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Transnational Dialect Contact and Language Variation and Change in World Englishes

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1. Introduction

Despite the accelerating pace of transnational mobility and connectivity in the current era of globalization, the nature and consequences of transnational dialect contact have received relatively little attention within the study of language variation and change. The present chapter focuses on this phenomenon as it relates to world Englishes; due to their ideological and geopolitical positionalities, these varieties experience substantial effects of contact that differ crucially from those experienced among “native” varieties of English.

Theoretical models of world Englishes may be divided into frameworks that account for variation within world Englishes-speaking communities and those that classify varieties of English around the world and their patterns of change. In the latter category is Kachru’s (1985) Three Circles of English model, which divides English-speaking nations into an Inner Circle (e.g., the United States), in which English is natively spoken as a first language, an Outer Circle (e.g., India), consisting of postcolonial nations in which English is extensively used in institutions, and the Expanding Circle (e.g., China), in which English is commonly learned as a foreign language. This model has been critiqued in prior work for its static nature, its focus on nation-states, and its inadequacy in classifying nations such as South Africa, in which different segments of the population differ substantially in their histories with and use of English (Bruthiaux 2003; Park and Wee 2009). Despite these issues, Park and Wee (2009) make the case that the model retains considerable utility from an ideological perspective, as Outer Circle Englishes continue to be perceived as less legitimate, non-native, and of lower status than Inner Circle varieties, even in cases such as Singapore, in which English is now primarily acquired as a first language.

In contrast to the static Three Circles Model, Schneider’s (2007) Dynamic Model of postcolonial Englishes proposes several phases of development in which varieties become increasingly stable, nativized, and locally-oriented. Crucial to the present discussion is the phase of endonormative stabilization, in which the community shifts its orientation from upholding external norms to accepting local norms (Schneider

2007: 48–52); a number of world Englishes, including Singaporean, Jamaican, Bajan, Indian, and Philippine English are proposed by Schneider to either be moving through this phase or to be on the cusp of entering it. This “cusp” status is suggestive of the difficult and piecemeal process of abandoning standard language ideologies that valorize Inner Circle Englishes, as also highlighted by Park and Wee (2009). As a result, many communities of world Englishes speakers are currently in a state of ideological flux, with rising endonormativity influencing some segments of the population and certain domains, but not yet reaching others.

Aside from rising endonormativity, a second major change proposed by some scholars to be underway in English worldwide is Americanization (Gonçalves et al. 2018), meaning the adoption of American lexical, grammatical, phonological, and orthographic conventions for English. The potential implications of parallel trends towards endonormative stabilization and Americanization for world Englishes, many of which historically orient towards British English norms, are consequential and multifaceted. The proposed ongoing global adoption of American English features also raises questions regarding the mechanisms and extent of such a change, in light of prior theorizations in sociolinguistics on the limitations of language change via media exposure (e.g., Trudgill 2014). As in the case of rising endonormativity, there is substantial scope within shifts toward American norms for individual differences in attitudes and use among speakers in the community.

The two proposed sociolinguistic changes outlined above, rising endonormativity and Americanization, introduce further complexity into already complex systems of language use within world Englishes-speaking communities. These systems have historically been modelled using a range of approaches. Given the common observation across world Englishes-speaking regions of the coexistence of standard and colloquial varieties, early theorizations of variation in these communities argued for either a diglossic model involving a High and Low variety (Gupta 1991), or a less discrete post-creole/lectal continuum (DeCamp 1971; Platt 1975). Theorization and debate in this area have been particularly intense among scholars of Singapore English, in which the High or acrolectal variety in these traditional frameworks is commonly referred to as Standard Singapore English and the Low variety as Colloquial Singapore English (or “Singlish”). Alternative approaches to variation in Singapore have included the Expanding Triangles Model (Pakir 1991), which sought to distinguish between the factors of formality level and English proficiency, and the Cultural Orientation Model (Alsagoff 2010), which proposed that the High variety, redubbed “International Singapore English,” indexes a global orientation, authority, formality, and other related attributes, while “Local Singapore English” indexes a local orientation, closeness, informality, and so on (39).

Although Alsagoff’s model allows for hybridity of language use among individual speakers, more recent work argues that the global-local dichotomy is insufficient to capture the fluid nature of language use in Singapore (Leimgruber 2012; Starr 2019a, 2019b, forthcoming). Scholars with this view, including myself, have called for a rejection of code-based models for world Englishes and a shift to the indexical, feature-focused approaches used in variationist sociolinguistics. Greater integration of sociolinguistic approaches into world Englishes has also been advocated for by

researchers who argue for the key role of social variation in communities such as South Africa (Mesthrie 2020: 10).

The present chapter explores how developments in world Englishes due to transnational dialect contact bolster the case for a variationist sociolinguistic approach. Following an introduction of the central principles and assumptions of variationist traditions and how they might be applied to world Englishes, the chapter surveys three major sources of transnational dialect contact: institutional exonormativity, transnational mobility, and media consumption, and considers evidence regarding their implications for language variation and change.

2. Investigating World Englishes Through the Lens of Language Variation and Change

As pioneered by Labov (1966, 1972, et seq.), the study of language variation and change centers around the empirical investigation of probabilistic patterns in inter- and intra-speaker language use. Eckert (2012) identifies three waves of variationist scholarship, referring to three research traditions that are roughly chronological in origin, but which all continue to inform variationist work. The first wave, initiated by Labov's (1966) study of the Lower East Side of New York City, examines geographically defined settings via surveys and sociolinguistic interviews; this tradition seeks to identify quantitative patterns in the social distribution and changing trajectories of linguistic variants, focusing on broad demographic categories such as social class and gender. The second wave incorporates ethnographic methodologies to explore more locally-defined social categories and the ways in which vernacular features reflect membership in these local social groups, as in Rickford's (1986) work on Estate Class and Non-Estate Class residents of Cane Walk, Guyana. Finally, the third wave reframes linguistic variation not as a reflection of social place, but rather as in a co-constitutive relationship with identity; research in this wave shifts its attention from communities to styles, and examines how individuals draw upon linguistic and other social-semiotic resources, juxtaposing them in various configurations to index social meanings and construct personae. Crucial in this framework is the notion of the indexical field (Eckert 2008), referring to an evolving set of distinct but ideologically linked stances, social types, and characteristics that may be invoked via a particular linguistic feature. For example, Podesva's (2008) third wave work on the speech of an American gay medical student highlights how features including falsetto and released *-t/d* can be deployed in combination with other features to construct various styles, including "caring doctor" and "gay diva."

