Models of English

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*The revised version of an address in April 1992,
given jointly at the University of Illinois,
Urbana-Champaign, to the conference 'World
Englishes Today' and the 'Sixth Annual International
Conference on Pragmatics and Language Learning'*

IN RECENT years, an increasing number of academics, educationists, and journalists have been using such terms as *Englishes* and *the English languages* to talk about something traditionally seen as one and indivisible. Such radicalism is of course a minority activity; for the vast majority of people, *English* and *the English language* are the only proper, possible or desirable terms.

These plural forms do, however, prompt some fundamental questions about how we perceive and conceive the subject and about the models that scholars have been using to describe and discuss languages in general and English in particular.

While I was working on *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, between 1986 and 1992, I found that perceptions and conceptions of English demanded more and more of my attention, because without a coherent view of such things I would not be able to produce a coherent book. The points which follow here are some observations and conclusions that were more or less forced upon me in the process of editing, and that in turn influenced the overall shape and direction of the book.

Two truisms

Let me start with two matters that Anglicists tend to agree about but seldom discuss. The first of these truisms is the sheer ungraspability of what we call 'English'. The totality of day-to-day activities – spoken, written, typed, printed, broadcast, telephoned, and e-mailed – occurs on a scale that no one can encompass. Nobody, even with the most dedicated collaborators, can perceive, conceive, digest, and display all of English.

The second truism is that, as a consequence, the efforts of Anglicists to encompass their subject are ad-hoc and fictive. Any model or models of English (or of French or

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Hindi or any other language) are means by which people locate it and themselves on some kind of map. With luck and a bit of hard work there is, for many purposes, a decent match between such maps and 'reality'. We manipulate our models in various ways and through them we manage, by and large, to deal with what is going on around us. In the process, though, our useful fictions may become part of the very phenomenon they represent, begin to influence it in their own right, and so become in due course objects of study in their own right.

Whenever scholars talk and write about a language, they are using such models, explicitly or implicitly, vaguely or precisely, whether or not they ever mention the word *model*, and whether they forget – or even remain unaware – that they are using models at all.

In this instance, the most basic model of all is embedded in grammar itself; we only become aware of it when some kind of syntactic and semantic 'violation' takes place, as when the phrase *kinds of English* is compacted into *Englishes* (just as *kinds of wine* can be turned into *wines*). At that point, the ancient prestige of the singular or the uncountable, which presupposes unity and inclines discussion towards that unity, is rudely challenged.

Chronological model-making

Nonetheless, although the unitary view has long dominated the work of Anglicists, it has not prevented the discussion of diversity. For example, a historical frame of reference developed in the 19th century makes the single great slab of English considerably less monolithic by dividing it into three stages or phases: *Old English, Middle English*, and *Modern English*.

This model has a box-like or ladder-like aspect, as in Figure 1. It belongs in a system that comparative philologists have applied to many languages (for example, *Old French, Middle Persian*, and *Modern Russian*), and suggests a line of growth in which the 'Old' is paradoxically the youth of a language and the 'Modern' a maturity that some traditionalists however see as riven by decay and decline. Let me call it the *basic chronological model*.

This framework has generally proved useful and adaptable. Most scholars have used it, especially with the *Modern English* phase
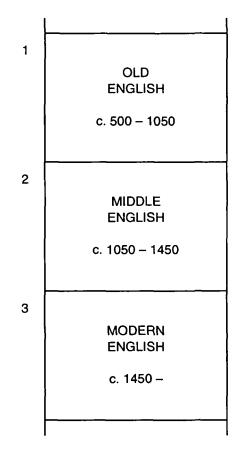

Figure 1. *The basic three-phase chronological model of English*

divided into two subphases, *Early Modern English* and *Late Modern English*, the latter however usually given the label *Modern English* again. The resulting four-in-one variant of the basic model has dominated thinking for decades, providing a reliable framework for many histories of English, both academic and popular. This I will call the *standard chronological model*. To that model, in recent years, some scholars have added a fifth prologue phase that they call *pre-Old English*, for the period before the first texts, and this development gives us a five-in-one variant.

