Global English – Global Corpora: Report on a panel discussion at the 28th ICAME conference

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1. Introduction

At the 28th ICAME conference, a panel discussion was held on the role of corpus linguistics in the study of English as a global language. The panel members were: Pam Peters, Joybrato Mukherjee and Anna Mauranen. The panel was chaired by Marianne Hundt. The topics to be covered were (a) English as an international lingua franca (EIL), (b) the question of ‘ownership’ or who to count as a native speaker, and (c) norms for global English. Since both the title of the panel and the topic areas were rather broad, we decided to focus the discussion by introducing provocative statements on the topic areas. The chair passed the following statements on to the panel members:

1. Corpus linguistics will enable us to describe the international core of English, namely those features that are shared by all L2 varieties of English.
2. One of the core requirements for inclusion in the International Corpus of English (ICE) is that the authors and speakers of the texts were educated through the medium of English – thus ‘English-medium education’ and ‘long-term residence’ have replaced the criterion of ‘nativeness’.
3. With its focus on ‘standard English’ (especially varieties of English as L1), corpus linguistics has (often involuntarily) fed into the ‘standard ideology’.

The idea for the panel discussion was to combine theoretical issues concerning ‘Global English’ with the methodological angle of corpus linguistics. Questions for discussion included: How do our methodological decisions influence our results? How does linguistic theory guide us in our methodological decision making? Do we have the ‘right’ corpora for studying global English?

The panel opened with short ‘position statements’ from the panel members. Each of them focussed on a different topic area. The discussion that followed centred mainly on one point: the variety status of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and the norms that might apply to it. Furthermore, and as Anna Mauranen had predicted in her position statement, it was at times a rather emotional discussion.

In this report of the panel, the position statements of the panel members are presented first; they were written by the panel members themselves. The summary of the ensuing discussion is based on the notes that David Minugh took
at the time. The names of the participants in the discussion are not mentioned although some statements may come close to verbatim passages in the original discussion.

2. Position statements

2.1 Pam Peters (Macquarie University, Sydney): The ICE corpora and Global English

Q. Do we have the “right” corpora for studying global English? How far do the ICE corpora go in meeting our research needs? A. In a nutshell, only part of the way. The ICE project is remarkable in many ways, providing a larger view of world English than any corpus project before it. It does nevertheless constrain or frame our view of world Englishes in at least two ways.

With their fixed size (1 million words, half spoken discourse/half written discourse, and multiple subcategories of each), the ICE corpora inevitably provide only limited coverage of each variety, and a somewhat arbitrary range of lexis, morphology and syntactic constructions. Even high frequency polysemous words may not present identical sets of uses, especially in L2 varieties of English. For example, some uses of until in Singapore English are slightly different from those of international written English, particularly in situation-dependent discourse such as:

(1) I waited until I (was) angry; luckily my turn came ten minutes later.

Here the *wait* of the main clause continues all through the *until* clause, whereas in standard English the *until*-clause marks the point at which the main clause action ceases. Yet among 200 examples of *until* in Singapore ICE, there is only one example of this usage, in a rather fractured conversation. Since this probably reflects the Chinese aspectual particle *dao*, it is of particular interest as an example of the way in which substrate languages may impinge on outer-circle varieties of English. The subtler semantic developments in new Englishes may not emerge from the smallish amounts of interactive discourse in ICE corpora, even if straightforward loans such as the discourse particle *lah* are represented well enough in the data.

The set of Englishes included in ICE is still limited. While it includes quite a few of those based on British English (e.g. Australian, New Zealand, Indian, Hong Kong English), there is only Philippine English to represent those based on American English. New ICE projects for the Bahamas, Fiji and Sri Lanka will extend the range, but the ICE network remains much more a coverage of Commonwealth Englishes than of “global English” per se. Without ICE-US and indeed ICE-Canada we still lack key reference points in world English, and the means of comparing the interplay of millennial British and American English on other inner and outer circle varieties of English. Their relative impacts on