In addition to language production, scholars informed by these variationist traditions have also examined language perception and attitudes, addressing questions surrounding the role of sociolinguistic information in cognition in addition to providing a more robust view of the social functions of language. Campbell-Kibler (2008), for example, underscored the utility of the indexical field by demonstrating listeners' agency in attributing diverse or even conflicting attributes to a speaker based on their use of the same linguistic feature. Labov et al. (2011) investigated listeners'

sensitivity to the frequency of sociolinguistic variants, identifying a logarithmic pattern in which only one or two tokens of a variant have a substantial impact on listener evaluation. Work of this type supports the view that listeners are highly sensitive to fine-grained patterns of language use, and that quantitative examination of the deployment and collocation of individual features, when integrated with ethnographic and other qualitative methodologies, can fruitfully advance our understanding of sociolinguistic phenomena in all communities, including those in which world Englishes are spoken.

Due in part to the American origins of the variationist tradition, the majority of research in this field has focused on communities in the United States and Canada, and to a lesser extent the United Kingdom (although many significant studies have been carried out involving other languages in various parts of the world) (see Stanford 2016). Only a limited number of studies (e.g., Rickford 1986; Blake 1996) have examined Englishes or English-based contact languages outside of the Inner Circle using a variationist approach (see Farquharson and Migge 2017 for a review). The dearth of variationist research on world Englishes and contact languages is arguably due to a lack of integration between the academic traditions of contact linguistics, world Englishes, and sociolinguistic variation, rather than the unsuitability of variationist approaches to these settings and language varieties. In fact, a variationist sociolinguistic approach, and particularly an indexical approach typical of the third wave, can account for phenomena among speakers of world Englishes that are not well-captured by other frameworks.

As pointed out by Leimgruber (2012), one of the major advantages of a variationist approach to world Englishes is a shift of focus from codes (i.e., varieties or lects) to individual linguistic variants. For example, taking the case of Singapore English, this approach means shifting away from analyzing speakers' use of so-called Standard Singapore English versus Colloquial Singapore English and instead analyzing their use of particular features, such as the merger of the COT/CAUGHT/COURT vowels (see Starr forthcoming), in various settings and in combination with other features to index particular social meanings. This change allows researchers to investigate styles of language use that incorporate a range of features with distinct indexical fields—styles that, in other approaches, may be characterized as “hybrid” or “leaky” (Gupta 1994; Leimgruber 2012).

The adoption of the indexical field framework also avoids the limitations of one-dimensional continua and scalar models that range from acrolect to basilect or standard to non-standard, as well as models in which attributes such as informality can only be evoked by local variants, as in Alsagoff's (2010) Cultural Orientation Model. Instead, in the third wave approach, single variants may be indexically linked to a wide range of possible stances, attributes, and social types; moreover, clusters of features may become enregistered as a socially-recognized style linked to a persona or a more widely-circulating characterological figure (Agha 2007: 177). In this view, sociolinguistic variation among speakers of world Englishes is no longer interpreted as purely a matter of “standard” versus “non-standard,” or “local” versus “global,” thereby acknowledging that these speakers do more with language than signal affiliation with or distance from dominant norms.

Another related notion that may be usefully adopted from scholarship in variationist sociolinguistics to a world Englishes context is that of the repertoire (Benor 2010; also see Blommaert 2010). Used primarily in Inner Circle variationist research in reference to “ethnolinguistic repertoires” associated with speakers of varieties such as Chicano English, the repertoire approach reimagines enregistered sociolects as a pool of linguistic features from which speakers selectively draw, rather than a uniform code that speakers codeswitch in and out of. Again, this approach emphasizes the meaning-making potential of individual linguistic features, rather than holistic codes. In Starr and Balasubramaniam (2019), we adopt the ethnolinguistic repertoire framework to account for variation in the realization of English /r/ among Tamil Indian Singaporeans. We argue that this variation is not best conceived of as shifting from Indian Singapore English to Standard Singapore English, but rather reflects a speaker’s selection of social-semiotic resources from their repertoire, in this case tapped or trilled /r/ versus approximant /ɹ/, to index a range of possible social meanings, including the construction of Tamil Indian identity. Outside the realm of ethnolects, this same repertoire approach can be adapted to features traditionally associated with lects along a continuum in any world Englishes context (e.g., Standard Singapore English versus Colloquial Singapore English).

The increasing flexibility afforded by variationist approaches is particularly valuable in recent work on world Englishes due to key developments in many of these communities that have upended traditional systems of sociolinguistic meaning. As discussed in the introduction, the trend towards endonormative stabilization across many postcolonial Englishes means that features formerly unambiguously classed as non-standard are now in a state of flux, with some community members evaluating them as acceptable in formal contexts and others disagreeing with that assessment. Another set of major ongoing changes in these communities are societal shifts, including changing media consumption patterns and rising transnational mobility, that all serve to increase non-local, and particularly transnational dialect contact. The Americanization of world Englishes, as discussed in the introduction, is just one of the potential impacts of this phenomenon. The introduction of non-local forms linked with various social types and stances has the potential to radically broaden the repertoires of speakers in these communities, transform the indexical fields associated with particular variants, expand speakers’ range of sociolinguistic knowledge, and lead to the enregisterment of new styles and personae. Bearing in mind the significance of rising transnational dialect contact for world Englishes, the following section considers various sources of such contact and discusses their respective sociolinguistic impacts.

3. World Englishes and Sources of Transnational Dialect Contact

There are a variety of channels through which speakers may come into contact with external linguistic norms and speakers of non-local dialects. In a homogeneous community populated primarily by native speakers, such exposure is generally limited, and would come from consumption of non-local media, travel outside the community, and interpersonal ties with speakers who had migrated from elsewhere. Members of a

community in which a marginalized dialect is spoken might also be exposed in school to a standard variety perceived as “non-local.” Given national language policies and migration patterns, the majority of non-local exposure within homogeneous native-speaker communities would likely consist of dialects spoken within the same country, rather than international varieties.