There is, in all forms of this model, a crucial difference between all the earlier elements and the last element. Whereas the phases from pre-Old English to Early Modern English are all over and done with, Modern English is not. This phase is implicitly open-ended, largely because until recently modernity has been perceived as a

permanent condition. In practice, however, Modern English (and therefore, by implication, the entire model) proves to be incremental: like a tapeworm, it acquires new sections as histories of the language are updated every decade or two, to account for new developments.

Although a 'Postmodern English' has not yet been seriously proposed, many Anglicists have been toying with something suspiciously close to it. They appear to be arguing, but without direct reference to the chronological model, that the Modern phase as once conceived is now over, that some time after the Second World War it was replaced by something new. This novel state has since the 1960s been called *World English* or *International English*, and since the 1980s has also been called *World Englishes*. And the implication of such names is that we now have a six-in-one variant of the old chronological model, as in Figure 2.

Six phases are a lot for one language to support, but in principle a box, ladder, or tapeworm model can handle an indefinite number of parts. The crux of the matter, however, is that the chronological model, however subdivided, favours (or 'privileges', as literary theorists would say) the idea of continuity. Anyone who wants to think and talk about *discontinuity* has to reconceive the model in some way so as to represent not phases in one language state but shifts from one language state to another.

A two-language model has in fact long been available in the work of such scholars as Henry Sweet, who have preferred the name *Anglo-Saxon* to *Old English*: a reasonable approach when one considers its unintelligibility for present-day users of English. A comparable multiplicity is also implied in the traditional practices of scholars of Scots, who divide its story into *Old English, Older Scots* (divided into *Early Scots* and *Middle Scots*), and *Modern Scots*. The names of the phases of Scots do not precisely match the names of the phases of English, and in doing so emphasize the distinctness of Scots.

Most Anglicists, however, have regarded, and continue to regard, Scots as simply a northern dialect of English, though without questioning the right of Scotticists to create a special perspective for their own purposes. Figure 3 is an attempt to make explicit the thinking associated with Scots, which has

Figure 2. *The six-phase variant of the basic chronological model*

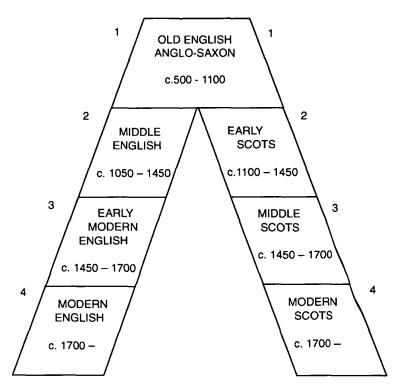| 1	PRE – OLD ENGLISH before 500 AD
2	OLD ENGLISH c. 500 – 1050
3	MIDDLE ENGLISH c. 1050 – 1450
4	EARLY MODERN ENGLISH c. 1450 – 1700
5	MODERN ENGLISH c. 1700 – 1945
6	WORLD ENGLISH c.1945 –

Figure 3. *The bifurcating model of English and Scots implicit in the traditional usage of scholars of Scots*

long implied the existence of not one but three Germanic languages in Britain: a defunct Anglo-Saxon and its two successors, English and Scots.

Biological model-making

Two groups of metaphors have long been associated with chronological models of English. The first descends from classical times, the other from the work of 18th- and 19th-century biological taxonomists, and the mixed images that arise from them have become so basic to linguistic terminology that, although constantly used, they are seldom discussed.

The classical group concerns a language plant that has roots, stems, and branches, but no blossoms or fruit. The biological group deals in language families that have mothers, sisters, and daughters, but no fathers, brothers, or sons. Then, in a rather curious blend, the various humanized and feminized languages are displayed as the branches of trees that are more likely to grow upsidedown

or sideways then vertically (much as my ladders of English go down rather than up from the past to the present). See the representations of the Indo-European language family in Figures 4 and 5.

