A Forty-Year Systematic Review of World Englishes: Implications for Teaching, Learning, and Language Policy

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the linguistic factors that influence the development and diversification of World Englishes along with implications for language teaching, learning, and policy, and to examine the trends in research related to WEs. Using a systematic review process with MAXQDA 20.2.1, the findings indicate that research on World Englishes has focused on a variety of linguistic elements, with a particular emphasis on syntax, phonology, and discourse and pragmatics. The study also highlights the importance of understanding the cultural and linguistic contexts in which English is being used, as these contexts can have a significant impact on the linguistic features and pragmatic norms of different varieties of English. Regarding the challenges that learners face when learning WEs, the findings suggest that learners may struggle with the different semantic features and pragmatic norms of different WEs varieties. In terms of trends in research related to WEs, the findings show a growing interest in the study of WEs from various linguistic and cultural perspectives, including sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and language education. However, there is a need for a more interdisciplinary approach to research on WEs, incorporating diverse perspectives and methodologies.

Keywords: *World Englishes, Themes and trends in World Englishes, English varieties, Language variation and change, Teaching World Englishes*

World Englishes (WEs) is a term used to refer to the different varieties of English spoken around the world - which have evolved through contact with other languages and cultures (Jenkins, 2015). The concept of World Englishes conveys the fact that English is no longer the

sole property of its native speakers, but a global language that has been adapted and transformed in various ways to suit the needs of different communities (B.B. Kachru, 1985).

In a broad sense, WEs refers to the many different varieties of English that are spoken worldwide, including varieties such as British English, American English, Australian English, and Canadian English, as well as non-native varieties of English spoken in countries where it is not an official language, such as India, Nigeria, and Singapore (Jenkins, 2015) or countries where English is an official language such as the Philippines, the Bahamas, South Africa, and Jamaica. This broad definition emphasizes the diversity of English as a global language and recognizes that it is a dynamic and evolving entity that is constantly changing (B. B. Kachru, 1985).

In a narrow sense, WEs refers to the study of the linguistic and cultural aspects of diverse varieties of English spoken in different parts of the world (Mollin, 2006). This narrower definition focuses on the sociolinguistic, cultural, and political dimensions of English as a global language and emphasizes the need for research on how English is used and understood in diverse contexts (Mollin, 2006).

Studies of WEs began in the 1970s (Firth, 2009). In 1974, a seminal article by linguist Randolph Quirk titled "Learner English" explored the features and characteristics of English spoken by non-native speakers around the world. This article highlighted the diversity and complexity of English use and development in different regions and paved the way for further studies of WEs (Quirk, 1974). Since then, researchers have studied and documented the features and characteristics of WEs in different regions including Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean (Jenkins, 2015; Modiano, 2001; Seidlhofer, 2011). These studies have contributed to the growing field of WEs, which seeks to understand the use and development of English in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

The recognition of English varieties as legitimate Englishes by researchers can be attributed to the work of linguists such as Braj Kachru and his "Three Circles of English" model (B. B. Kachru, 1985). Kachru's model proposed that English can be classified into three concentric circles: the Inner Circle (English-speaking countries such as the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia), the Outer Circle (former British colonies such as India, Nigeria, and Singapore), and the Expanding Circle (countries where English is learned as a foreign language, such as China, Japan, and Brazil). Kachru argued that the varieties of English spoken in the Outer and Expanding Circles are not deviations from Standard English, but rather legitimate Englishes with their own unique features and norms.

Since the recognition of WEs, comparative studies, i.e., those comparing a given variety with inner circle varieties, and qualitative accounts of features pertaining to a particular variety of English have been the most extensively studied. (e.g., Berns, 1988; B. B. Kachru, 1988; Eslami & Yang, 2018; Johnson, 1994; Van Rooy, 2002). These studies have compared linguistic and/or pragmatic features of Englishes with what they call the norms.

The study of World Englishes (WEs) and knowledge of the issue have substantial importance. To name a few, they are significant in teaching/learning English for the large number of people wishing to move beyond the 'Inner-Circle' and explore new pedagogical and communicative settings (B. B. Kachru, 1988; Brown 1995). They also play a crucial role in anthropological linguistics research, as well as sociolinguistics studies of the 'forms and functions of English' (Bhatt, 2001). In the realm of education, there has been a debate on whether or not to teach and learn WEs. Most educationalists and researchers believe that an awareness of the varieties and their features, although not necessary, can be beneficial but there should be no strict

emphasis on teaching or learning these varieties (see for instance, Batool et. al., 2023; Bhowmik, 2015; G. P. Glasgow, 2021; Sadeghpour & Sharifian, 2019). However, there are others who maintain that effective communication among users of English requires an understanding and knowledge of different varieties (Y. Kachru & Smith 2008) or possessing a pragmatic ability to communicate with speakers of different Englishes (Wolf & Polzenhagen, 2009).

Considering the importance of the issue of WEs and its implications for teaching and learning, it is essential that one first conduct a systematic review of published articles on the existing varieties of English not only to depict a visual pattern of these varieties' research paths over the past four decades but also to discover how these varieties differ in relation to each other and the norms. Visualization of patterns means identification of the current trends in research related to WEs, with a particular emphasis on the areas that have received significant attention (such as syntax, vocabulary, phonology, etc.) and those that require further investigation (communication problems, discourse, sociolinguistics of WEs, etc.)

By examining the existing literature on different varieties of English, researchers can gain a better understanding of factors (e.g., cultural factors) that have shaped these varieties, as well as the linguistic features and norms that distinguish them. This line of inquiry can provide valuable insights into the use and development of English in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, and inform language planning and policy decisions.

Also, this approach facilitates interdisciplinary research aimed at addressing the question of whether or not to teach World Englishes. By examining the results of previous studies, researchers can draw conclusions about what works and what is ineffective, and use this knowledge to inform their own research or teaching practices. Through this analysis, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of research on WEs and to identify the key gaps and challenges that need to be addressed in future studies of both WEs and their implications for teaching and learning. Thus, the study specifically addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the specific linguistic factors that contribute to the diversification of World Englishes?

2. What implications do they have for language teachers, learners, and policymakers?

3. What are the central themes and research paths in the investigation of English varieties across different decades?

The Literature Review

Since the beginning of the second millennium, there has been a spate of interest in investigating features and aspects of WEs (See for instance, Boberg, 2020; Brook, 2018; Del Torto, 2010). The studies of WEs, depending on the purpose they serve, are divided into two types: a) analysis of naturally occurring English interactions of speakers from different regions (e.g., Meierkord, 2004) and b) corpus-based analysis of English varieties (e.g., Grafmiller & Szmrecsanyi, 2018; Stange, 2016; Yao & Collins 2017).