In communities where world Englishes are spoken, including both the Outer and Expanding circles, the extent and nature of transnational English contact is considerably different from the circumstances described above. Moreover, the ideological positioning of non-local Englishes in this context is distinct from how non-local varieties are perceived in communities that are ideologically construed as “native-speaking.” In the following sections regarding sources of transnational dialect contact, each discussion will consider the extent to which community members receive exposure from these sources, and the impact that this exposure might have on language use, sociolinguistic knowledge, and attitudes in the community. Work in the variationist tradition will be introduced along with other research that demonstrates the utility of moving beyond traditional models for world Englishes. Although studies of other settings will be referenced, this discussion highlights recent and ongoing work on Singapore, which has been at the forefront of variationist approaches to world Englishes.

3.1 Institutional Exonormativity

In the context of world Englishes, institutional exonormativity refers to the use of non-local, Inner Circle curricular materials and linguistic norms in Outer and Expanding circle schools, extra-curricular classes, language campaigns, and other institutional domains. The adoption of textbooks developed in Britain for English classes in a community outside of the UK, for example, would be a case of such exonormativity. While Kachru’s Inner Circle includes a number of countries ideologically constructed as “natively” English-speaking, in the case of English education and promotion, orientation towards a non-local norm almost always refers to the promotion of standard US or UK English (although there are some notable exceptions, such as the influence of New Zealand English curricula and teachers in the South Pacific [Crocombe 1992: 96]).

Despite longstanding calls in the study of Teaching English as a Foreign Language and other related fields for a shift towards “English as an International Language” and other approaches to English language teaching that do not valorize native speaker norms (see Jenkins 1998; Holliday 2006), the promotion of US and UK English remains *de rigueur* in English programs in the Expanding Circle. While some countries have longstanding orientations exclusively towards the US or UK due to their colonial histories, geographical proximity, or other sociohistorical factors, many Expanding Circle nations, such as China, make use of curricular materials from both regions (He 2017: 130). Thus, learners in certain segments of the Expanding Circle receive considerable exposure to both US and UK varieties in educational settings. Whether such exposure increases their explicit sociolinguistic knowledge of these dialects, however, is another matter; materials from different regional sources are often incorporated into curricula with no clear provenance provided to students, limiting

the degree to which students might link features to regions. At the same time, certain types of EFL programs, particularly those designed to prepare students for study abroad and standardized English exams, such as those offered by the British Council, are explicitly associated with specific regional norms. Moreover, although standardized English exams such as the TOEFL and IELTS purport to be international in orientation and to accept any “native” variety of English, students are routinely advised to focus their preparation on the variety associated with the makers of the exam (e.g., US English for the TOEFL test), and to avoid mixing spelling standards or regional accent features (Recine 2016). Therefore, we expect a minority of students learning English in an Expanding Circle setting, and specifically those aiming to study abroad, to gain some explicit sociolinguistic knowledge regarding the features associated with US and UK English.

Turning to the Outer Circle, despite long-established local conventions for English in these communities and ongoing progression towards endonormative stabilization, standard language ideologies and pragmatic concerns both contribute to the widespread upholding of Inner Circle norms for English in institutional settings. In other words, these Inner Circle varieties are perceived as both more legitimate and more “useful” than the local variety, thereby rationalizing their continued institutional promotion. Due to the legacy of British colonialism and imperialism, with the exception of the Philippines and a few other cases, the variety targeted as an ideological norm in Outer Circle nations is specifically a conservative form of standard British English (i.e., “Received Pronunciation”); while the recent dominance of American media has resulted in minor concessions in education policy, such as tolerance for American spelling on exams in some countries (e.g., Singapore), British English remains the notional standard in most respects. In Hong Kong, for example, Chan (2018: 35) finds that 68 percent of students agree that Hong Kong examinations target British English, while only 7 percent and 6 percent identify American and Hong Kong English, respectively. One participant reports, “since my early schooling days, I have been told again and again that we should learn British English” (Chan 2018: 35). Similarly, Kenya promotes British norms in schools and discourages the use of Kenyan English in formal settings (Ni Chonghaile 2012).

This institutional exonormative orientation is maintained even in societies with well-established local English norms. In Singapore, where English is the most commonly-spoken home language (Singapore Department of Statistics 2015) and locally-developed English textbooks are used (Singapore Ministry of Education 2020), the education system continues to position standard British English as Singapore’s target variety (Rubdy 2010); governmental policies and campaigns in Singapore, most notably the Speak Good English Movement, similarly promote standard British English (often presented in aregional terms as “universally understood” English) and frame Singapore English as illegitimate and problematic for national development (Park and Wee 2009; Gupta 2010).

In terms of transnational dialect contact, the impact of exonormative institutional practices in the Outer and Expanding Circles is threefold: (1) increasing the community’s exposure to Inner Circle varieties, (2) increasing their sociolinguistic knowledge of the distinctions between these varieties and the local variety, and

(3) ideologically constructing the acquisition of Inner Circle varieties as desirable. Regarding increased exposure, the majority of contact with Inner Circle varieties due to institutional exonormativity comes via educational media consumption, meaning videos, textbooks, and other learning materials. In a minority of settings, exonormativity also leads to increased interpersonal interaction with Inner Circle English teachers; this is the case in Japan, for example, where thousands of native English speakers are hired to teach in local schools via the Japan Exchange and Teaching program (JET Programme 2019).

Although the two modalities of transnational dialect contact due to institutional exonormativity are media consumption and interpersonal contact resulting from transnational mobility, each of which will be examined further in their respective sections below, it is nonetheless worth considering these institutional cases separately from the more general effects of media exposure and interpersonal contact. Such contact within institutions is crucially distinct in that it is often accompanied by explicit metalinguistic discussion of local versus non-local features (see Starr 2017); moreover, language exposure within institutional contexts carries with it both the benefits and drawbacks of institutional authority. Watching an educational video in class, for example, may have a greater influence on a student than a video they watch for leisure at home because they know they may be assessed on it later; on the other hand, the video may have less influence in the classroom setting, due to decreased engagement and less intrinsic motivation on the part of the student.