In this *biological model*, 'English' is a daughter whose mother was 'Germanic' and grandmother (or further relative) was 'Proto-Indo-European'. In each generation of this model every virgin-born child has an insulated purity that bears little relation to the hustle and bustle of real life. In addition, as was the case with the chronological model, there is no provision for tomorrow: the grandmothers and mothers reproduced, but the daughters have yet to prove fertile, despite centuries of existence. If they have in fact also become mothers, none of the births have yet been officially registered.

The basic imagery of the biological model owes a great deal to the work of Linnaeus, Darwin, and other biologists: later forms evolve from earlier forms, whose fossil remains have been, as it were, dug up and
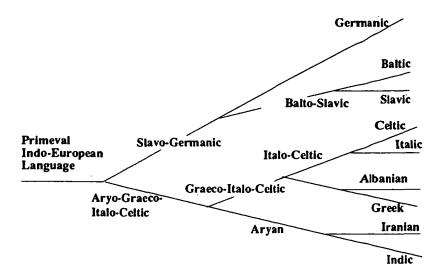
Figure 4. *A sideways branching model of the Indo-European language family, as proposed by the German philologist August Schleicher (1821–68), reproduced from J. P. Mallory, 'In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology and Myth' (Thames & Hudson, 1989).*

exposed in the rock strata of texts. The recent concept of *Englishes* has not to my knowledge ever been directly aligned with the longstanding Indo-European branching model, but as we shall see at least one indirect link has been made. Such linkage, however, does suggest that there has been some backstreet midwifery – if not also abortions – while the philologists have been comfortably at work in their parlours.

Extending the metaphor, we can say that Old Mother English has given birth to quite a number of youngsters – as have the other major imperial languages of western Europe, Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Spanish. Two distinct groups of offspring come to mind: first, the pidgins and creoles of Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Oceania; second, and less immediately obviously, the national varieties, not only the *New Englishes* of India, Nigeria, Singapore, and elsewhere, but also the older 'white' Englishes of the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, as well indeed as of the British Isles themselves.

Just as one cannot be precise about how and when West Germanic shaded into Old English and Old English into Middle English, so one cannot be precise about how

and when the African, American, Asian, Australasian, and Oceanian varieties came to be viable everyday media with their own distinct usages and, increasingly, institutions such as dictionaries, grammars, histories, style guides, newspapers and broadcasts.

Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish are universally recognised as national languages which are at the same time varieties of Common Scandinavian. They are simultaneously dialects of a supranational language (not usually discussed as such) and for political and institutional purposes languages in their own right. In the same way, we can regard American, Australian, British, Canadian, Indian, Nigerian, and Singaporean, etc., as national varieties of 'Common' English, while each is at the same time a national language. Such entities can be identified for some purposes as *varieties of English*, for others as *Englishes* (implying closeness despite separateness), and for others still as *English languages* (implying separateness despite closeness). The differences are matters of perspective.

Geopolitical model-making

In the closing decades of the 20th century four models have emerged that deal primarily with the geopolitics of what Robert W. Burchfield has called the 'innumerable clearly distinguishable varieties' of English (Introduction, Vol. 4, *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*, 1986). Although they behave at first sight like unitary models, their aim is the management of diversity, and their creators have freely used such terms as

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THE INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

Proto-Indo-European
(hypothetical)

