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Variation in Nonnative Varieties of English

Z Bao, National University of Singapore, Singapore

Native vs. Nonnative Varieties

Native and nonnative varieties of English are distinguished on the basis of the sociolinguistic environment in which they take root. Native varieties are found in North America, Australia, and New Zealand, places that saw large-scale settlement by English-speaking people. Nonnative varieties emerge in former British or American colonies in South and Southeast Asia and parts of Africa, where there has never been a sizable English-speaking settlement, and English is spoken along with the languages of the local populations. From the perspective of genetic linguistics, native varieties are the product of normal parent-to-child transmission in that both the grammar and the vocabulary are transmitted from the same parent language (Thomason and Kaufman, 1988). There is little structural difference among them. Nonnative varieties are more complicated. Though the vocabulary is largely English, the grammar exhibits significant restructuring under the influence of indigenous languages. Given their unique sociolinguistic histories, nonnative varieties are not typologically homogenous. Because of the presence of linguistic features appropriated from indigenous languages, they are often referred to as 'indigenized,' 'nativized,' 'contact' varieties, or as 'New Englishes.'

Nonnative varieties are distinguished from English-lexified pidgins and creoles, also on sociolinguistic grounds. However, the internal variation within a nonnative variety is analogous to the post-creole continuum, ranging from basilect to acrolect. Unlike the basilectal subvarieties, the acrolect does not exhibit the effect of grammatical restructuring and serves as the local standard. It is in effect a native variety, and 'nonnative' applies to the basilectal subvarieties.

Native vs. Nonnative Speakers

'Native' is also used to describe the order of language acquisition: a 'native' language is the first language acquired by a 'native' speaker. The acquisitional status of nonnative varieties of English deserves comment. Conditioned by different postcolonial experiences, they followed separate developmental paths (Schneider, 2003). Malaysia and Singapore offer an interesting case study. In Malaysia, Malay is the national language, and English remains the language of the elite. In Singapore, the government adopts an English-centered language policy. English is the working language of government and, more importantly, the medium of instruction in schools. An English diglossia has emerged, with the nonnative variety – Singapore English – as L, and the superposed, acrolectal variety as H. Increasingly Singapore English is acquired as a first, if not the first, language (Kwan-Terry, 1991; Gupta, 1994). Given the right sociolinguistic conditions, a nonnative variety can acquire native speakers and become the mother tongue.

Variation

Variation in nonnative varieties of English is usually measured against the grammatical norm of the native variety. The focus is placed on linguistic neologisms and their possible origins. Variation can also be approached in terms of the usage patterns of linguistic variables as conditioned by context of use. But this line of enquiry is woefully lacking in the literature and is usually subsumed in the more common studies of lectal variation, conditioned by speaker proficiency. Linguistic neologisms can be found in all levels of language.

Phonetics and Phonology

Two noticeable innovations among the English consonants have to do with the dental fricatives (*thin*, *this*) and the aspirated voiceless stops (*pot*, *top*, *cop*). The dental fricatives are replaced by *t* and *d*, respectively, and aspiration of the voiceless stops is lost. These innovations illustrate two basic mechanisms of sound interference: direct substitution and change in phonological contrast. In Singapore English, there has been a further development in the treatment of the dental fricatives: they are pronounced as *t/d* in syllable-initial position, but as *f* in syllable-final position (*healthy* [-t-] vs. *health* [-f]).

Table 1 Simplification and vowel inventory

RP			Nonnative		Examples	
iː/ɪ	uː/ʊ		i	u	beat/bit	boot/put
ɛ	ɔː/ɒ	⇒	e	o	bet	caught/cot
æ	ɑː/ʌ			a	bat	cart/cut

The change in the vowel system is more drastic. The typical vowel inventory of a nonnative variety consists of five or seven vowels. The additional two vowels in the larger inventory are traceable to the diphthongs in *bait* and *boat*. A plausible explanation is that the five-vowel inventory is due to simplification in phonological contrast. Table 1 displays the result.

The five-vowel inventory emerges when length is no longer phonemic and the high–mid–low contrast is reduced to high–low. The loss of phonological contrast may be caused by contact with indigenous languages or by internal drift.

Lexicon and Morphology

The lexicon is a depository of words and is the part of language that is the most susceptible to external influence. Lexical borrowing is commonplace. Not surprisingly, nonnative varieties borrow words from the languages in their contact environment: *dhobi* 'washer man' (from Hindi) in India, *kampong* 'village' (from Malay), and *kaypoh* 'nosy' (from Chinese [Southern Min Chinese]) in Malaysia and Singapore. It is not easy to differentiate this sort of direct borrowing from code-mixing or code-switching, which are common phenomena in multilingual communities.