As to whether students actually absorb anything from media presented in an institutional context, a large body of evidence suggests that students do engage with and show learning benefits from multimedia in English language curricula (Mayer 2005; Ismaili 2013; Kaboocha and Elyas 2018; i.a.). Whether this sort of multimedia exposure, or exposure to teachers from various international dialect backgrounds, translates into shifts in speakers' sociolinguistic awareness, attitudes, or variation patterns has not been extensively assessed in scholarly work. In my own research on expatriate and local children in Singapore, I find that children show significant effects of school setting in both perception and production, with expatriate children attending local government schools acquiring significantly different patterns from those in international schools, underscoring the role of educational institutions in shaping children's sociolinguistic knowledge and patterns of use (Starr et al. 2017; Starr 2019a). At the same time, the majority of expatriate children attending local schools were not observed to acquire local Singapore English norms in their phonological production, even if they had been born in Singapore; I argue that this phenomenon reflects persistent institutional exonormativity that discourages children from Inner Circle backgrounds from acquiring Outer Circle features (Starr 2019a). The same study also finds significant effects of endonormative versus exonormative orientation among Singaporean children; children who rate speakers of Singapore English as likely to be English teachers and children who report that they do not feel they have an accent in their own speech are both more likely to use phonological features typical of Singapore English. This finding suggests that the ideological messages children receive from institutions about the legitimacy and normativity of Outer Circle Englishes have significant impacts on their language use.

3.2 Mobility

As transnational mobility has accelerated in the twenty-first century, scholarly interest in mobility and its consequences has also expanded, as is reflected in the proliferation of novel frameworks and terms, including “superdiversity” (Vertovec 2007) and “metrolingualism” (Otsuji and Pennycook 2010), intended to capture diverse contact settings. However, transnational flows of people and languages under globalization are not a new phenomenon; indeed, such mobility underlies the very existence of world Englishes. As noted by Johnstone and Pollack (2016: 255), mobility is a broad term that encompasses a wide variety of travel and migration phenomena. These different types of mobility, ranging from individual overseas holidays, to study abroad experiences, to short-term expatriate stays, to permanent migration, to colonization, vary significantly in their sociolinguistic consequences due to differences in power, geography, demographics, extent and length of contact, ideologies, and other factors. The consequences of mobility can be assessed on an individual level or a broader societal level, investigating diverse topics such as the acquisition of second dialect features by a particular migrant, the broadening of sociolinguistic knowledge resulting from increasing contact with non-local speakers, or the development of a contact dialect in a community over generations.

A large body of prior work in variationist sociolinguistics examines geographic mobility in the Inner Circle and its impact on the use of local features by native-born residents and newcomers. Of particular relevance to world Englishes research are studies involving the acquisition of stigmatized regional features, including work on immigration into the American South, such as Wolfram et al.’s (2004) study of Latinx acquisition of /ay/ monophthongization and Dodsworth and Kohn’s (2012) study of newcomer and local children in North Carolina, as well as various studies of Polish migrants’ acquisition of regional dialect features in the UK (Schleef et al. 2011; Drummond 2013). Crucially, outcomes of contact in these Inner Circle settings are found to be constrained not only by age of acquisition, degree and length of exposure, and complexity of the linguistic feature, but also by the relative legitimacy and status of each variety. Dodsworth and Kohn (2012), for example, find that it is local children in North Carolina who shift towards the more prestigious features used by their newcomer peers, and not the other way around. These findings in Inner Circle settings suggest that transnational migration in world Englishes-speaking communities will be similarly shaped by ideological factors, and illustrate the necessity of examining the consequences of mobility not only for migrants, but also the native-born population.

The present discussion of transnational mobility and its consequences for world Englishes is divided into two sections, the first focusing on short-term mobility, including overseas travel and study abroad, and the second on longer-term or permanent migration.

3.2.1 Short-term Mobility

In research on Inner Circle settings and in popular discourse within those communities, it is generally assumed that changes in a speaker’s habitual language use due to

geographic mobility would only result from long-term migration involving sustained interpersonal contact with a new community, rather than from a short-term sojourn elsewhere. In world Englishes-speaking communities, however, the notion that a speaker who spends a limited time overseas in an Inner Circle nation may retain (or affect) that non-local accent upon their return is a commonly circulated discourse. These ideologies appear to be longstanding in communities where overseas study in the Inner Circle is a long-established practice; in several countries formerly colonized by Britain, including Guyana and Nigeria, the stereotype of a returnee who exhibits exaggerated US or UK English speech and mannerisms was enregistered by the mid-twentieth century as a characterological figure known as a “been-to” (Obiechina 1973: 54; p.c., John Rickford, February 18, 2014).

More recent iterations of this discourse include the 2013 Malaysian video “Your Accent Come From Where?”¹ by YouTube comedy group TheMingThing, which portrays several Malaysian characters who have acquired US and UK accents from improbably brief exposure, including one young man who has returned with an accent after four days abroad (“I brought back with me so many brilliant memories!” “Yeah, that’s not the only thing you brought back.”). The video also highlights that Malaysians do not pick up local accents when visiting India or other non-Inner Circle countries. The same observation is made by Ntarangwi (2009), who reports a common joke among Kenyans about those who study abroad: “the ones who go to the United States and United Kingdom come back with thick American and British accents, while those who go to India never do” (54). This emphasis on the selectivity of non-local dialect acquisition reflects the ideology that speakers who engage in this behavior are doing so as an affectation resulting from a desire to affiliate themselves with a more prestigious dialect. Discourse on the impact of overseas study or travel can also serve as a means of rejecting elite local speech patterns by casting them as non-local; Mesthrie (2020: 6) describes the case of South African politician Lindiwe Mazibuko, whose educated speech patterns were attributed in the media to the gap year she spent in London and characterized as “un-African.”