Regardless of the types of investigations, the purposes the studies of WEs serve also vary. The inquiries into WEs have prompted investigations of English variations not only in micro level analysis such as phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactic, semantics, pragmatics, and discursive features of given varieties, but they also have covered macro levels of the language varieties- those of usage and cultural-related issues (e.g., Berg et al., 2001; Martínez, 2015; Stubbe & Holmes, 1995;).

The results of these studies, on the one hand, have triggered further research on the subject, most of which are to be considered duplicates of previous ones in other regions where the variety takes on different forms. On the other hand, the results have been employed specifically in language teaching and learning research, language policy, language assessment, and sociolinguistics. (e.g., Bhowmik, 2015; K. L. Glasgow, 2021; Sharma, 2016;).

In the field of language teaching and learning research, educators and WEs researchers have been trying to deal with the questions of whether or not to teach/learn WEs. The teaching of WEs has been a topic of interest in language teaching and learning research in recent years (Bhowmik, 2015). While some researchers have suggested that WEs can and should be taught (Bautista, 2001; Hernandez, 2020a, 2020b; Matsuda, 2020), others have argued against it, citing various factors such as limited knowledge of teachers, learners' expectations, and the diversity of WEs. In one study by Sadeghpour and Sharifian (2019), for instance, the 56 English teachers from all Kachruvian Circle believed that the awareness of WEs is necessary but teachers may not have the knowledge and resources to teach them. They assert that time constraints and learners' expectations and other context-related factors, along with the limited knowledge of teachers might be the reason for not approaching teaching WEs.

Jenkins (2006) emphasized the prominence of issues such as awareness-raising and the significance of knowing and understanding the differences in varieties of English but not necessarily learning them. Bhowmik (2015) adopted a similar attitude by stating that learners' needs and goals should be considered and that a uniform framework of teaching methodology may not be possible.

In addition to considering the study types and purposes, the theoretical considerations for the teachability of WEs should also address pedagogical issues such as curriculum development, assessment, and materials design. Bhatt and Bolonyai (2011) proposed a framework for teaching WEs that includes four stages: awareness-raising, exploration, interaction, and integration. The awareness-raising stage involves introducing students to the concept of WEs and the different varieties of English. The exploration stage involves exploring the linguistic and cultural characteristics of different WEs. The interaction stage involves providing opportunities for students to interact with speakers of different WEs. The integration stage involves integrating the learning of WEs into the overall language curriculum.

While Bhatt and Bolonyai's (2011) framework for teaching WEs provides a useful guide for language teachers, there are also some potential drawbacks to consider. One possible drawback is that the framework may be too general and not specific enough to the needs of individual learners or classrooms. This limitation could result in a lack of focus or direction in the teaching of WEs, which may not be effective for all students.

Another potential drawback is that the framework may not adequately address the linguistic and cultural diversity of WEs. While the exploration stage involves exploring the linguistic and cultural characteristics of different WEs, it may not be sufficient for learners who have limited exposure to or understanding of this diversity. This drawback could result in a superficial understanding of WEs that does not fully capture the complexity and richness of these varieties of English.

Another consideration related to the challenges of implementing a WE approach to English language teaching and learning is the issue of language contact in diverse communities where English is an official second language, such as India and Singapore. These communities may have unique linguistic and cultural characteristics that influence the way English is spoken and learned, which may affect the effectiveness of a WE approach. While this issue is beyond the

scope of this paper, it is important to acknowledge its relevance to the teaching and learning of English in such societies.

Language contact, an outcome of the bi/multilingual speech community under certain circumstances (Muysken, 2013), is a major reason for the emergence of WEs. Lim (2019) lists factors that assisted in the evolution of WEs, particularly language transfer and the nature of local languages with which English is in contact.

Two primary outcomes of language contact are variations in lexicon and syntax. These variations are more observable when interactants of different nationalities, belonging to any of the three Kachruvian circles employ English as a lingua franca to communicate (Meierkord, 2004).

Studies of these syntactic variations are of two types; they are either analyses of individual varieties or comparisons of the so-called non-standard with the standard varieties (either British or American). Considering these variations of the same language by either the same or different individuals, one can realize that the scrutiny of variation and change demands corpora of linguistic items and features.

By considering the tendencies in research and variations in English in a global scale, this research aimed to include all variations of English investigated by the researchers of the present paper from 1980 up to July 2020 in both micro and macro levels of language. In so doing, first, the concept of variation was clearly identified, and then, based on this identification, the corpora were collected in terms of distinctive features on which the studies were conducted. The most significant feature of the present study is its pervasiveness in the selection and time frame which makes it distinctive from other previously conducted systematic research on WEs, if there is any.

Theoretical Framework

A sound systematic review is often based on a solid theoretical framework that guides the research process and shapes the final outcomes. Hence, the current systematic review draws on three theories, namely 'The theory of World Englishes' by B. B. Kachru (1985), the cylindrical Model of WEs' by Yano (2009), the theory of Communicative Competence' by Dell Hymes (1972).

Kachru's theory of WEs is a comprehensive framework that emphasizes the fact that English as a global language is spoken across different sociocultural contexts with significant linguistic diversity and variations in forms (Boonsamritphol, 2022). He proposed a three-dimensional framework where English speakers are categorized into three concentric circles: Inner Circle, Expanding Circle, and Outer Circle.

Yano (2009) recognized the Kachruvian model to be insufficient in explaining English use and proficiency worldwide (Castillo, 2015) and, thus, offered a new model of WEs. Castillo (2015) summarizes Yano's model as follows:

> Once outer and expanding circle English users attain inner circle proficiency, the language user is able to control *English for General Purposes* (EGP) and *English for General Cultures* (EGC). A higher level of proficiency for any language user, native speakers included, will then be *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) and *English for Specific Cultures* (ESC). The highest level of proficiency, *English as an International Language* (EIL) is understood in Yano's terms as a speaker who is able to master communicative competence across cultures and across disciplines, as opposed to a speaker who is only able to use *Intra-regional Standard English* (Intra RSE). (p. 5)

The third theory that the current research draws on is Dell Hymes's theory of communicative competence (1972). Hymes stated that in order for speakers to convey the intended meanings and intentions, they need to go beyond the syntactic skills emphasized in Chomsky's theory of communicative competence. Hymes incorporated social and cultural aspects of language use into his communicative competence theory and highlighted that practical and functional aspects of language use in real-life contexts are the keys to effective global communications (Al-Said et al., 2024).

