

OBITUARY

Larry E. Smith, co-founder of *World Englishes*, dies at 73

Larry Eugene Smith, co-founder of the International Association for World Englishes (IAWE) and co-founder and adviser to its quarterly journal,¹ *World Englishes*, passed away suddenly of a massive heart attack on 13 December 2014 in New Delhi, India soon after his arrival there, in advance of the IAWE annual conference. He was 73.

Smith, in collaboration with Emeritus Professor Braj B. Kachru of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, founded the field of English as an International Language (EIL) and developed it into the concept of World Englishes, which became a major area of academic inquiry both in its own right and in related fields, including English as an International Language, English as a Global Language, English as a Lingua Franca and Developmental World Englishes.

A native of Arkansas, Smith graduated from Arkansas State University. After teaching English in Thailand as a Peace Corps volunteer for four years, he came to the University of Hawai'i in 1967, where he worked towards an MA in sociolinguistics. In 1970, he joined the East–West Center (EWC) there, the US government-initiated cross-cultural and educational institution, and later served as Dean and Director of its Institute for Culture and Communication (1993–1999), where he developed and implemented programs for EIL and cross-cultural communication.

In 1999 he retired from EWC and established his own consulting firm, Christopher, Smith & Associates LLC, specializing in leadership education. He did, however, continue to serve EWC as President of the Friends of the East–West Center, and maintained close ties there and ran workshops at the EWC through the Global Challenge Program, an initiative which he developed to promote programs such as 'Living World Englishes' in connection with several Japanese universities. At the same time, he worked tirelessly to continue to grow and develop the International Association for World Englishes (IAWE), the academic organization he had co-founded with Professor Braj B. Kachru, up to his final day. Wherever the site of each year's IAWE Conference, and as Braj and the late Yamuna Kachru became less able to travel, Smith was the key adviser whom local hosts relied on to ensure that the conference would run smoothly. He also helped to develop scholarship funds within the IAWE, to help young scholars from developing countries be able to attend the conference, and created the Braj B. Kachru award for the best paper given at the conference by a young PhD candidate.

Hawai'i held a special place in Smith's heart. Once having arrived, he never left the islands for long. The meeting place of East and West, and the land of racial, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, it suited him well. In these islands of internationality, multiculturalism and harmony, he developed the concepts of English as an international language, World Englishes, cross-cultural communication and intelligibility in English across cultures – where English is no longer the sole property of native speakers. He continuously transmitted these concepts and their application to the

teaching of English around the world in various contexts, through countless conferences, lectures, workshops and major publications.

Looking at the historical development of World Englishes, in April 1978 Smith organized an international conference on cross-cultural and cross-linguistic use of English. In June, two months later, Braj B. Kachru organized another international conference on a similar theme at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Though independently organized, the two conferences had considerable conceptual similarities and shared participants. These epoch-making conferences were described in Braj Kachru's own words:

The English-using community in various continents was for the first time viewed in its totality. A number of cross-cultural perspectives were brought to bear upon our understanding of English in a global context, of language variation, of language acquisition, and of the bilinguals' – or the multilinguals' – use of English. (Kachru, 1982/1992, pp. xiii–xiv)

These seminal conferences provided the impetus for research to conceptualize World Englishes and its formal and functional implications in international and intranational use [see Smith (1981) and Kachru (1982) for the contents of these conferences]. The conferences led to the creation of the International Association for World Englishes (IAWE) in May 1992, which aims to promote research and teaching of World Englishes, focusing on the study of the forms and functions of varieties of English in diverse cultural and sociolinguistic contexts.

Soon after its inception, the field of World Englishes proposed such concepts as *appropriateness*, *intelligibility*, *comprehensibility* and *interpretability* as pragmatic factors that determine the use of English as an international and intranational language. In general, appropriateness in a given context is taken to be more important than grammatical accuracy. In one of Larry Smith's more important models, levels of *understanding* are subcategorized into *intelligibility*, i.e. the recognition of an utterance; *comprehensibility*, i.e. the recognition of the meaning of an utterance in a given socio-cultural setting; and *interpretability*, i.e. the recognition of the speaker/writer's intent of said utterance. In speech act theory, these three subcategories correspond to locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act, but Smith and Kachru importantly claim that they are 'interactional' activities, not speaker- or listener-centered (Kachru & Smith, 2008, p. 68).

The major stratification of use due to the internationalization of English is viewed in terms of three concentric circles: the *Inner Circle*, the *Outer Circle* and the *Expanding Circle* (Kachru, 1985, p. 12). This three-circle model, which classifies English users into native speakers, second language speakers and foreign language speakers, represents the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains and has been the fundamental model for World Englishes research thereafter.

The three-circle model rightly depicts the spread of English in terms of history and the present state. However, how long this geographically-based model can continue to best explain English use is yet to be seen in the increasingly globalized world, where 'how' one acquires the language (the individual educational factor) is increasingly becoming more relevant than 'where' he/she does so (geographically defined speech communities such as the Inner, Outer and Expanding Circles) (Yano 2009a, 2009b). Nevertheless, the model has shown remarkable longevity, usefulness and resiliency.

With Braj Kachru and Larry Smith as founding fathers and leading theorists, the IAWE has developed into an academic organization of over 300 members from all over

the world. Being an international organization, those who have served as its president have been American, British, South African and Russian, and the President-elect is from India. The annual conferences have been held in North America, Asia, Africa, Europe and Australia and its quarterly journal, *World Englishes*, issued its 33rd volume in 2014.

While many scholars are ‘frenemies’ in the academic world, where they argue against each other with opposing theories, this mild-mannered scholar rarely if ever had enemies. Everyone who had contact with him remembers his broad amiable smile and the many pleasant times we shared with him. Whether with well-established scholars, or fresh-faced students, Larry was known to treat everyone with the same consideration, kindness, respect and *Aloha* spirit. We are deeply saddened for having lost this caring and lighthearted man who lived his life so joyfully with limitless enthusiasm, generosity and consideration, and who contributed so much to so many. We have lost him much too early, but his memory will surely live on. Larry Smith is survived by his wife Sharyn and two children, Sean and Erin.

Note

1. The Journal was independent of the Association until they were linked together in 2011.

References

- Kachru, B. B. (Ed.). (1982/1992). *The other tongue: English across cultures*. 2nd ed. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language 25 in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11–30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the British Council.
- Kachru, Y., & Smith, L. (2008). *Cultures, contexts, and world Englishes*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Smith, L. E. (1981). *English for cross-cultural communication*. London: Macmillan.
- Yano, Y. (2009a). The future of English: Beyond the Kachruvian three circle model? In K. Murata & J. Jenkins (Eds.), *Global Englishes in Asian contexts: Current and future debates* (pp. 208–225). Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yano, Y. (2009b). Perspectives on English as a lingua franca (With M. Berns, J. Jenkins, M. Modiano, and B. Seidlhofer). In T. Hoffmann & L. Siebers (Eds.), *World Englishes – Problems, properties and prospects* (pp. 369–384). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Yasukata Yano

*Professor Emeritus of Applied Linguistics Department of English Language and
Literature School of Education, Waseda University Tokyo, Japan*
yasuyano@waseda.jp