Despite the pervasiveness of “been-to” discourse, only limited scholarly work assesses the extent to which Outer Circle returnees maintain non-local features after sojourns overseas. Starr (2019b), a survey-based study of Singaporeans’ own pronunciation of BATH- and TRAP-class words and their knowledge of how those words are pronounced in the US and UK, does not find any evidence that Singaporeans who have spent time in the US are more likely to use an American English-like /æ/ vowel for BATH-class words. Starr (forthcoming) similarly finds no effect of US travel experience on Singaporean use of postvocalic /r/, another salient feature of American English. On the other hand, Chua’s (2016) analysis of data drawn from the Voices of Children in Singapore project observes that adolescents born in Singapore who have spent at least five months overseas do retain certain phonetic features of their second dialect after their return. While it is unsurprising to find children acquiring some features of a second dialect, it is noteworthy that they have retained those second dialect features after returning to Singapore, given their young age when they rejoined the Singapore English-speaking community. The limited evidence for an impact of overseas experience in speakers’ language use data may be partially accounted for by

the additional adoption of Inner Circle English features by those speakers who consume US and UK media but have no overseas travel experience; this possibility is considered in Section 3.3.

Short-term travel does not only potentially affect production, but also sociolinguistic knowledge; interpersonal experience with speakers of a particular region should increase an individual's knowledge of that region's dialect features. Indeed, Starr (2019b) finds that Singaporeans with experience traveling to the UK show significantly greater accuracy in reporting which words in the BATH and TRAP classes are pronounced with the /ɑ:/ vowel in London. US travel experience is also observed to correlate with Singaporeans' knowledge of the BATH-TRAP merger in American English.

While the discussion above has focused on the impact of short-term overseas stays among native-born members of Outer Circle communities, a related subject worthy of mention here is the situation of Expanding Circle learners of English who spend time studying overseas in an Outer Circle English-speaking setting. One major context in which this occurs is the Philippines, which has increasingly positioned itself as a global center for English language education (Choe 2016). Due to the Philippines' ideologically precarious situation in the Outer Circle, individual learners may hold differing views regarding the acquisition of Philippine English features, depending upon their learning goals and social ties with local Filipinos. Imperial (2016), an investigation of Korean learners of English in Baguio City, found that learners who interacted more with Filipino peers and reported greater engagement with their English classes produced English voiceless stops with shorter voice onset times, meaning in a manner more consistent with local Philippine English (110). The study also observed that Korean learners who were better able to identify the regional origin of a speaker of Philippine English in a listening task also used significantly longer voice onset times, thereby distancing themselves from local norms (140); this finding underscores that familiarity with the local variety is not sufficient to trigger a shift towards that variety in a learner's speech, but may conversely assist in a learner's efforts to avoid the acquisition of stigmatized features. Imperial's (2016) work on this Outer Circle setting is consistent with studies of other languages in the field of Second Language Acquisition indicating that most L2 learners strongly orient towards what they perceive to be standard varieties, avoiding acquisition of regional and non-standard features even if they are prevalent in the speech of teachers and native-speaker peers (Starr 2017). This learner tendency, along with the institutional exonormativity described in the section above, means that the typical student studying abroad in an Outer Circle setting is unlikely to acquire many features of the local variety unless they develop substantial community ties.

3.2.2 Migration

Rising transnational migration across the socioeconomic spectrum in recent decades has transformed existing world Englishes-speaking communities and forged new communities of diverse English speakers. Many of the nations serving as major sources of out-migration are traditionally placed in the Outer Circle, including the Philippines,

India, and Bangladesh; others, such as Mexico and China, are members of the Expanding Circle (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division 2017). The significance of smaller-scale migration from Inner Circle nations, such as Australia, into world Englishes-speaking communities should also not be overlooked, particularly given the socioeconomic power of these “expatriate” migrants and the status granted to Inner Circle varieties in institutional contexts.

The impact that transnational migration is expected to have on a local community’s sociolinguistic practices, knowledge, and attitudes is constrained by the relative number of migrants, their social status, the legitimacy granted to their language variety, and their level of integration. For example, although expatriates have had a longstanding presence in Singapore, in recent years the social spheres of the expatriate and local communities have increasingly intersected as migration to the country has risen. As a result of these changes, 45 percent of young Singaporeans now report having a close friend of another nationality (National Youth Survey 2016). Starr et al. (2017) argues that this increased contact has led to expanded sociolinguistic knowledge among Singaporeans; we demonstrate that Singaporean children are now very skilled at explicitly associating speakers of various Englishes with their regional origin, and at identifying the likely occupations of such speakers.

Crucially, however, we should not expect local exposure to international varieties of English to necessarily result in local shifts towards those varieties. In Starr and Balasubramaniam (2019), we consider the impact of the recent rise in foreign workers and immigrants from South Asia on Singapore’s longstanding Tamil Indian community. We argue that the rise in newcomers from South Asia is one of several factors that account for the precipitous drop we observe in the use of tapped and trilled /r/ in English among Tamil Indian Singaporeans. While tapped/trilled /r/ is an established variant in Singapore English, it has now become linked with non-local South Asian identity, leading younger speakers to prefer approximant /ɹ/ to index their identity as locals and distance themselves from recent arrivals.

One sector of the transnational labor market that has attracted scholarly attention in sociolinguistics is foreign domestic workers (i.e., maids). Foreign domestic workers from the Philippines constitute a major source of exposure to English for children in some societies in Asia and the Middle East; in Hong Kong, standard language ideologies and the devaluing of Outer Circle Englishes have led to concern among laypeople that exposure to Filipino maids could be a “bad influence” on children’s English acquisition. Leung (2012) assesses whether any impact of exposure to Filipino English can be identified, comparing Hong Kong kindergarteners and secondary school students who have had a Filipino maid versus those who have not. He finds that children with maids from the Philippines show no deficit in listening tasks involving stimuli using American, British, or Hong Kong English; moreover, they show an advantage with stimuli spoken in Philippine English. In Singapore, Starr et al. (2017: 15) finds no correlation between having a Filipino maid and children’s ability to identify Philippine English or other English varieties; rather, all local children regardless of home exposure are found to be skilled at identifying Philippine English, perhaps reflecting the major presence of Filipino workers in the service sector and other areas of the labor market. Other ongoing work on the same Voices of Children in Singapore data suggests no influence

of having a Filipino maid on children's patterns of language use. When taken together with the Tamil Indian Singaporean findings above, it seems clear that the influx of speakers of other Outer Circle Englishes into communities such as Singapore and Hong Kong is not triggering a vast levelling of Outer Circle features into a panregional dialect; to the contrary, these migration phenomena are raising sociolinguistic awareness of local vs. non-local varieties and encouraging young speakers to highlight their local identity using various social-semiotic resources.