The relevance of these theories to the current systematic investigation of WEs can be explored in a number of ways. To begin with, the theory of WEs proposed by Kachru elucidates the concept itself and highlights the linguistic diversity and variations of English forms spoken across different sociocultural contexts. Yano's theory of WEs, on the other hand, offers a new perspective on English use and proficiency and distinguishes between several forms of English for different purposes, thus proposing a cylindrical model that promotes a more inclusive and context-sensitive approach to understanding WEs. Finally, Hymes' theory of communicative competence highlights the adaptability of language in different communicative contexts, informing language teaching approaches as well as language planning and policies that take into account the contextual factors influencing language use and communications.

Methodology

All the procedures used to conduct the current mixed-methods study are elaborated on in detail. This documentation includes the introduction of the protocol, selection criteria, location and selection of studies, coding (for the qualitative phase), and data analysis (for the quantitative phase).

Systematic Review Protocol of the Study

It is mandatory to have an explicit and vivid plan prior to carrying out the systematic review. Hence, the following protocol was designed and meticulously followed during the study:

- Search question and objective
- Inclusion/exclusion criteria with a one-year interval (Time 1 and Time 2)
- Databases to be searched
- Proposed search strategy
- Methodology for data extraction and analysis
- Time-frame

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria. Specific criteria for inclusion were determined to capture all the studies germane to the English language varieties investigated in the literature. Studies (original articles and theses) were included *if*:

a) They were reported to be totally (or almost totally) on the English language features of the variety under investigation.

b) They contained examples of the differences and/or similarities with Standard English. Studies deemed eligible if they showed, for instance, the phonological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, morpho-syntactic, and/or lexico-syntactic features.

c) They investigated pragmatics or discourse strategies, specifically in spoken English.

d) Language teaching/learning and acquisition strategies and surveys included an investigation of at least a single linguistic feature.

e) The varieties were known ones, i.e., spoken by a lot of people not a small group.

Exclusion criteria. The following articles were excluded:

a) Studies reporting the history of the English language in a region.

b) Studies on language policies and planning (as the focus was on descriptive aspects of English use rather than prescriptive aspects or theoretical studies).

c) Books and article reviews (as they do not provide first-hand data necessary to conduct the research)

The final pool of articles in the journals was retrieved based on the above inclusion criteria.

Databases and Searching Terms

Six databases and 26 journals were selected as the homes of published articles on WEs from 1980 to July 2020. The Google search engine was also used to locate possible related articles outside the chosen databases and journals. A total of 1543 articles, including special issues on various topics, were investigated.

For this systematic review of published articles on WEs, the authors used a combination of search terms to identify relevant articles. Specifically, the researcher used terms such as "World Englishes", "English as a lingua franca", "Varieties of English", "Global English", "English language teaching and World Englishes", "World English language curriculum", "Language awareness", "Intercultural communication", "World Englishes and Multilingualism". The researchers combined these terms with different regions using Boolean operators to refine the search, such as "Asia," "Africa," "Europe," "North America," and "Latin America." These search queries allowed us to identify relevant articles that focused on the current state and use of English in different regions, as well as issues related to teaching and learning WEs.

When an article was found in a journal, the key terms were used once more in the search section of that journal to find further possible articles on the issue.

Data Collection and Analysis

The authors reviewed the titles and abstracts for possible inclusion by applying the selection criteria stated earlier and put 1 meaning included or 2 meaning excluded in an Excel sheet in Microsoft Word Office 2016 in order to perform an intra-rater agreement analysis. If not much was discerned from the abstract to determine the inclusion or exclusion of an article, the full text was read meticulously and decisions were made based on the compatibility of reasons with criteria. The same procedure was taken after one year. This narrowed the pool of published articles to 747.

Table 1. Databases and Investigated Journals

Database	Journals	Number of articles	Included	Excluded
Wiley Online Library	World Englishes	947	318	629
Cambridge	English Language and Linguistics	58	43	15
	English Today	149	86	63
	Language variation and change	83	72	11
Taylor & Francis	Asian Englishes	48	26	22
	Australian Journal of Linguistics	74	52	22
	English Studies	8	6	2
	Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development	3	1	2
Elsevier	Ampersand	2	2	0
	Discourse, Context & Media	4	1	3
	English for Specific Purposes	19	11	8
	Journal of Phonetics	8	8	0
	Journal of Pragmatics	15	9	6
	Language and Communication	5	2	3
	Language Sciences	9	5	4
	Lingua	10	7	3
	Linguistics and Education	3	1	2
	System	10	4	6
Sage	Discourse & Communication	4	0	4
	International Journal of Bilingualism	4	1	3
	Journal of English Linguistics	50	34	16
	Language and Speech	6	4	2
Oxford	Applied Linguistics	10	1	9
	International Journal of Lexicography	5	2	3
	Journal of Language Evolution	2	0	2
Google Search Engine	The Journal of English as an International Language	7	7	0
TOTAL	**26**	**1543**	**700**	**840**

Interrater agreement was computed using SPSS 24 to determine the reliability of the selections based on reading the abstracts. This returned a Cohen's Kappa of .864 assuming $p < 0.001$, which according to McHugh (2012) is almost a perfect agreement.

Table 2. First Screening Measure of Agreement

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error[a]	Approximate T[b]	Approximate Significance
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.864	.013	33.956	.000
N of Valid Cases		1543			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

The authors reviewed the differences returned by reading the full text of each of the 747 articles identified to further determine the suitability of their inclusions until the differences were completely resolved. This final screening reduced the sample size to 700 articles that met one or more inclusion criteria. Therefore, another interrater reliability analysis was run to identify the rate of agreement in the two time intervals.

Table 3. Second Screening Measure of Agreement

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error[a]	Approximate T[b]	Approximate Significance
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.903	.030	24.712	.000
N of Valid Cases		747			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

This second measure of agreement returned a Cohen's Kappa of .903. Once again, evaluations were made and the final corpus was reduced to 700 articles to be thematically analyzed and coded via MAXQDA 20.2.1, a qualitative and mixed methods data analysis software. Coded variables were organized into 4 major categories. The articles were analyzed and coded for their research methodology, the linguistic features and characteristics of the varieties of English studied, the themes and research foci addressed in the articles, and the specific varieties of English that were the focus of the research.

