



English as a world language: changes in the expanding circle.

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This talk will explore the status of English as a world language, and the changes that are currently taking place in the status of English in various countries worldwide, including our own country. Kachru (1992) formulated a clear rationale for dividing the English-speaking countries into an inner circle (the traditional bases of English as a first language: UK, US, Australia, New Zealand, English-speaking Canada), an outer circle (countries where English is not the native language, but is historically important and plays a part in countries' institutions, e.g. India, Nigeria, the Philippines, Malaysia, Kenya, Tanzania), and an expanding circle comprising many countries like the Netherlands where English plays no role historically, but where it is nevertheless important as a foreign language and lingua franca. The inner circle countries supposedly set the norm for the use of English, more especially for the countries in the expanding circle. It is the expanding circle where the status of English has been developing most dynamically since this division was first formulated: taking the Netherlands as an example, we can safely say that the status of English has changed in various ways since 1992: English has clearly increased its impact on a variety of aspects of Dutch society. In business, it has become more important in the sense that major companies are turning to English as the exclusive corporate language. In education, increasing internationalization is turning higher education into a bilingual environment, whereas English language secondary schools are rapidly increasing in number, and are extending from VWO to HAVO level. Multilingualism has become the norm rather than the exception in society more generally, and English sets the tone in the language of social media.

I will also explore the question how this might influence the way in which we teach English. Should we maintain the British English norm that has been characteristic in the past (with some allowances for American English)? Should we focus more on the communicative effect of the English we teach, inevitably at the expense of pragmatic norms and opening the door to extensive lingua franca effects? Some recent research suggests that politeness norms, which were always set by British English, are changing in Britain as well, and the contrast between English and Dutch norms of politeness does not seem as sharp as it used to be.

Kachru, B. (1992). *The Other Tongue: English across cultures*. University of Illinois Press.