Another significant implication of transnational migration in relation to world Englishes is the potential for the creation of new contact varieties. In many regions with significant levels of migration, English is the lingua franca used for communication among foreign workers and between foreign workers and locals, even when another language is dominant in the local community. In the Gulf states of the Middle East, for example, English rather than Arabic serves as the lingua franca of transnational migrants, who constitute the majority of the labor force there (Alharbi 2018; also see Siemund, Al-Issa, Rahbari and Leimgruber, this volume). Research on the impact of migration on the formation of new English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) varieties includes Boyle (2011), a study of the English used in the United Arab Emirates. Using data from the UAE's largest English-language newspaper, Boyle demonstrates that the English of the region contains innovative features (e.g., novel transitive patterns, as in "to alert a fire accident"[153]) and that the community is converging on these novel conventions, indicating that a new variety is emerging. Siemund, Al-Issa and Leimgruber (2020) draw a similar conclusion based on a survey of university students in the UAE, arguing that speakers show signs of convergence on a developing "Gulf English." The widespread use of English as a lingua franca in these emerging transnational migrant communities underscores the need for updated models of world Englishes that better account for new mobility patterns.

3.2.3 *Media*

Traditional sociolinguistic frameworks center interpersonal interaction as the core mechanism of language variation and change (Labov 2007). These approaches argue that sustained interpersonal contact is required to provide speakers with sufficient exposure and motivation for the acquisition of complex sociolinguistic patterns. As such, the potential role of media as a source of language change has been treated with skepticism, particularly in light of social dialectology studies demonstrating that regional variation has continued to thrive despite widespread mass media consumption (Trudgill 2014).

A growing body of research, however, has reconsidered the role of media in community language change and speakers' patterns of language use (Stuart-Smith et al. 2013; Sayers 2014; Androustopoulos 2014; Nycz 2019; i.a.). Critiquing the characterization of media consumption as lacking in social interactivity, the work of Stuart-Smith and colleagues (2013) points to scholarship in communication studies that approaches media consumption as a form of parasocial interaction in which individuals may become highly emotionally engaged with the characters and stories they consume. Stuart-Smith et al.'s (2013) study of the diffusion of *th*-fronting and *l*-vocalization from

the London area to Glasgow, Scotland identifies a significant effect of engagement in the popular London-based television program *EastEnders*; however, this work also takes the view that the role played by media consumption is primarily that of accelerating changes already introduced via interpersonal ties. Building upon the observation that certain types of linguistic features, such as lexis, would appear to be more straightforward to acquire from media exposure than others, such as phonological constraints, scholars in this area have increasingly queried exactly what aspects of language can be picked up via media contact, and to what extent this expanded sociolinguistic knowledge shapes speakers' attitudes, perception abilities, and/or production patterns (Stuart-Smith et al. 2013; Androutsopoulos 2014; Starr 2019b).

Due to a number of factors, the impact of media consumption on speakers in world Englishes-speaking communities may differ from the patterns observed in Inner Circle nations. First, speakers of world Englishes typically consume a higher proportion of non-local English-language media than local English-language media (if such local media exists at all). While Singapore has its own domestic media industry, for example, viewership is low relative to consumption of American and British film and television programs (Jagdish 2017). Additionally, due to continued institutional exonormativity and the reification of Inner Circle norms as desirable, "standard" English, world Englishes-speaking consumers may be more likely to attend to and/or adopt features they observe in Inner Circle media. A final key factor is the global dominance of American cultural and economic products, including hip-hop, Hollywood films, professional sports, and multinational corporations. Indeed, the desire to affiliate with American culture and the widespread consumption of American media have been identified in lay discourse and scholarly work as the primary explanations for the worldwide Americanization of English (Rindal 2010; Leow 2011; Gonçalves et al. 2018). Potential shifts toward American English norms are particularly salient in popular discourse due to the continued institutional dominance of British English in much of the Anglophone world, leading to conflicts over spelling conventions and vocabulary that are of interest not only to linguists but also stakeholders in education, media, and language policy.

In sum, greater relative exposure to Inner Circle varieties than local varieties in media, the ideological positioning of local varieties, and the desirability of American English may all encourage world Englishes speakers to engage with and show sociolinguistic influence from international media consumption; however, this prediction has yet to be extensively tested.

3.2.4 *Traditional Media*

Despite the hesitation in sociolinguistics to attribute language change to media exposure, it is not uncommon in the field of contact linguistics to find claims regarding change resulting from "distant contact" via media exposure (Winford 2003: 31). In Singapore, for example, an observed rise in postvocalic /r/ has been speculated to result from American media influence (Poedjosoedarmo 2000; Tan 2012). Recent work supports the view that the subset of world Englishes speakers who do consciously target American English frequently cite media as a motivating factor; this observation

is made by Rindal (2010) about Norwegian learners of English, and by Hansen Edwards (2016: 209) about Hong Kong, in which 90 percent of students who reported targeting American English mentioned media in their questionnaire responses (e.g., “The media has helped shape my accent. I watch a lot of American TV shows and movies in my free time” [209]).

At the same time, other scholars have cautioned against attributing innovative features in English varieties to diffusion from American English when these features may have developed via independent drift (Meyerhoff and Niedzielski 2003; Trudgill 2014). In fact, evidence for American media influence on speakers of world Englishes is quite limited, as very few studies have directly assessed whether individuals who consume more American media are more accurate in their knowledge of American English features, have more positive attitudes towards them, or use more of them in their own speech. Regarding the rise in postvocalic /r/ in Singapore, in Starr (forthcoming), an analysis of the low back vowels in Singapore English and how these interact with rhoticity, I argue that several factors cast doubt on whether increasing postvocalic rhoticity truly represents a shift towards American English norms due to media influence. First, there is no correlation observed in these data between participants who consume more US media and the use of postvocalic /r/. Secondly, postvocalic /r/ does not appear to be increasing in all stylistic contexts, but only in careful, read speech, suggesting that it may be rising in popularity because it is a “spelling pronunciation” that indexes correctness. Moreover, some degree of postvocalic /r/ use is present among all age groups in the data, and therefore it does not appear to be a novel variant introduced by recent American media dominance. Most notably, the vowel used by young Singaporeans in COURT-class words, even in careful speech, is a low [ɒ] associated with Colloquial Singapore English, rather than the mid vowel used in American English. As a result, young Singaporeans’ production of words in this class, such as *sport* and *norm*, bear very little resemblance to their form in American English, even when postvocalic rhoticity is present. If Singaporeans were modelling American English based on aural exposure from media speech, we would expect use of postvocalic rhoticity to consistently co-occur with an American English-like preceding vowel, as these two segments are heavily co-articulated. Thus, while it is clear that young Singaporeans are shifting away from British features in careful speech, what they are moving toward is not a wholesale adoption of American English features, but rather something distinctly Singaporean.