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                                Proto-Indo-European
                                   (hypothetical)
                    ┌──────────────────────┴──────────────────────┐
              Western Branch                                 Eastern Branch
            (centum languages)                              (satem languages)
       ┌────────┬──────────┬────────┐      ┌──────────┬──────────────┬──────────┐
    Western   Hellenic¹  Others¹¹   Balto-    Albanian²   Armenian³    Indo-
    European                        Slavonic                          Iranian
    ┌─────────────┐                 ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────┐
  Celto-      Germanic⁴            Baltic⁵      Slavonic⁶  Iranian⁷        Indian⁸
  Italic
  ┌──────────────┐
 Celtic⁹      Italic¹⁰
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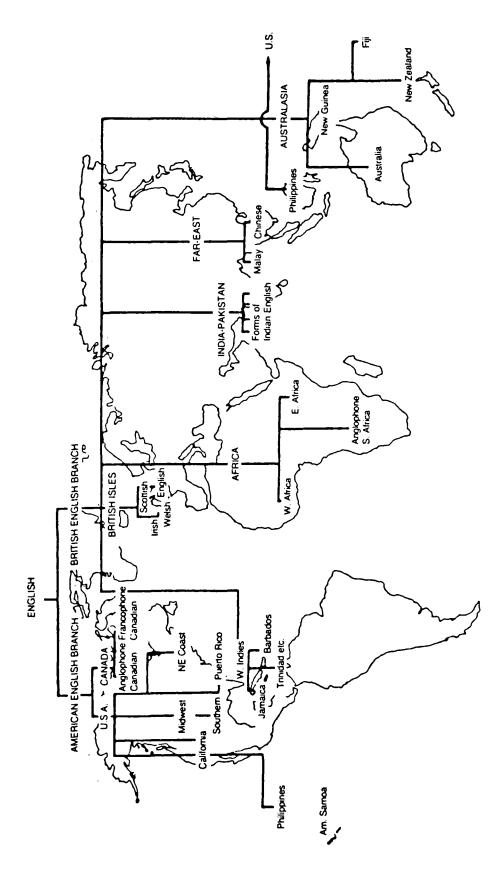|		
1	Hellenic:	Greek (including *Ancient, *Archaic, *Classical, *Koine, *Byzantine and the modern forms *Demotiki* and *Katharevousa*)
2	Albanian:	Albanian
3	Armenian:	Armenian
4	Germanic:	Afrikaans, *Anglo-Saxon, (Old English), Bavarian, Danish, Dutch/Flemish, English/Scots, Faroese, Frisian, German (Low, High, Swiss, etc), *Gothic, Icelandic, Luxemburgish, *Old Norse, *Old High German, Norwegian, Swedish, Yiddish
5	Baltic:	Latvian, Lithuanian, *Old Prussian
6	Slavonic (or Slavic)	Bulgarian, Byelorussian, Croatian, Czech, Kashubian, Macedonian, Polish, Pomeranian, Russian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovene, Sorbian, Ukrainian
7	Iranian:	*Avestan (Zend or Zand), *Bactrian, Baluchi, Kurdish, *Median, Ossetic, *Pahlavi, *Parthian, Pashto, Persian (Farsi), Tadzhik
8	Indian:	Assamese, Bengali, Bhili, Bihari, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Konkani, Marathi, Oriya, Pahari, *Pali, Punjabi, Rajasthani, *Sanskrit, Sindhi, Sinhalese, Urdu
9	Celtic:	Breton, *Brythonic, *Cornish, Gaelic (Irish, *Manx and Scottish), *Gaulish, *Goidelic, Welsh
10	Italic:	(1) *Latin, *Oscan, *Umbrian (2) Romance: Catalan, French, Gallego (Galician), Italian, Portuguese, Provençal, Romanian (Rumanian), Romansh, Spanish (Castilian)
11	others	*Anatolian (including Hittite), *Tocharian

The Indo-European languages An outline diagram of the historical relationships among the Indo-European languages, followed by lists of languages in each branch of the family tree. Extinct languages are marked with an asterisk (*).

Figure 5. *An inverted branching model of the Indo-European language family, plus a simplifying numbered list, as prepared by Tom McArthur for Hutchinson reference books (London, late 1980s).*

'Englishes', 'new Englishes' and 'World Englishes' in discussing this diversity.

