Expanding the Expanding Circle: New and Future Changes in German English

Simone Lechner
University of Hamburg, Germany

According to Kachru’s influential model (1990), Englishes spoken in the world can be divided into inner, outer and expanding circle Englishes. To this day, expanding circle varieties are defined as being comprised of monolingual speakers of a language with English as a foreign language and/or a lingua franca. A typical example of an expanding circle variety of English is German English.

Societies throughout Europe, however, have changed over the last decades, and are still undergoing changes due to migration. In urban spaces in Germany, between 30 and over 50% of children in foreign language classrooms have a migration background, and the number is consistently growing. Past studies (cf. DESI 2008) have shown positive effects for children with multilingual language backgrounds in Germany.

This study looks at English as it is produced by multilingual children in Germany with English as a foreign language, drawing on oral and written data collected in a pilot study looking at the acquisition of English by Russian-German (n=40), Turkish-German (n=40) and Vietnamese-German (n=40) children. The linguistic features investigated were word order, subject-verb-agreement, articles, prepositions and tense- and aspect marking. Results were compared to corpora of outer circle, inner circle and other expanding circle varieties of English.

Results so far indicate that speakers of German English with multilingual backgrounds show distinctly different features than speakers of German with English as their first foreign language, and that these features are best comparable to outer circle varieties of English. Results also show that foreign language curricula in Germany have to be adjusted to multilingual students’ needs.

References:

Keywords: Multilingual Language Acquisition, Changing Varieties of English, Multilingual Europe.