The processes involved in categorizing and organizing the codes were open coding, axial coding, selective coding, constant comparison, and iterative process. This allowed for a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the literature on WEs.

Results

Statistical Results

Linguistic factors influencing the development and diversification of World Englishes. In order to find the linguistic factors that influence the diversification of WEs, one needs to primarily discern the level of diversity in the varieties under investigation. These diversities can be studied in terms of morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. It seemed crucial to discover the research coverage on the areas discussed.

The results, as shown in Figure 1, revealed that priority in studying WEs has been given to syntactic and phonological features. Stated otherwise, researchers have put considerable amounts of effort in investigating these features mainly to identify the diversity of varieties under discussion. Pragmatics and lexicon have been the third mostly investigated features of WEs by 72.7% (with 16 articles each).
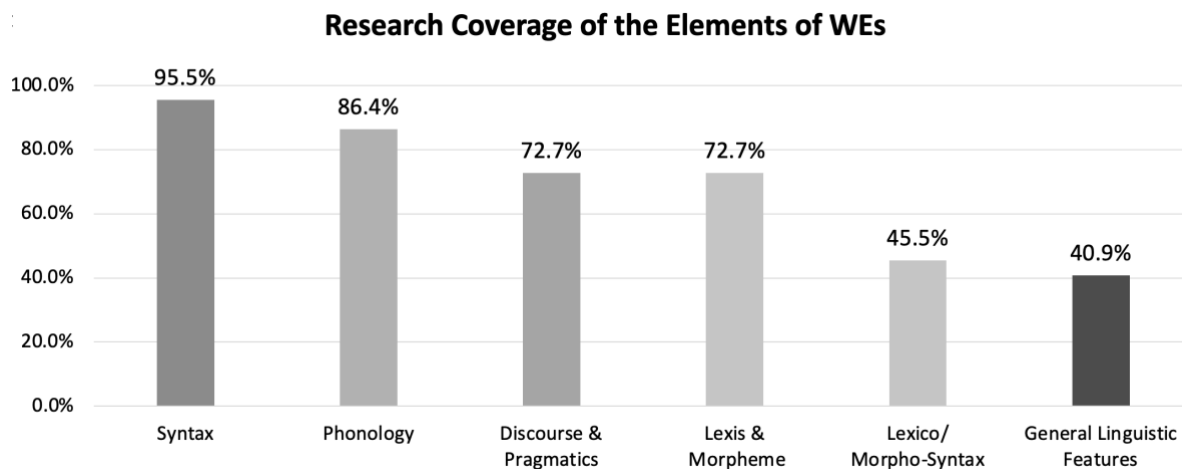
Figure 1. Research Coverage of the Elements of WEs

These findings suggest that a more balanced coverage of the various linguistic elements may be needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic factors influencing the development of WEs.

Published articles also focused mainly on general syntactic features (nearly 50%, as shown in Figure 2), investigating several features at the same time to highlight differences found in those varieties compared to the Inner-Circle varieties. Okunrinmeta (2011), for instance, refers to the influence of local Nigerian languages on the syntax of Nigerian English and that these influences should not be treated as errors.
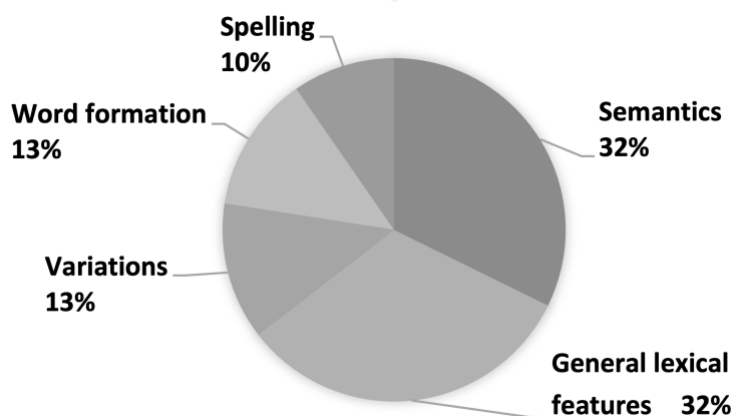

Figure 2. The Investigated Syntactic Features of WEs

As in another instance, the results also showed that concord patterns differ in most Outer- and Expanding Circle varieties, and authors of such articles have put considerable efforts to magnify these differences in subject-verb agreement. Okunrinmeta (2011) suggests that there is a growing recognition that WEs should not be judged solely by Inner-Circle norms and standards. This recognition highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of WEs, which takes into account the linguistic and cultural contexts in which they are used.

Variation most often deals with not only syntax but also lexis and morpheme. The diversity of WEs is manifested mostly in terms of impaired communication as a result of lexical choice. Figure 3 below represents the types of investigations on Lexical variation.
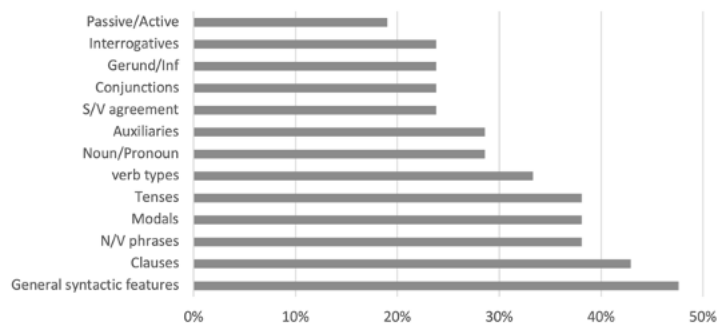
Figure 3. The Investigated Lexical Features of WEs

The studies of lexicon and morphemes have mainly focused on semantic features of WEs to convey the idea that a variety of Outer- and Expanding Circle Englishes spoken outside the context may lead to confusion of both parties. This could result from speakers using English terminology according to their first language categorization which is a case of semantic transfer.

Implications for Language Teachers, Learners, and Policymakers

This finding suggests that language teachers and learners need to be aware of the potential for confusion that may arise from the use of different semantic features in English varieties. Teachers may need to incorporate a more comprehensive understanding of the lexical and morphemic features of WEs, including their semantic features, in their teaching materials and pedagogy. Learners may need to be exposed to a variety of WEs in order to develop an understanding of the range of semantic features that exist in these varieties, and to develop the skills to navigate and understand these features in communication with speakers of different varieties of English.