Additional phonological features of Singapore English investigated in other work also show no signs of a broad shift towards American norms. Returning to the realization of the BATH and TRAP vowel classes examined in Starr (2019b), this survey of 1,167 native-born Singaporeans reveals the maintenance of a conservative distinction between these vowels consistent with standard British norms and inconsistent with American English, despite the fact that 92 percent of the survey respondents reported consuming US media at least occasionally. However, although overall levels of /æ/ responses for BATH words were low, frequent consumption of US media did in fact significantly correlate with greater self-reported use of /æ/ for BATH-class words (Starr 2019b: 66). This finding appears to constitute the first piece of empirical evidence of a media consumption effect for language use by speakers of world Englishes. On the

other hand, even frequent consumers of US media in the data were not producing a complete phonological merger of BATH and TRAP as is typical of American English, underscoring the limited nature of this effect.

As previously discussed in the section on mobility, Starr (2019b) also assessed respondents' knowledge of how the BATH and TRAP vowels are produced in standard US and UK English. While accuracy for UK English was significantly predicted by more frequent consumption of UK media (69), performance on the US task was less expected. First, despite the high levels of US media consumption reported among respondents, only 137 of 1,167 participants were able to accurately report the merger of BATH and TRAP to /æ/ in US English (71). Equally unexpectedly, although accuracy in the US task did correlate with US media consumption, this effect was rendered statistically insignificant by the much larger effect of UK media consumption. In other words, respondents who consumed more UK media had much more accurate sociolinguistic knowledge of US English features, although exposure to UK media is unlikely to improve sociolinguistic knowledge of American English. In light of the particular UK media programs that were popular at the time of the survey (e.g., *Sherlock*), I proposed that respondents who frequently consumed UK media were more likely to be high-engagement viewers with a stronger Western orientation, and therefore outperformed other respondents in their explicit knowledge of Inner Circle English features (76). This incongruous finding reflects the difficulties inherent in attempting to identify specific impacts of media exposure that are independent of speaker identity and attitudes. Because media consumption is generally a leisure activity, individuals will naturally consume more media from a region that they find interesting and hold positive attitudes towards; in the absence of experimental methods in which individuals are assigned media to view, this correlation of consumption and interest presents considerable challenges to the researcher.

One indirect means through which media may potentially facilitate language change is by shifting a community's attitudes towards a dialect (e.g., by presenting it as a prestige variety) (Stuart-Smith 2007). This role of media is particularly relevant in the context of world Englishes-speaking communities in which British English is the historical standard, where rising endonormativity and Americanization mean that different community members may indexically link dramatically different sets of features with standardness and formality.

In ongoing work, I have been investigating the role of Singaporeans' media consumption habits in shaping sociolinguistic perceptions of variation in the COT-CAUGHT-COURT vowel set. This set of variables is particularly useful in distinguishing US, UK, and Singapore English norms, because their configuration differs in each variety, with COT distinct from CAUGHT-COURT in the UK, COURT distinct from COT-CAUGHT (which are merged or distinct, depending on region) in the US, and all three sets merged to [ʊ] in traditional descriptions of Singapore English (Deterding 2007). This ongoing study employs a digital matched-guise newscaster paradigm adapted from Labov et al. (2011), in which participants are told that they will hear clips of three Singaporeans preparing audition tapes to be newsreaders on local radio. Participants are asked to help the auditioners improve by giving each audio clip a rating on a six-point scale from "totally professional" to "totally unprofessional," and

then providing open-ended feedback. To create the stimuli, three female Chinese Singaporean graduate students read brief pseudo-news passages, including filler passages and target passages constructed to contain two tokens each of the COURT vowel (e.g., *report*, *sport*). A US, UK, or Singapore-like variant (meaning [ɔɪ], [ɔ:], or [ɒ]) was digitally spliced in to one or both of these tokens, creating six versions of each target passage that contained COURT vowels that were either consistently produced in one way (UK, US, or Singapore), or contained one token produced one way and one produced another (e.g., US-Singapore).

The preliminary findings involving fifty-one participants born in Singapore ages 21–29 indicate significant effects of media consumption patterns on professionalism ratings. Linear mixed-effect regression modelling finds that participants who report high levels of US media consumption give significantly higher professionalism ratings to the 100 percent US and hybrid US-UK guises; also, participants with low levels of Singapore media consumption give significantly higher ratings to all guises not involving Singapore variants (US, UK, and US-UK). These findings confirm that it is not only non-local media consumption, but also level of local media consumption that shapes individuals' attitudes towards varieties. Finally, looking at the ratings overall, professionalism ratings for guises containing Singapore variants do not significantly differ from guises that do not contain those variants, supporting the notion that younger Singaporeans are more likely to view features traditionally associated with Colloquial Singapore English as appropriate to formal contexts, in line with rising endonormativity.

3.2.5 Social Media and other Online Language Use

Scholars have recently begun to examine the impact of transnational dialect contact in online language use, particularly on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Individuals may be more likely to adopt novel variants or terms in the online domain than they are to adopt non-local patterns that they encounter in person, for several reasons. First, many of the features encountered online involve lexis, which is relatively easy to acquire via limited contact. Also, as illustrated by the phenomenon of digital blackface (Hess and O'Neill 2017), the disembodied nature of online language use allows users to express themselves in ways that would be perceived as inauthentic to their embodied social identities (Turkle 1995). The innovative and casual nature of online language use also encourages the adoption of novel terms and constructions. Finally, the globalized nature of many online communities, such as Twitter, leads to increased transnational contact and a global experience of shared online systems and affordances (e.g., “retweeting,” “likes”), giving rise to a repertoire of shared terms.

