Academic Discourse in the Outer and Expanding Circles

The three-world ideology-oriented division that characterized most of the second half of the 20th century’s Cold War era has given way to what is called today Developed, Emerging, and Developing countries (economies). First World countries have maintained their supremacy and are ranked as Developed countries. Former Second World communist countries, namely Russia and China, together with other countries such as India and Pakistan, are top Emerging countries. A few Third World countries have risen to the rank of Emerging countries, but many are classified as Developing and some, political correctness aside, are underdeveloped. With the exception of South Korea, perhaps, no Third World country has joined the Developed countries club.

The second half of the 20th century also witnessed an unprecedented spread of English outside the countries where it is predominantly a Native Language and beyond Great Britain’s former colonies where it is a Second Language and often a lingua franca. Braj Kachru’s three-circles model tried to capture this expansion. Kachru referred to the countries where English is a Native Language as Inner Circle, the countries where it is a Second Language as Outer Circle, and the countries where it is a Foreign Language as Expanding Circle.

Seen from a postcolonial perspective, Kachru's classification debunked the long-standing supremacy of English and the native speakers of English. The works produced by Inner Circle variationist sociolinguists and English language teaching researchers who embraced Kachru’s ideas had a rather apologetic tone, while their Outer Circle peers felt empowered. There was a general consensus that native speakers’ varieties are not always the most preferred varieties, that teachers who are nonnative speakers of English can be more efficient than their colleagues who are native speakers, and that Standard English is not the only yardstick to evaluate a person's linguistic competence. World Englishes is now a thriving research area in the field of applied linguistics and Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL) is a practice that the reality on the ground imposes.

All countries having English as a first language are both Developed and Inner Circle. Language, power, scientific knowledge, and technological innovation are inextricably linked. Standard English is learnt and used, albeit with different accents, in many Developed, Expanding Circle countries, such as Germany, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Russia, and The Netherlands. It is taught in most Developing, Expanding Circle countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Bahrain, and Iran. Outer Circle speakers in Emerging countries, such
as India or Pakistan, or Developing countries, such as Nigeria or Bangladesh, may find it easier to communicate in and across local or regional Englishes. But, when it comes to having access to scientific knowledge or contributing to it, students and scholars across the three Circles are more than aware that they have to have a very good command of Standard English.

Inner Circle, Developed countries have maintained their linguistic, economic, and scientific supremacy. Aside from some accent variations and code-mixing, Inner Circle Standard English is expected in most academics' spoken discourse genres. And since the written form is devoid of accent and intonation, written academic discourse is expected to be in no variety other than the Standard one. Scholars in these Inner Circle, Developed countries are major contributors to knowledge, which they formulate and present according to the rhetorical patterns of their respective disciplinary genres. Most high ranking journals are published in Developed, Inner Circle countries and most top universities in the world are American or British; some high-quality journals are published in other European countries, such as Germany, Sweden, and The Netherlands; a few are published in China and South Korea, and hardly any are published in Developing countries. The Inner Circle has maintained its "glamour" for academics, even for those who are working in prestigious universities and research centers based in Emerging or Developing countries. "World Englishes" has gained acceptance by teachers and sociolinguists, but it is dispreferred even in informal academic settings and unacceptable across a large number of academic discourse genres.

However, academic discourse is not completely detached from the sociocultural contexts in which it is produced and disseminated. Novice and expert Outer Circle and Expanding Circle academics have issues with acculturation in the Inner Circle peers' modes of reasoning, rhetorical practices, and even lexical and syntactic preferences.

Topics include, but are not limited to:
- Universality, localism, and power in academic discourse practices
- Innovation, convention, and standardization in academia and in academic discourse
- Rhetorical patterns and structures in academic discourse genres and subgenres
- Metadiscourse features in academic discourse genres
- Academic genre and subgenre stability, change, and hybridity
- Stance in and across academic disciplinary genres
- Academic Reading-Writing processes and strategies
- Plagiarism and authenticity in academic discourse
- Research Publication policies, processes, and strategies.
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