

# 'Queen's English' not the best

November 2 2011

---

Native English speakers should give up their claim to be the guardians of the purest form of the language and accept that the ways it is used and changed by millions around the world are equally valid.

A linguist at the University of Portsmouth, Dr. Mario Saraceni, has [published an article](#) in the latest issue of the journal *Changing English* which suggests the way English is taught to non-native speakers and the [attitudes](#) of those for whom it is their [mother tongue](#) need a dramatic change.

He said: “It’s important the psychological umbilical cord linking English to its arbitrary centre in England is cut. The English are not the only legitimate owners of the [language](#).”

“English is the most dominant language on the planet and though it is spoken widely in the western world, westerners are in the minority of English language speakers.

“For many around the world, the ability to speak English has become as important as knowing how to use a computer. But the myth of the idealized native speaker needs to be abandoned. How it is spoken by others should not be seen as second best.”

Dr. Saraceni, of the School of Languages and Area Studies, said it was time English language teachers abroad took down posters of double-decker buses and Parliament Square from their classrooms and taught

English in a purely local context.

He said: “Critics might feel uncomfortable with what they see as a laissez-faire attitude but language use is not about getting closer to the ‘home’ of English, and it is not about bowing deferentially and self-consciously to the so-called superiority of the inner circle of the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand.

“Language use is fundamentally about mutual understanding.”

According to Dr Saraceni, the widely held view that English has spread around the world from its original birthplace in England can be challenged.

“The idea seems natural and unquestionable, but if you examine it closer it is patently untrue. It is impossible to identify any point in history or geography where the English language started – one can talk only of phases of development. The origins of English are not to be found in the idea of it spreading from the centre to the periphery, but in multiple, simultaneous origins. The concept of a single version of any language is always questionable.”

English has been “reincarnated” throughout the world, including in Malaysia, India, China and Nigeria but England should not be seen as the linguistic “garden of Eden” where the language was pure and perfect, he said, though this notion has “not yet been accepted by linguistic vigilantes or the power elite” despite being favoured by many linguists globally.

The de-Anglicisation of English needs to take place primarily in classrooms and the “whole mystique of the native speaker and mother tongue should be quietly dropped from the [linguist](#)’s set of myths about the language”.

Dr. Saraceni said: “Fundamentally, we need to re-think the whole concept of languages in connection to nations and we need to begin to accept that people use the linguistic repertoires that suit them the most. The notion of separate of language ‘A’, language ‘B’, etc. needs to be reconsidered in favor of a more flexible approach.” Dr. Saraceni’s thought piece is published in the latest issue of Changing English.

Provided by University of Portsmouth

Citation: 'Queen's English' not the best (2011, November 2) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-11-queen-english.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--