

Self-Perception, Hegemony, and Postcolonial Background: English outside its Natural Environment

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Due to historical, economic, and cultural factors, English has found itself capable of expanding well beyond its territory and, in the process, has acquired a certain hegemonic quality that, in some speech communities, has placed it on a pedestal above the native language. Kachru (1985) identifies three concentric circles in which English exists; however, this paper is only concerned with the Expanding Circle where it is spoken as a foreign language. It attempts to observe the differences in the manner in which English is perceived within the so-called Expanding Circle based on the Postcolonial history of the community under observation. It employs an experiment based on Bem's self-perception theory (1972), which hypothesizes that people base their attitude upon observing their own behavior. The experiment involves university students between the ages of 18-30 from Austria and Egypt who listen to three-minute audio files of their own native language, English spoken in accordance with the norm-providing model, English spoken with an accent consistent with their native language, and their native language spoken with significant English borrowing. The topic of the audio file, a short description of the speaker's impression of Vienna and Cairo respectively, depending on the speech community being tested, was selected as an unbiased, impersonal topic that will not act as an additional variable in how the participants judge the audio file. The participants are required to judge the speakers in terms of intelligence, confidence, and charisma. Afterwards, a short interview is conducted with the participants in their native language, followed by another in English. During the interviews, the participants are required to judge their own performance based on the same aspects upon which they judged the speakers in the audio files. The results of the experiment are expected to provide an overview of how, if at all, the new generation of English-speakers in the two communities may view English as superior to their own native language, especially in a context where it acts as an adstratum, based on the postcolonial history of the speech community or the lack thereof.

References

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