

## Interview with Andy Kirkpatrick

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**Although you were born in the UK, you were brought up in Malaysia and have lived and worked in many countries including China, Singapore, Myanmar and Australia... Are there any particular experiences or events which inspired you to write *World Englishes*?**

Growing up in Malaysia and Singapore with multilingual people who spoke several languages alongside English meant that I always saw such multilingual English-speaking people as normal and never thought that their English was in any way strange. When I started teaching English in Hong Kong in the late 70s, I became irritated at the ideas of 'correctness' that were being propagated by many of my colleagues, especially as these pronouncements were often made by people who were themselves monolingual, who did not possess the multilingual skills of their students and who had not had experience of learning a second language. I thought then, as I do now, that being monolingual had to be a great disadvantage for a language teacher, but it was usually held up as an advantage ('the students have to speak in English in class if the teacher doesn't know their language' was the usual type of justification for being monolingual). Perhaps cynically, I often wondered whether the 'monolingual argument' had been constructed precisely because so many English language teachers were monolingual and some justification for this had to be contrived. It's such an absurd argument. Would a maths teacher be advantaged if she or he only knew algebra and thus could not speak 'geometry' to the class? Note this is *not* an argument against native speakers per se, but against *monolingual* language teachers. By the same token, proficient and well-trained local teachers should actually be held up, not just as *role* models, but also as *linguistic* models for their students. Instead they are often made to feel that their English is somehow deficient, as it differs from the native speaker benchmarks still used as linguistic criteria in many parts of the world. I hope the book will help convince people of the value and worth of the multilingual 'local' English teacher and of the need for English language teachers to be multilingual and multicultural.

**You've been quoted previously as saying that 'Standard English only exists in grammars.' How would you reply to the accusation that some local teachers teach grammar and vocabulary that is simply wrong, not only compared to some native English ideal but also in relation to the local variety?**

An English language teacher from somewhere in the UK who finds herself teaching English in Australia is not going to go down very well if she starts correcting her students when they use an appropriate variety of Australian English. Language teachers must know and respect local varieties. Unfortunately, language tests tend not to make too many allowances for local variation. For example, to be rated in the top pronunciation scale, English language teachers in Hong Kong have to display no 'L1 interference'. Not only does this automatically disqualify all local teachers from inclusion in the top scale, it also, characteristically, classifies influence from other languages as

'interference'. We need a better understanding of how languages interact. The laudable goal of the HK government is to create a *multilingual* citizenry (Cantonese, English, Putonghua), but it measures their performance against *monolingual* native speaker benchmarks. This is a bit like organising a local general knowledge quiz in Hong Kong and then only asking questions about England.

**There are a great many monolingual, and possibly monocultural, native speaker English teachers all over the world. What implications do you think this has for teacher training?**

TESOL courses must ensure that their graduates are multilingual and multicultural. As a profession, I think we need to establish a body that promulgates minimum qualifications for registration as an English language teacher. Being multilingual and multicultural needs to be part of these minimum qualifications, although these terms need to be carefully defined. We are not asking for people to be perfect bilinguals and to have lived for several years in different cultural settings. What we need to demand, however, is knowledge of other languages and cultures. A course in World Englishes is also vital in helping English language teachers understand how different varieties of English have developed and in what ways they differ and why, and the implications of all this for ELT.

**There is a great variety of recordings of different world Englishes on the Audio CD that accompanies the book, from Sri Lankan poetry to an interview with a Soweto Flying Squad officer. Do you have any favourites?**

I'm bound to upset someone if I admit to a particular favourite. But it's important to note that the recordings are not meant to provide a systematic comparison, but rather to give people some idea of the wonderful range that exists.

**How do you see the future of English as a global language?**

As a global language its major role will be as a lingua franca between educated English-speaking multilinguals. Local varieties of English will also continue to develop so that local literatures etc., in English will begin to make an even greater impact.