The study of pragmatical usage of Englishes outside their context of use has as well been of utmost importance; hence, they might lead to communication failure. According to results found in Figure 4, researchers have mostly dealt with discursive features, genres and strategies, markers, and speech acts (Botha, 2018; Gut et al., 2013; Hiramoto, 2015; Morrow, 2015; Valentine, 2019). Closely related to semantics, discursive features of most varieties diverge from the norms, and some researchers assert that "such differences in usage should be recognized, respected and accepted" (Adegbija & Bello, 2001; p. 89).
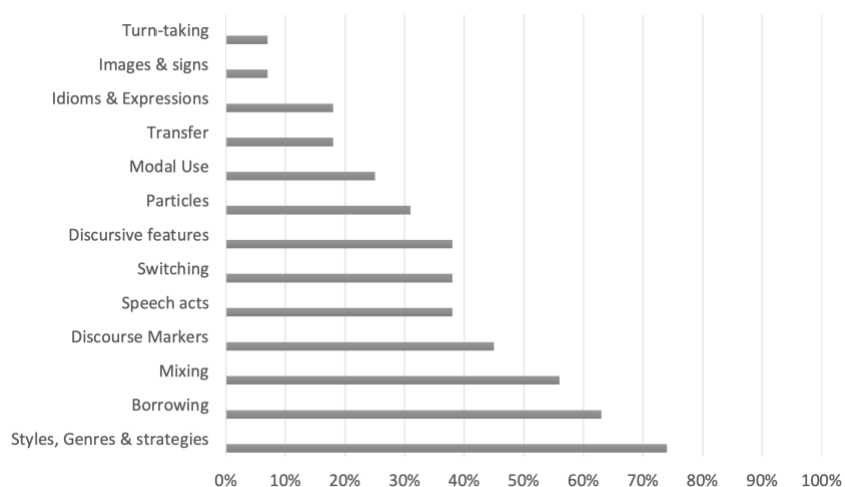

Figure 4. Discursive Features of WEs

According to Figure 4, styles, genres, and strategies in communication have been widely investigated, for the culture of the context where Englishes are employed may also affect the pragmatic norms. For instance, Arabic has fewer modals, and thus, to compensate for the politeness functions of modals in English, different strategies are employed (See Atawneh & Sridhar, 1993). This observation highlights the importance of understanding the cultural and linguistic contexts in which English is being used, suggesting that language teachers may need to take into account the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their students as well as the variety of English they will be using in order to effectively teach the appropriate pragmatic norms and language use strategies for communication in that context.

Descriptive Results

Central themes and research paths in the investigation of English varieties. The results of this systematic review provide valuable insights into the investigation of English varieties based on the 137 identified varieties of WEs presented in Tables 4 to 9 in Appendix A and the coded themes presented in Table 10 in Appendix B. It is important to note that certain themes appeared more frequently than others, with discourse markers/strategies, phonological-related themes, and syntax-related themes being the most common subjects of investigation.

Interestingly, the trends and research paths varied across different decades, as shown in Table 11 in Appendix B. However, based on the results of the coding and recoding procedures, certain topics emerged as central issues of research in each decade. These included discoursal styles, genres and strategies, general phonological features, lexico/morpho-syntax, and general linguistic features.

While new subjects of research appeared in each decade, they were not always continued in subsequent research. For example, turn-taking (Revis & Bernaisch, 2020), R liaison/labial (Bulley, 2014; Carmichael & Becker, 2018; King & Ferragne, 2020), adjectives (Sowa, 2009; Tagliamonte & Pabst, 2020), vowel orthography (Durie & Hajek, 1994, 1995), and stressed/unstressed vowels (Denning, 1989; Shores, 1984) were all briefly investigated but did not receive continued attention.

The findings of this systematic review suggest that discourse markers/strategies, phonological-related themes, and syntax-related themes are important areas of investigation in the study of English varieties. However, it is also important to explore new research subjects and continue investigating previously explored ones to gain a deeper understanding of the linguistic features of different English varieties.

Overall, the trends and research paths in the study of English varieties have been diverse and dynamic, with different themes and subjects of investigation emerging and fading in popularity over time. By examining the results of this systematic review, researchers can gain a better understanding of the most important themes and trends in the study of English varieties and can use this information to guide future research in this area.

Furthermore, the majority of articles analyzed in this study employed descriptive research types and qualitative approaches. Conversation and interviews, coupled with ready-made corpora, were the primary data collection tools used by researchers (see Table 12 in Appendix C). Such approaches allowed researchers to capture the complexities of WEs and gain an understanding of the linguistic features of these varieties.

Discussion of the Results

The present study is a systematic review that synthesizes and consolidates data from 700 published articles spanning 40 years of research in the area of World Englishes. The review

examines various aspects of the research, including methodologies, approaches, themes, trends, and the potential for teaching and learning WEs. The results of this review offer valuable insights into the research conducted in this field. The data presented in Tables 4 to 9 in Appendix A provide a comprehensive overview of the 137 varieties of WEs investigated between 1980 and July 2020, based on the inclusion criteria outlined in the study protocol.

One prominent issue that has emerged as a significant challenge in the literature related to WEs and highlighted in the results of the current systematic review is the intelligibility of different English varieties. As illustrated in Figures 1 to 4, the linguistic features of WEs are so diverse that English spoken in one country, such as Malaysia, may not be intelligible to speakers in another country, such as Nigeria. Research on the issue of intelligibility highlights the subjective judgments of native speakers of English and nonnative speakers of English, as observed by Pickering (2006) and Nguyen (2017), and underscores the ongoing issue of language ownership. This categorization is in line with the theory of WEs proposed by B. B. Kachru (1985), who categorized speakers into three circles of English and thereby emphasized language ownership by Inner-Circle varieties.

Moreover, the research themes and trends presented in Table 10 reveal that WEs have been and continue to be investigated across a wide range of linguistic areas and categories. These findings also highlight the significant diversity present in Outer- and Expanding-Circle Englishes, which raises important issues related to intelligibility, curriculum design, and language policies. These complexities confirm the challenging nature of planning, designing curriculum, assessing, and providing a uniform framework of teaching methodology in the field of WEs, as noted by Bhowmik (2015).

In addition to the challenges faced by educators, learners also encounter a range of difficulties when exploring WEs. These challenges include linguistic and cultural differences, lexical variation, and phonological features that differ from Standard English. These challenges can lead to confusion and misunderstandings in communication, as noted by Jenkins (2018). For instance, learners may struggle to comprehend the semantic features of English varieties due to their lexical and morphemic differences. Moreover, learners may encounter difficulties in understanding the pragmatic features of WEs such as discourse markers and strategies, which may be unfamiliar to them, as observed by Kirkpatrick and Xu (2020).

