

The Three Circles of English is a model developed by linguist Braj Kachru in 1985 to classify how English is used around the world. It provides a framework for understanding the diverse roles and statuses of the English language, moving beyond the simple "native vs. non-native" distinction. The model divides the use of English into three concentric circles:

## 1. The Inner Circle

- **Description:** This circle consists of countries where English is the primary, native, or first language (L1). These are the traditional bases of the language, representing the "norm-providing" centers from which English originally spread.
- **Role:** The countries in the Inner Circle are seen as the sources of English. They set the linguistic standards and norms that other circles often follow.
- **Examples:** The United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

## 2. The Outer Circle

- **Description:** This circle comprises countries where English has an official or historical second language (L2) status. This is largely a result of colonial history, where English was introduced and institutionalized by the British Empire.
- **Role:** In these countries, English is not the primary native language for most people, but it plays a crucial role in daily life, especially in government, education, law, and business. These nations are considered "norm-developing" because they have developed their own unique varieties of English, often called "World Englishes," which are influenced by local languages and cultures.
- **Examples:** India, Nigeria, Singapore, the Philippines, Kenya, and Pakistan.

## 3. The Expanding Circle

- **Description:** This is the largest and most diverse circle, including countries where English has no official or historical role. English is primarily learned and used as a foreign language (EFL) for international communication.
- **Role:** The speakers in this circle are "norm-dependent," meaning they generally look to the Inner Circle for linguistic standards. English is used as a lingua franca for specific purposes, such as business, diplomacy, science, and technology.
- **Examples:** China, Japan, Russia, Brazil, Germany, and most of Europe.

## Significance and Criticisms

Kachru's model was highly influential for its time. It legitimized the study of diverse varieties of English and challenged the notion that only native speakers could set the standards for the language.

However, the model has also faced criticism:

- **Oversimplification:** The boundaries between the circles are often blurred, and some countries could arguably fit into more than one circle. For instance, the number of English speakers is growing in the Outer and Expanding Circles, and some of their English varieties are becoming influential.
- **Dynamic Nature:** The model is static and doesn't fully account for the dynamic changes in the global use of English. The rise of English as a lingua franca among speakers of the Outer and Expanding Circles makes the "norm-dependent" and "norm-developing" labels less rigid.
- **Hierarchy:** Some critics argue that the model still places the Inner Circle at the top of a hierarchy, which can reinforce a native-speaker bias.

Despite its limitations, the Three Circles model remains a foundational and widely used framework for understanding the spread and sociolinguistic status of English worldwide.