New meanings may develop. In Southeast Asia, to *gostan* (< *go stern*) is to change direction; an *alphabet* is a letter (*English has 26 alphabets*), and a *parking lot* is a space in a *car park*. A more subtle change involves the lexical semantics of words. Take *win* and *admit*. In Euro 2004, Greece played Portugal and won. To report this in Singapore English, you can say *Greece won*, *Greece won the game*, or *Greece won Portugal*. The last sentence reveals the change in the lexical semantics of *win*. The same is true of *admit*, as in *Teachers admit this exhibition for free*, on a museum notice board advertising a special exhibit.

Inflection is poorly developed. This is not to say that plural marking and verb agreement are completely lacking. More commonly, they are used apparently at random and may occur in unexpected places (recorded telephone message in Singapore: *This transfer will take*s *about five seconds*). The complex verbal morphology associated with aspectual meanings suffers the same fate. However, differences in the aspect system are often due to underlying systematic differences in the way aspectual meanings are expressed.

Grammar

In the literature, grammatical description of the nonnative varieties, with the possible exception of Singapore English, is not as extensive and detailed as that for English-lexified pidgins and creoles. Nevertheless, from the available descriptions it is possible to appreciate the structural diversity within them. Topic prominence is a significant typological change that has variable structural instantiation among the extant nonnative varieties. The topic structures of Singapore English are as extensive as those in Chinese, its main substrate language. A typical example is *everything also want*, the title of a local comic strip. Here, we see Chinese influence in the fronted topic *everything*, in the adverb *also*, which reinforces the meaning of the quantifier *everything*, and in the missing subject. Related to the topic structure is the novel conditional construction in which the protasis is not introduced by *if*. In *Don't want egg, please inform first*, the protasis is interpreted as the topic that specifies the condition for the apodosis. Typologically or parametrically related syntactic properties tend to cluster in substrate transfer. Other nonnative varieties also allow missing arguments, but they do not have the same range of topic structures (Cheshire, 1991; Baumgardner 1996).

Another significant, and often substrate-driven, change concerns the aspectual system, which varies across the nonnative varieties (Platt *et al.,* 1984). In Singapore English, the perfective aspect is expressed by *already* (*I wash my hands already*), which occurs predominantly in clause-final position. Careful analysis reveals a subtle yet systematic difference between *already* and the past tense or perfect of native English. While *I wash my hands already* may be rendered as *I washed* (or *have washed*) *my hands*, *the wall white already* means that the wall is white, not that the wall was or has been white. This use of *already* is consistent with the perfective aspect of Chinese.

Register

Nonnative varieties of English do not have an accepted written form, unlike some English-lexified pidgins and creoles, such as Tok Pisin. They are used as a vernacular for informal occasions and have yet to develop a full repertoire of registers – linguistic styles associated with context of use. Newspapers such as *The New Straits Times* (Malaysia), *The Straits Times* (Singapore), and *The Hindu* (India) use native English in their stories, which may contain linguistically trivial neologisms characteristic of the local cultural milieu. Literary works are also written in native English; nonnative varieties are used in the speech of characters as an indexical marker of their low social and educational standing (Talib, 2002). The thin repertoire of registers of a typical nonnative variety is

Table 2 Counts of *already* in private conversation and writing, normalized to 1000 words of text

	Medial position		Final position	
	SIN	GB	SIN	GB
Spoken register	0.42	0.18	0.98	0.04
Written register	0.39	0.37	0.02	0.02

Note. SIN, Singapore English; GB, British English.

correlated with its limited grammatical resources, its historical roles, and its present sociolinguistic status.

The lack of registral variation is supported by available corpus evidence. **Table 2** displays the frequencies of *already* in the spoken and written registers of Singapore English (SIN) and British English (GB). The data are culled from the International Corpus of English (Greenbaum, 1996). (See **Table 3**.)

There is no difference in the written register. Differences emerge only in the spoken register of Singapore English, especially in the sentence-final position. The corpus profile suggests a clear registral division of labor: substrate-driven grammatical innovations are used in informal contexts and avoided in formal contexts.