The first model was published by Peter Strevens in 1980, and consists of a map of the world on which an inverted tree diagram has been superimposed. It provides a conceptual link between the new wave of representations of English and the older wave of biological models. With both synchronic and diachronic implications, the Strevens approach divides the language into a *British English Branch* and an *American English Branch*, each further divided into extensions of British English in Africa, the Caribbean, South Asia, and Australasia, and extensions of American English in the Caribbean and the Philippines. See Figure 6.

The second model is my own 'Circle of World English' produced in 1987, in effect a wheel with a hub, spokes and rim, as in Figure 7. The hub is an entity called *World Standard English*, which lies within a band of regional varieties, such as the standard and other forms of *African English, American English, Canadian English*, and *Irish English*. Beyond these, but linked to them by means of eight outward-extending spokes that serve to mark off eight regions of the world, is a crowded fringe of subvarieties, lesser national varieties, and creoles, such as *Aboriginal English, Black English Vernacular, Gullah*,

Figure 6. A world map with superimposed branching diagram, first published by Peter Strevens in 1980 in 'Teaching English as an International Language,' Pergamon Press, and most recently reprinted in 1992 in 'English as an International Language: Directions in the 1990s', 2nd edition, 'The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures', ed. Braj B. Kachru (University of Illinois Press). John Algeo proposed similar branches and sub-branches in 'A mediation on the varieties of English', 'English Today' No. 27, July 1991, in list form. I complemented his article with an adaptation of the Strevens model displayed on the cover of that issue.

WORLD STANDARD ENGLISH (center)

Inner ring regions:
- East Asian Standardizing English
- Australian, New Zealand and South Pacific Standard English
- South Asian Standard(izing) English
- British and Irish Standard English
- West, East and South(ern) African Standard(izing) English
- American Standard English
- Caribbean Standard English
- Canadian Standard English

East Asian Standardizing English varieties: Chinese English etc., Japanese English, Philippines English, Malaysian English, Singapore English, Hong Kong English, East Asian English

Australian, New Zealand and South Pacific: Antipodean English, Australian English, Aboriginal English, New Zealand English, Maori English, Tok Pisin, Bislama/Beach la Mar etc.

British and Irish Standard English: British English, BBC English, English English, Scottish English, Scots, Norn, Welsh English, Ulster Scots, Hiberno-English etc., Irish English

South Asian Standard(izing) English: South Asian English, Indian English, Pakistani English, Bangladeshi English, Nepalese English, Sri Lankan English, Burmese English etc.

West, East and South(ern) African Standard(izing) English: African English, Nigerian English, Ghanaian English, Cameroon English, Sierra Leone Krio, West African Pidgin, Kenyan English, Ugandan English, Tanzanian English, Zambian English, Zimbabwean English, South African English etc.

American Standard English: American English, Network Standard, Northern, Midland, Southern, Black English Vernacular, Gullah, Appalachian, Indian English

Canadian Standard English: Canadian English, Quebec English, Frenglish/franglais, Newfoundland English, Athabascan English, Inuit English, Ukrainian English etc.