To further address the challenges of teaching and learning WEs, it is crucial to recognize the significant diversity that exists among the many varieties of English (B. B. Kachru & Nelson, 2018). Developing a single framework that can account for the linguistic and cultural differences among these varieties may not be feasible. The recognition of this diversity emphasizes the need for language teachers to adopt a more flexible approach to their teaching methodology, which can accommodate the diversity of WEs.

A more flexible approach to teaching WEs could involve the incorporation of a range of teaching materials and activities that reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the varieties of English being taught (Sifakis & Sougari, 2021). In addition to focusing on the linguistic features of WEs, teachers can encourage learners to explore and learn about the cultural aspects of the different varieties of English. This exploration can help to enhance learners' understanding of the various cultural contexts in which English is used. The understanding of the cultural contexts aligns with the theory of communicative competence proposed by Hymes (1972), where he incorporated the social and cultural aspects of language use into his theory.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that there may be variations in the teaching and learning of WEs depending on the specific context in which they are being used (Sifakis &

Sougari, 2021). As such, it may be necessary to develop context-specific pedagogical approaches that take into account the local linguistic and cultural factors. This need emphasizes the importance of developing teaching materials that reflect the local culture, or incorporating local English varieties into the curriculum to help learners become more familiar with the linguistic and cultural features of English in their specific context (B. B. Kachru & Nelson, 2018).

The findings of the systematic review also highlight the evolving research path in the field of WEs. The research has progressed from once-prominent issues such as prepositions, word order, word formation, and sole syntactic features to more complex features that include lexico-syntax, morpho-syntax, discourse genres, styles, and strategies, as well as language mixing, switching, and borrowing. This progression reflects the changing nature of English and the need to understand the linguistic features of its many varieties.

The findings of this systematic review are consistent with previous research on the using English across different regions. The study confirms that individuals employ English for their own purposes, and that Inner Circle speakers are not the only authorized users of the language whose identification of standard or non-standard English should be accepted as a model (Tahmasbi et al., 2019; Widdowson, 1994).

In summary, the findings of this systematic review demonstrate the evolving research path in the field of WEs, which has progressed from simpler linguistic features to more complex and intricate ones. Descriptive research types and qualitative approaches have been the primary data collection tools used by researchers, reflecting the need to capture the complexities of WEs. Finally, the study reinforces the need for a more inclusive approach to teaching and learning English that recognizes the diversity and complexity of WEs, and acknowledges the ownership of English by all its users.

Conclusion

All systematic reviews and corpus studies aim at providing the readers and researchers with the state of knowledge at a particular point in time, providing authors with the evidence, reports, and research available on the issues at their disposal. They also identify and pinpoint the areas needing immediate attention or modifications. The present study, then, systematically investigated 40 years of research on World Englishes and sought to visualize the distinctive features of English varieties and what has been of utmost importance to researchers and educationalists, especially in the field of Applied Linguistics. The findings clarified the diversity of WEs in terms of morphological, syntactic, semantics, and discursive features, and these diversities would pose significant challenges for those educationalists who wish to specify, plan, and design curricula for teaching WEs.

The results indicated a change from single-feature investigation of varieties in the first two decades of research on WEs to more complex socio-pragmatical aspects of English varieties mostly seen in the studies conducted since the year 2000, those which probed the deeper layers of language variation in terms of global communication; the time when English users of different nationalities exchange information by employing the English knowledge and ability they have possessed in their homelands. Nonetheless, the results of the present study can not only be viewed and employed as one comprehensive reference of 40 years of research on WEs, but it can also be used in other interdisciplinary fields such as sociolinguistics, for a number of key terms and research issues such as language contact, borrowing, semantic and variety have been meticulously studied.

Like any study, there were certain limitations that should be noted. One limitation of this particular systematic review was its inclusion of only studies that were published in English, which could have excluded relevant research published in other languages. Additionally, the review was limited to research published between 1980 and 2020, which may not fully reflect the most recent developments in the field of WEs. Also, the selection of studies for this review was based on specific inclusion criteria, which may have limited the scope of the analysis of the linguistic and cultural aspects of WEs. Lastly, the findings of this review were limited to the available research, and may not fully represent the experiences of all language learners and educators. Further research is necessary to fully explore the complexities of teaching and learning WEs in different contexts and with different learner populations.

Besides the implications that can be derived from the limitations of the study, the present research has various implications that are worthy of consideration. Conducting research on the sociolinguistic aspects of WEs can potentially provide insights into whether or not to teach and/or learn these varieties of English. To achieve this goal, sociolinguists and applied linguists could investigate the linguistic attitudes of WEs users and the language teaching policies of different regions. By so doing, they could develop converging curricula that take into account the linguistic and cultural diversity of WEs, with the aim of devising universal curricula that are effective across different contexts.

Also, more research is required to investigate the influence of WEs in language policy and material development by Outer Circle and Expanding Circle countries where English is either the second or a foreign language. There are also a number of other issues which could be studied to cover more areas of WEs. Among these issues one can refer to investigating the impacts of WEs on Inner Circle varieties, studying WEs in ways other than investigation of structures, probing the future of WEs, and exploring the native speakers' attitudes towards the future status of WEs.

In conclusion, this systematic review highlights the importance of continued research into impact of known WEs for researchers, teachers, learners, and policymakers. Researchers and educators should collaborate to develop innovative pedagogical approaches that take into account the linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic elements of WEs. This collaboration could involve in exploring new teaching methods and creating context-specific curricula that reflect the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of English language learners. By so doing, we can better prepare language learners for effective communication in a globalized world and promote intercultural understanding. Continued research in this field is crucial to enhance our understanding of WEs and ensure that language education remains relevant and effective.