Stigma and Grammatical Growth

One reason for the underdeveloped state of the non-native variety is the lack of prestige in the adoptive speech community. Even in places such as Singapore, where English is the *de facto* national language and the local accent is increasingly seen as a marker of the Singaporean identity (Ooi, 2001), grammatical features that deviate from native English are stigmatized and frequently targeted for eradication in government-sponsored *Speak Good English* movements. Stigmatization has serious consequences for the nonnative variety. Not only do stigmatized features face individual and institutional resistance, they are also slow to stabilize for eventual codification (Bao, 2003). Nonnative varieties need to overcome stigma, reduce internal variation, and expand linguistic resources before they are able to function in wider communicative domains. Against the international prestige and dominance of native English, this is no easy task.

Theoretical Approaches

The bulk of the literature on nonnative varieties of English is devoted to sociolinguistic issues arising from the global spread of English, among them identity, ownership, standardization, and English pedagogy (Quirk and Widdowson, 1985; Cheshire, 1991; Kachru, 1992; Fishman *et al.,* 1996; Görlach, 2002). The cause of grammatical restructuring is also the subject of intense study and lively debate, especially among scholars of pidgins and creoles. Some

Table 3 Examples of *already* from the Singaporean component of the International Corpus of English

With dynamic predicates
1. Maybe she increase the price *already*
2. I told you about it *already* remember

With stative predicates
3. It's like kind of oldish *already*
4. Her hand better *already*

Habitual states
5. Nowadays I switch to Mandarin *already*
6. I think I am quite used to it *already*

With negatives
7. By the time you eat nuh not nice *already*
8. Aiyah I cannot remember *already*

In coordinate sentences
9. When I was in sec one I noticed him *already*
10. If reject then she wouldn't get her PP *already*

scholars treat all varieties of English as adaptations to their environment, so the tripartite division – native, nonnative, and pidgin and creole – has little theoretical significance (Mufwene, 1994).

Among the many factors that are involved in grammatical restructuring, we can list linguistic universals, markedness conventions, internal drift, and language acquisition. Also crucial is the role of the languages in the contact ecology, especially the linguistic substratum. The continued presence of indigenous languages in the speech community of a nonnative variety gives added importance to substrate transfer as a prime mover of grammatical restructuring (Lefebvre, 1998). At the same time, native English exerts strong normative pressure. The antagonistic forces on the grammar of the nonnative variety cannot be resolved purely on linguistic grounds. Grammatical restructuring is a composite and complex process, and no single mechanism is solely responsible. For recent summaries of the field, see Thomason (2001) and Winford (2003).

See also: Native Speaker; Pidgins and Creoles: Overview; Variation in Pidgins and Creoles.

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Variation in Pidgins and Creoles

G Escure, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, USA

Introduction: Creole Myths

Pidgins and creoles have long been characterized as ungrammatical and their speakers as uneducated. This bias is illustrated in the following excerpt from the first novel completely written in a French-based creole (Guyanais), a stinging satire of French colonial society in Cayenne offered through the voices of two Creole characters: Atipa, a gold miner, and his friend Bosobio:

(1) **Atipa:** Nu kriol pa gen reg ku franse
We creole not have rule like French

(2) nu sa pale li ku nu wle…
we TOP speak it as we want

(3) gremesi bunge landan nu lang
Thank god in we language

(4) nu pa benzwen okjupe di sintas…
we not need worry of syntax

(5) Mo rin save sintas-la sa lang ye
me nothing know syntax-DET TOP language that

(6) ka pale la konsey ke la tribinal
IMPERF speak DET council like DET tribunal

(7) **Bosobio:** a pu sa li gen un ta di zafe
TOP for that it have one lot of business

(8) mo pu ka konpren ni la
me not IMPERF understand neither at
tribinal ni la fomasi-la
tribunal nor DET pharmacy-DET

Atipa: 'We Creoles do not have grammatical rules as in French, we speak just as we like. Thanks to God who gave us our language, we don't have to worry about syntax. I don't know anything about syntax, it's the language they use at council meetings, and at the tribunal. **Bosobio:** That's why there are so many things I don't understand, either at the tribunal, or the pharmacy.' *Atipa* (Parépou, 1885)

Atipa's anonymous author, who used the pseudonym of Alfred Parépou, neatly summarizes the myths attached to creoles, and their social correlates: creoles are not real languages ('we speak as we want'; 'creole has no syntax'); furthermore, creole speakers are excluded from official business and basic social services. Yet, the author demonstrates that this nonlanguage can be used to write a 227-page novel!

The young languages we call pidgins and creoles are universally engendered in the context of traumatic situations such as slavery, indenture, or migration. Although pidgins and creoles differ in the scope of their social functions – pidgins are short-term creative attempts at producing *lingua franca*s, whereas creoles are native vernaculars – they have in common that they are oral languages spoken by marginalized groups, are rarely acknowledged as valid grammatical systems, even by their own speakers, and are