Caribbean Standard English: Caribbean English, Jamaican Nation Language, Barbadian/Bajan, Trinidadian, Bahamian, Belizian, Guyanese, Nicaraguan etc.
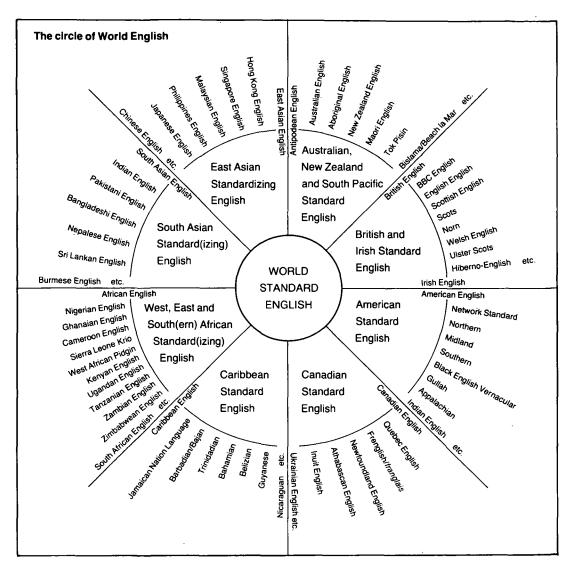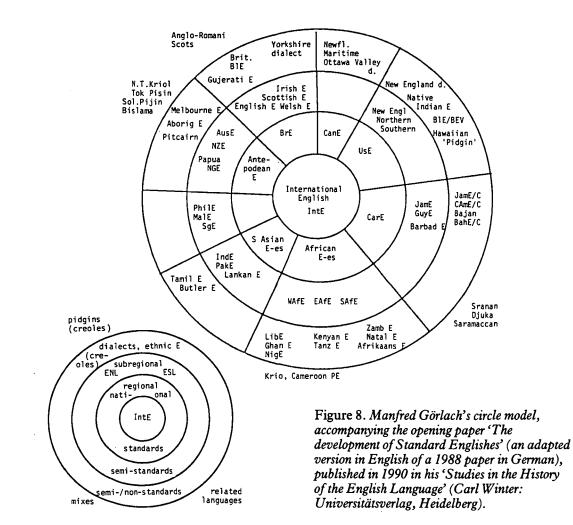
Figure 7. Tom McArthur's 'The Circle of World English', accompanying the article 'The English languages?', 'English Today' No. 11, July 1987.

Jamaican Nation Language, Krio, Singapore English, and *Ulster Scots*.

The third model, also wheel-like, is Manfred Görlach's representation of 'the status of varieties of English and related languages world-wide' (1990). See Figure 8. The hub is an entity called *International English*, surrounded by a band of regional standards such as *African Englishes, Antipodean English, British English, United States English*, which is enclosed in turn by a band of subregional semi-standards, such as *Australian English, Irish English, Jamaican English, Scottish English, Southern U.S. English*. This is surrounded by dialects and creoles, such as *Aboriginal English, Black English Vernacular, Newfoundland dialect*, and *Yorkshire dialect*. Again, eight specific regions of the world are marked off by eight spokes. Beyond the rim of the wheel lie remoter pidgins, creoles, 'mixes', and 'related languages', such as *Anglo-Romani, Krio, Saramaccan, Scots* and *Tok Pisin*.

The fourth model is Braj Kachru's 'Three Concentric Circles of English'. The circles are not truly circular or indeed concentric (though they could be), but in their most recent form constitute contiguous ovals that

Anglo-Romani
Scots

Yorkshire
dialect

Newfl.
Maritime
Ottawa Valley
d.

Brit.
BIE

Gujerati E

New England d.

N.T.Kriol
Tok Pisin
Sol.Pijin
Bislama

Irish E
Scottish E
English E Welsh E

Native
Indian E

Melbourne E

New Engl
Northern
Southern

BIE/BEV

Aborig E

Pitcairn

AusE

BrE

CanE

Hawaiian
'Pidgin'

NZE

UsE

Papua
NGE

Ante-
podean
E

International
English
IntE

PhilE
MalE
SgE

CarE

JamE
GuyE

Barbad E

JamE/C
CAmE/C
Bajan
BahE/C

S Asian
E-es

African
E-es

IndE
PakE

Lankan E

Tamil E
Butler E

WAfE EAfE SAfE

Sranan
Djuka
Saramaccan

pidgins
(creoles)

LibE
Ghan E
NigE

Kenyan E
Tanz E

Zamb E
Natal E
Afrikaans E

Krio, Cameroon PE

dialects, ethnic E
(cre-
oles) subregional
ENL   ESL

regional
nati-   onal

IntE

standards

semi-standards

semi-/non-standards
mixes

related
languages

Figure 8. *Manfred Görlach's circle model,
accompanying the opening paper 'The
development of Standard Englishes' (an adapted
version in English of a 1988 paper in German),
published in 1990 in his 'Studies in the History
of the English Language' (Carl Winter:
Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg).*

rise one above the other out of still smaller unlabelled ovals in a presumably remote past. See Figure 9. The first and lowest labelled oval is the *Inner Circle*, representing the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The second and larger, the *Outer Circle*, represents post-colonial countries, such as Bangladesh, Kenya, Philippines, and Zambia. The third and largest, formerly the *Extending Circle*, now the *Expanding Circle*, represents most of the rest of the world. Population statistics are provided for the countries cited within each oval, giving the model a unique demographic dimension.