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To Cite this Article

Khany, R. & Beigi, M., (2024). A forty-year systematic review of World Englishes: Implications for teaching, learning, and language policy. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ), 28*(2). https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.28110a1

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Appendix A: Varieties of English by Region

Table 4. Asian Varieties

Varieties	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2020	Total
Anglo- Indian English	0	0	0	1	1
Arab English	0	1	0	0	1
Asian Englishes	0	0	1	2	3
Brunei English	0	3	1	2	6
Butler English	0	0	1	0	1
Chinese-Australian	0	0	0	1	1
Chinese English	2	4	9	11	26
Hong Kong English	0	1	15	14	30
Indian English	7	7	12	18	44
Indonesian English	0	1	0	1	2
Japanese English	1	7	1	5	14
Korean English	1	2	0	2	5
Malay English	1	0	3	5	9
Nepali English	0	1	0	0	1
Oman English	0	0	0	1	1
Pakistani English	0	3	0	2	5
Pashto English	0	0	0	1	1
Persian English	0	1	0	2	3
Philippine English	0	0	7	10	17
Saudi Arabia English	0	0	0	2	2
Singapore English	4	11	15	29	59
South Asian Englishes	0	0	0	1	1
South-East Asian Englishes	0	0	1	2	3
Sri Lankan English	1	1	2	1	5
Taiwan English	0	0	1	1	2
Thai English	0	0	1	3	4
Vietnamese English	0	1	0	0	1
Yunnan English	0	0	0	2	2
Total	18	44	70	119	251

Table 5. European Varieties

Varieties	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2020	Total
Albanian English	0	0	1	0	1
Anglo-English	0	0	0	1	1
Bristol English	0	0	0	1	1
British English	4	4	17	28	53
British Isles English	0	0	1	0	1
Buchan Scots English	0	0	1	1	2
Buckie English	0	1	0	0	1
Carlisle English	0	0	0	1	1
Devon English	0	1	0	0	1
Dutch English	0	0	1	2	3
European English	0	0	2	1	3
Finish English	1	0	0	0	1
French English	0	0	2	2	4
Hiberno English	0	0	0	1	1
Hungarian English	0	0	0	1	1
Irish English	0	0	2	6	8
Lancashire English	0	0	1	0	1
Liverpool English	0	0	2	0	2
Macedonian English	0	0	1	1	2
Manchester English	0	0	0	1	1
Midland English	0	0	1	0	1
Russian English	0	0	2	1	3
Scilly English	0	0	0	1	1
Scottish English	0	2	1	2	5
Scotch-Irish English	0	1	0	0	1
Shetland English	0	0	0	3	3
Shetland Scots English	0	0	1	1	2
Slavic English	0	0	0	1	1
Somerset English	0	0	1	0	1
Spanish English	0	1	1	0	2
Swedish English	0	0	2	0	2
Tyneside English	0	0	1	1	2
Welsh English	0	0	2	1	3
West German English	1	0	0	0	1
West Yorkshire English	0	0	1	0	1
York English	0	1	0	2	3
Total	6	11	44	60	121

Table 6. African Varieties

Varieties	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2020	Total
African English	0	0	5	3	8
Black South African English	1	0	1	4	6
Cameroon English	0	1	5	3	9
Congo English	0	0	0	1	1
East African English	0	1	2	0	3
Egyptian English	0	2	0	0	2
Gambian English	1	0	0	0	1
Ghanaian English	0	1	0	5	6
Kenyan English	0	1	0	3	4
Liberian English	0	1	0	0	1
Namibia English	0	0	0	1	1
Nigerian English	3	5	6	10	24
South African English	0	2	6	2	10
South African Indian English	1	1	0	0	2
Swazi English	0	2	0	0	2
Tanzanian English	0	1	0	0	1
Tswana English	0	0	1	1	2
Ugandan English	0	0	0	1	1
West African English	0	2	1	0	3
White South African English	0	0	1	0	1
Xhosa English	0	0	2	0	2
Yaoundé English	0	1	0	0	1
Total	6	21	30	34	91

Table 7. American Varieties

Varieties	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2020	Total
African American English	3	7	6	2	18
American English	3	3	17	20	43
Apachean English	1	0	0	0	1
Appalachian English	0	1	1	2	4
Brazilian English	0	1	0	0	1
Cajun English	0	1	1	0	2
Canadian English	0	2	2	9	13
Charleston English	0	0	1	0	1
Chicano English	0	2	0	0	2
Colombian English	0	0	0	1	1
Costa Rican English	0	0	1	0	1
Ecuadorian English	0	0	1	0	1
Hawaiian English	0	1	0	0	1
Kentucky English	0	0	1	0	1
Lumbee Native English	0	0	1	0	1
New England English	0	0	0	1	1
Newfoundland English	0	0	0	1	1
New Orleans Englishes	0	0	0	2	2
New York English	0	0	0	3	3
New York Puerto Rican English	1	0	0	0	1
North American English	0	1	0	0	1
Philadelphia English	0	0	0	3	3
Puerto Rican English	0	1	0	0	1
Quebec English	0	0	0	1	1
Tangier Island English	1	0	0	0	1
Tejano English	0	1	0	0	1
Utah English	0	1	0	0	1
Vietnamese refugees English	1	0	0	0	1
Total	10	22	32	45	109

Table 8. Caribbean and Oceanian Varieties

Variety	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2020	Total
Aboriginal English	0	2	1	0	3
Australian English	9	5	13	18	45
Bunuba English	0	1	0	0	1
Caribbean creole- English	0	1	1	1	3
Fiji English	1	0	1	0	2
Jamaican English	0	0	2	0	2
New Zealand English	5	10	16	7	38
Niuean English	0	0	1	0	1
Palmerston English	0	0	0	1	1
Papua New Guinea	3	0	0	0	3
Samaná English	0	0	1	0	1
Tok Pisin English	0	0	1	0	1
Tongan English	0	0	0	1	1
Trinidad and Tobago English	0	2	1	2	5
Total	18	21	38	30	107

Table 9. World Englishes and Occupational Varieties

Varieties	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2020	Total
Aviation English	0	0	1	0	1
BBC English	0	0	0	1	1
Legislative English	0	0	0	2	2
Maritime English	0	1	0	2	3
Marshallese English	0	0	0	1	1
Medical English	0	1	2	1	4
Missionary English	0	1	0	0	1
Persian Gulf War English	0	2	0	0	2
World Englishes	0	2	7	14	23
Total	0	7	10	21	38

Appendix B: Tables of Themes and Coded Features

Table 10. Main Themes in a Forty-Year Period of Research

Themes	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2020	Total
Variation and change	6	10	5	19	40
English in a region	8	0	0	6	14
Lexis-related topics	3	9	17	13	42
English in media	0	0	1	4	5
Anglicization/Americanization	2	7	0	1	10
Multilingualism	3	8	2	5	18
Colloquial English	0	3	2	4	9
Syntax-related themes	1	12	33	56	102
Discourse Markers/Strategies	15	21	31	49	116
Nativization & Localization	6	5	5	4	20
Writing, Intelligibility, & Patterns of use	2	8	16	9	35
English as Lingua Franca	0	1	2	3	6
Phonological-related themes	5	23	56	65	149
Verb-related themes	3	7	7	11	28
English in advertisement	1	1	5	12	19
Language Contact	1	5	9	5	20
Total	56	120	191	266	633

