show a diverse collection of Englishes rejecting the ideal of neutrality and instead encoding cultural differences, with the effect that those who
speak these languages can use English to communicate transnationally while also protecting their own identities. With the development of multiple Englishes well underway, the challenge that remains is challenging the standard language ideology that attacks the legitimacy of non-standard varieties of English.

There are some compelling reasons for supporting standardization, aside from any interest in using standardization as a mechanism for protecting existing power structures. Perhaps the most important concern is that without a Standard English, communications difficulties could emerge as the multiple Englishes become mutually incomprehensible (Quirk 1990). One could argue that if English were allowed to become so diverse that speakers of various Englishes were unable to communicate with each other, then many of the advantages of having a global language would be lost. While there certainly is a risk that variation between Englishes could lead to communicative problems, it is important avoid overstating the extent of this problem. We should not imagine that the only choice is between one universal way of speaking English and a collection of mutually unintelligible Englishes. Rather, there is ample room for a middle ground between these positions. Instead of judging Englishes by their resemblance to a standard version of the language, it would be more productive to judge them according to their family resemblances. Speakers of distinct Englishes can communicate when there is significant overlap between their ways of speaking. Different varieties of a language do not have to be identical for their speakers to be mutually comprehensible, nor do they need to emulate an ideal of Standard English as long as the Englishes resemble one another enough to permit communication.

A prime example of how different varieties of English can develop according to particular interests while still being mutually comprehensible can be found by looking at the core English speaking countries. The forms of English used in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada,
Australia and other core countries reflect these countries’ distinct cultures. Each country maintains a slightly different vocabulary than the others and each has unique idioms that reflect their respective cultures and values. Further examples of variations that preserve particularity can be found in the regional variations in speech within each of the core countries. Despite these differences, most English speakers from these countries are capable of communicating with each other without much difficulty. They may encounter some minor problems when common words do not translate, but these challenges are easily surmounted when speakers explain the problematic expressions. It seems misguided to argue that Americans have a more authentic way of speaking English than Australians or that the English spoken in the United Kingdom is superior to South African English. As long as speakers of each of these varieties of English are capable of understanding each other, there is no need to consider one of these languages as more correct than any of the others. The current state of English diversity provides a model for how Englishes from countries with large populations of nonnative speakers could be guided by the family resemblance norm without sacrificing local variations.

A potential counterargument to the claim that Englishes may be guided by family resemblance alone is suggested by the previous section’s discussion of language change. One might argue that languages’ propensity to change could easily drive the Englishes apart if their development is not guided by Standard English. While diversity to the point of mutual incomprehensibility is an unavoidable possibility of abandoning the standard language ideology, it seems unlikely given the range of forces that drive the global use of English. The powerful mechanisms that underlie the diffusion of English would still exist and would still compel people to engage in transnational communication, even if this communication were not guided by the ideal of Standard English (Kachru 1985). The individual speakers who use English also have
incentives to ensure that communication between Englishes remains possible. Once nonnative speakers have learned English, it seems unlikely that they will abandon this goal and sacrifice their extensive work learning another language by allowing their ways of speaking to deviate significantly from others. The reverse is also true. Native speakers have much to gain from the ability to speak with nonnatives. Business and travel are made easier, and the scope of cultural borrowing is broadened. As Crawford points out, “Language is the ultimate consensual institution” (Crawford 2000: 68). As long as each speaker has a strong desire to be able to speak with others in the linguistic community and the opportunities to do so, they will have strong incentives to keep different Englishes from drifting too far apart. Thus, the same processes that are responsible for the rise of global English in the first place can serve as a means of preserving contact between different Englishes.

Conclusion
As I have argued, global English has the potential to become an inclusive language that is capable of articulating the values and interests of nonnative speakers not because it is a neutral language but because the interests it reflects can be reconfigured. English is a malleable language that is open to shifts in vocabulary and usage. This allows it to be reshaped in ways that reflect the values interests of nonnative speakers. The spread of the language beyond the core English speaking countries means that the connection between English and any particular nation or culture is attenuated; English is increasingly detached from a particular nationality and less capable of sustaining exclusionist claims (Barbour 2000). However, even as English becomes the dominant language of international communication, it may still be able to protect, rather than efface, cultural differences if variations. For English to become an inclusive language, the plural
Englishes must be recognized as being legitimate uses of the language, rather degenerate forms that should aspire to the Standard English of the core English speaking countries.

Although this essay is framed as a defense of global English, this should not imply that English is the only language that could serve as a global language. English is intrinsically no better suited for worldwide use than other language. It is the leading candidate for the role of an inclusive global language simply because it has already established its international influence. Moreover, the endorsement of global English is also not meant to promote English to the exclusion of other languages. Bilingualism or multilingualism with English serving as a means of communication between distinct linguistic communities is preferable to using English exclusively. Languages are not mutually exclusive; global English is not only reconcilable with the maintenance of other languages, it can also support them by giving speakers of minority languages more political access. Therefore, this essay should not be taken as a defense of monolingualism or of attempts to promote English at the expense of other languages. Rather, it is an argument in favor of making global English more open and inclusive by leaving it open to deliberate reconstruction by nonnative speakers.
References