Some conclusions

In this presentation I have proposed that three main kinds of model-making have been used in the description and discussion of

English: chronological models and biological models, both products of the 19th century, and largely synchronic geopolitical models that have emerged in the later 20th century. I would now like to draw some basic conclusions about them.

Firstly, some comments on form and function. The various earlier models express temporal linearity in three ways: as a sequence of phases resembling boxes or rungs on a ladder; as branching trees that imply directional growth; and as depictions of fertility extending over generations of mothers and daughters. Only one of the 20th-century models retains this directionality: Strevens's branching diagram. Of the others, two are wheels that have hubs, spokes, and rims, and one is a set of circles that suggest the widening ripples of a stone thrown long ago into deep waters. All are metaphors that can be read to empha-
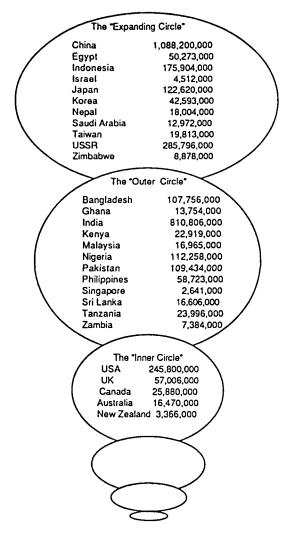
Figure 9. *Braj Kachru's circle model,
accompanying the paper 'Teaching World
Englishes', in 'The Other Tongue' (see caption,
Figure 6). The model has appeared in various
forms in various publications, including 'English
Today' No. 16, Oct. 1988, accompanying his
article 'The sacred cows of English', in which the
circles are presented in horizontal left-to-right
succession.*

size either unity or diversity. Like Janus, they face both ways.

Secondly, some comments on names. *English*, as a term for something unique and unified, is hardly going to disappear. At the same time, however, the form *Englishes*, although it is a minority usage and is likely to remain so, is probably here to stay, and will go on acting like sand in a linguistic oyster. It also looks in two directions: it can be unitary, because plurals usually have singulars, or it can be multiple, giving each variety its place. The phrase *English languages*, however, with which my own wheel model is closely associated, goes further, implying that what once happened to produce the daughters of Germanic has happened again, producing the daughters of a once (more or less) unitarian English.

The phrase asserts that a new family already exists, one that has had several centuries in which to grow, unnoticed as philologists and linguists bent their attention to other things. This family includes many entities, one of which is the universal glue holding them together – a more or less homogeneous standard language that is highly effective in terms of print, radio and television, the schoolroom, and international business, science and technology, and the humanities.

I like the idea of such a family of Englishes, and would quite enjoy being a witness at the signing of a whole batch of new birth certificates for them. But my preferred conclusion is a little different. Two things are currently in a rapid state of change: the language (or languages) on the one hand and our perceptions of it (or them) on the other. Anglicists have inherited a rich array of models to help in the description of what has been and is going on, and are in the process of adding more. All such constructs have their strengths and their weaknesses, and there need be no pressure to choose one model over another. We do not benefit from such a slogan as 'My model right or wrong!'

After all, models *are* only metaphoric tools. For some purposes, a monolithic view of English is appropriate and useful. For others, a medley of Englishes or English languages may be more relevant. Better still, if we can work with both ideas at the same time – two sides to one coin – a linguistic Yin and Yang – then maybe we can get closer to grasping the ungraspable.   **ET**