



Larry Smith (right) and Braj Kachru (center)

Experts on International English Speak at BYU-HC

Larry E. Smith, of the East-West Center, and Braj Kachru, of The University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and a visiting researcher at the East-West Center, spoke at a Brigham Young University--Hawaii Campus forum sponsored by BYU-HC's student TESL Society in January of this year. Both addressed the subject of world English in a way that reflected their particular backgrounds and expertise.

Smith spoke on attitudes and perspectives, and began by noting that "never before has a single language been used so frequently by so many people." For this reason, "International English" contacts, in which

non-native speakers of English use the language to communicate with each other or with native speakers of English, are becoming increasingly common.

Smith went on to discuss five senses important to those who teach, learn, and/or use English as an international language. These were...

1. a sense of self (there is no need to become somebody else just because you are using English),
2. a sense of other (realizing that an English-speaking audience does not always consist of native speakers of the language),

3. a sense of the relationship of self to other,
4. a sense of the social situation, and
5. a sense of the goal or objective of linguistic interaction.

Communication in an "International English" situation will be facilitated if the interlocutors keep these factors in mind.

Citing reports that there are approximately 700 million users of English worldwide and only 300 million native speakers of the language, Smith concluded that "English doesn't belong to its native speakers. It doesn't really *belong* to anybody."

Kachru, following up on Smith's remarks, spoke on directions, contexts, and roles for English as an international language. Given the facts of its widespread use today, English cuts across a multitude of cultures and political boundaries creating a speech community that is anything but typical. A great variety of native and non-native speakers use English in a multiplicity of domains (not just for education and diplomacy). In many of these situations, language switching and mixing occur frequently.

Echoing Smith's comments, Kachru also emphasized that learning the English language does not necessarily mean that the learner must or even should acquire membership in a native-speaker English culture. He went on to say that English can be used as a link language or an identity language in many other socio-cultural settings. In addition, of course, it can also be used exclusively in other roles--for commerce or diplomacy, for instance.

According to Kachru, International English is used for four general functions...

1. Instrumental, e.g., in third-world systems of education,
2. Regulative, e.g., for administrative purposes or in the legal system,
3. Interpersonal, i.e., for intergroup communication (as a link language), and
4. Imaginative or innovative, e.g., for creative writing

Respecting this fourth function, Kachru noted the growing body of English literature produced by non-native users of the language. Authors in Africa, Southeast Asia, and various other parts of the world have used English very effectively as an international literary language. This use not only shows their "ownership" of English, but has also resulted in new registers, literary styles, and strategies.

Regarding linguistic norms, Kachru outlined three general types of English-speaking communities: norm providing, norm developing, and norm dependent. He then noted that the great variety of non-native users of English in the world today has resulted in an unprecedented situation where these non-native users not only contribute to the language's spread but often also determine what model of English is to be used in a particular situation.

Another point made by Kachru which emphasizes the value of learning English as a second/foreign language is that it, above all other languages in use throughout the world today, carries a "maximum vehicular load." No other language opens up for its learners such a large world of opportunities for interaction.