Some of the most compelling evidence regarding the transnational Americanization of English comes from Gonçalves et al. (2018), which presents largescale analyses of Twitter data and the Google Books corpus. Within their corpus of over thirty million geolocated English-language tweets, American English vocabulary dominated in every nation examined, across all three Circles, with the exceptions of India, Ireland, and the UK; British spelling, on the other hand, retained influence across more nations, reflecting the continued role of British norms in formal education. At the same time,

other research on American regional variation on Twitter concludes that, far from being a uniform, globalized community, in fact Twitter shows substantial variation by region consistent with conventional dialect boundaries identified by dialectologists (Huang et al. 2016). While impressive in their scope, the lexically-focused methodologies of these studies limit the extent to which they can definitively capture region-based sociolinguistic variation.

Smaller-scale research investigating language use on social media sites has examined how world Englishes speakers draw upon local sociolinguistic resources and juxtapose them with non-local features to construct various online personae. In the context of Singapore, Ooi and Tan (2014) and Chong (2020), analyzing Facebook and Instagram respectively, both observed the use of American slang terms, some originating in online culture (e.g., *LOL*) and others from African American Vernacular English (e.g., *woke*) (or, in many cases, originating from the intersection of both communities). As pointed out by Chong (2020: 19), the African American origins of many of these terms are lost on most Singaporean internet users, who simply view them as globalized “internet” slang. In her comparison of the Instagram accounts of female undergraduate students versus a younger group of adolescent girls, Chong found that the younger group used few features associated with Colloquial Singapore English, instead preferring to engage in globalized linguistic and paralinguistic practices (e.g., respelling, use of creative fonts) to index their youthful identities. Specifically, Chong argues that these adolescents use sociolinguistic resources to construct several different personae associated with the broader characterological figure of the *Xiao Mei Mei* (“younger sister”), an immature, trendy teenaged girl. Young Singaporeans’ recruitment of American-origin features to construct casual, cool styles in interactions among themselves illustrates the limitations of traditional models that associate Inner Circle norms with correctness, formality, and an outward orientation.

A final language change phenomenon that has been observed to result from online contact is the nativization of non-local features. Using a large corpus of WhatsApp messages supplemented with online social media data, Chee (2019) investigates the innovative term *toh* in Singapore English; originally meaning “to fall” in Hokkien, she argues that the current use of this term has evolved from a loan translation of the American internet slang term *dead*, which carries a range of related meanings, including, “that’s so funny.” Chee’s analysis is a reminder that language change under globalization does not necessarily mean homogenization. Rather, young speakers of world Englishes are drawing upon features they encounter via contact and transforming them, creating new social-semiotic resources with which to express their identities.

4. Concluding Remarks

The preceding discussions have provided a broad, but incomplete overview of three major channels of transnational dialect contact in world Englishes-speaking communities: institutional exonormativity, transnational mobility, and media consumption. Throughout these sections, the interactions of rising endonormativity, Americanization, and accelerating transnational flows of people and information have

been shown to hold major implications for the language use, ideologies, and sociolinguistic knowledge of world Englishes speakers. Moreover, rather than a rapid global levelling of Englishes, what we are instead witnessing is a more nuanced and multifaceted set of variation and change phenomena, in which rising contact with non-local varieties can trigger the innovation of new features, an increasing emphasis on the performance of local identity, as well as the adoption of non-local features and the expansion of speakers' sociolinguistic repertoires.

The transformative impacts of these developments in world Englishes-speaking communities affirm the need for approaches that move beyond codes and lectal continua. While it is debatable whether the sociolinguistic situation in any community has ever been simple enough to be effectively captured by a unidimensional continuum from non-standard to standard lects, such models are manifestly unable to account for the sociolinguistic patterns observed in world Englishes today. There is no longer a single way of doing "standard language" in these communities, nor is there a single way of being colloquial; moreover, different community members have diverging views regarding what social meanings are linked with which linguistic forms. Feature-focused variationist approaches have the potential to capture the social-semiotic moves of speakers as they strategically juxtapose features that index a constellation of possible social meanings. Such approaches also recognize that speakers use linguistic features in combination with other social signifiers to construct locally-salient personae, such as the Xiao Mei Mei in Chong's (2020) Instagram study, rather than only to affiliate themselves with local or global language norms. The adoption of variationist frameworks has the additional advantage of better integrating the fields of World Englishes and mainstream quantitative sociolinguistics. This improved dialogue carries potential benefits both for World Englishes and sociolinguistics, which has long over-relied on evidence from North American settings to propose universal principles of language variation and change.

The developments discussed in this chapter also uncover certain limitations in the ability of existing models of world Englishes to incorporate recent globalization trends, and in particular to factor in the role of rising transnational mobility, which has forged new English-speaking communities and transformed existing ones. As we argue in Starr and Balasubramaniam (2019), the progress of Singapore English towards the differentiation phase, as predicted by the Dynamic Model, has been thrown off-track in certain respects by the rising salience of the dichotomy between locals and non-locals. In the Caribbean, progression from British English-oriented norms towards endonormativity has similarly been upended by the impact of contact with the US (see Ferguson 2016). In fact, every postcolonial English-speaking community is currently being transformed, to some extent, by rising transnational contact; models of the development of world Englishes must account for this reality.

The rapid changes underway in the attitudes, knowledge, and language use patterns of world Englishes speakers also speaks to the need for updated corpora and other sources of data that can inform fresh sociolinguistic analyses of evolving patterns in established and newly-formed communities. Work in progress on recently-compiled corpora of world Englishes, such as the Corpus of Singapore English Messages (CoSEM), a corpus of WhatsApp messages between young Singaporeans (Gonzales et al. n.d.; see

discussion of Chee 2019 above), promises to yield new insights into how younger speakers are communicating.

Finally, as is evident in this chapter, many questions regarding the impact of transnational dialect contact on language variation and change have yet to be rigorously investigated across multiple communities, while others have not yet been addressed at all, either within world Englishes or with respect to other languages and varieties. If variationist sociolinguistics as a field can effectively work to overcome its North American, inward-looking focus, these efforts may give rise to a long overdue wave of scholarship on globalization and transnational contact.

Notes

- 1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPCXixIY2kw>

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