Table 11. Coded Features of English Varieties

Codes	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2020	Total
Writing	0	1	1	1	3
Lexico/Morpho-syntax	4	6	13	6	29
General linguistic features	8	8	6	5	27
Discursive features	0	1	8	7	16
Turn-taking	0	0	0	2	2
Idioms & Expressions	1	0	1	2	4
Images & signs	0	0	0	2	2
Styles, Genres & strategies	6	7	4	18	35
Switching	2	6	3	7	18
Mixing	5	3	5	11	24
Borrowing	1	8	7	10	26
General Speech Acts features	0	2	0	2	4
Representatives	0	0	0	1	1
Declaratives	0	1	0	0	1
Expressives	0	0	3	2	5
Directives	0	4	3	2	9
Particles	1	1	1	8	11
Discourse Markers	1	2	9	9	21
Transfer	1	1	2	0	4
Modal Use	0	1	3	3	7
Connected speech	1	0	0	3	4
Pronunciation	0	1	2	6	9
General phonological features	1	4	15	10	30
Consonant clusters	0	1	3	2	6
Voiced/Devoiced	0	1	2	4	7
R liaison/labial	0	0	0	4	4
Plosives/Alveolar	0	6	4	4	14
Interdental Fricatives	0	1	1	2	4
Deletion	0	3	3	7	13
Velar nasal	1	1	0	0	2
Intonation/ Stress	1	5	6	9	21
Accent	0	0	5	1	6
Vowel Orthography	0	2	0	0	2
Vowel Shift	1	0	3	6	10
Vowel split	0	0	0	1	1
Front/Back/Mid vowels	0	1	6	3	10
Lax/tense-lax vowels	0	2	5	11	18
Stressed/unstressed vowels	2	0	0	0	2
Demonstratives	0	0	0	1	1
Objects	0	0	0	1	1
Quantifiers	0	0	0	2	2
Continued below					

Subjunctives	0	0	0	1	1
Conditionals	0	0	1	1	2
Quotatives	0	0	1	0	1
Copula/Auxiliary	0	6	2	6	14
Reduplication	0	1	0	0	1
Perfectives	2	1	0	1	4
S-V agreement	2	0	1	2	5
General syntactic features	3	2	3	7	15
Noun/Verb phrases	0	3	2	3	8
Interrogatives	0	0	2	6	8
Verb types	1	1	3	3	8
Nouns & Pronouns	0	1	5	3	9
Gerund/Infinitive	0	0	3	2	5
Passive/Active	0	1	1	3	5
Prepositions	1	1	1	0	3
Word Order	0	0	1	0	1
Negations	0	1	1	1	3
Clauses	0	6	4	7	17
Articles	0	0	2	5	7
Connectors & conjunctions	0	2	2	1	5
-s markings	0	2	3	1	6
Modals	1	3	4	7	15
Adverbs	0	0	2	3	5
Adjectives	0	0	1	1	2
Possessives	0	0	2	2	4
Plurality	0	1	2	2	5
Tenses	0	6	8	10	24
General Lexical Features	2	2	5	6	15
Spelling	0	0	0	4	4
Deviations	0	1	0	0	1
Word formation	0	1	0	4	5
Semantics	3	4	4	7	18
Total	53	130	197	281	661

Appendix C: Table of Methodologies and Approaches

Methodology considerations	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2020	Total
Methodology					
Qualitative	32	65	80	80	257
Quantitative	8	20	40	56	124
Mixed-Method	13	35	64	136	248
Participants					
1 to 50	9	20	36	58	123
50 to 100	3	14	13	20	50
more than 100	6	12	21	20	59
Data & Corpus					
Ready-made corpora	4	12	75	157	248
Published articles	0	1	5	0	6
Books and stories	0	0	6	7	13
Tasks	1	2	12	16	31
Dictionaries	0	2	3	1	6
Diverse sources	2	4	2	10	18
Examples or Written samples	31	52	60	58	201
Newspapers/ TV and Radio	2	10	12	25	49
Observation	0	7	5	8	20
Online forums, blogs, & tweets	0	0	0	15	15
Photos & signs	0	1	0	5	6
Questionnaires	3	3	7	7	20
Search-engine-based corpus	0	0	0	2	2
Surveys	4	3	4	6	17
Interviews and conversations	16	28	32	45	121
Tests	1	2	10	5	18
Words & Tokens	2	9	37	37	85
Procedures					
Acoustic Analysis	0	1	12	20	33
Coding and recoding	2	3	3	7	15
Comparative Analysis	1	4	5	8	18
Discourse Analysis	12	5	9	28	54
Discussions	0	0	5	4	9
Field Work	0	2	1	2	5
Form-based	0	1	2	0	3
Qualitative Analysis	12	16	26	13	67
Word Query/Analysis Tools	1	4	17	41	63

Table 12. Table of Methodologies, Approaches, and Techniques in World Englishes Research

Methodology considerations	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2020	Total
Methodology type					
Qualitative	32	65	80	80	257
Quantitative	8	20	40	56	124
Mixed-Method	13	35	64	136	248
Participants					
1 to 50	9	20	36	58	123
50 to 100	3	14	13	20	50
more than 100	6	12	21	20	59
Data & Corpus					
Ready-made corpora	4	12	75	157	248
Published articles	0	1	5	0	6
Books and stories	0	0	6	7	13
Tasks	1	2	12	16	31
Dictionaries	0	2	3	1	6
Diverse sources	2	4	2	10	18
Examples or Written samples	31	52	60	58	201
Newspapers/ TV and Radio	2	10	12	25	49
Observation	0	7	5	8	20
Online forums, blogs, & tweets	0	0	0	15	15
Photos & signs	0	1	0	5	6
Questionnaires	3	3	7	7	20
Search-engine-based corpus	0	0	0	2	2
Surveys	4	3	4	6	17
Interviews and conversations	16	28	32	45	121
Tests	1	2	10	5	18
Words & Tokens	2	9	37	37	85
Procedures					
Acoustic Analysis	0	1	12	20	33
Coding and recoding	2	3	3	7	15
Comparative Analysis	1	4	5	8	18
Discourse Analysis	12	5	9	28	54
Discussions	0	0	5	4	9
Field Work	0	2	1	2	5
Form-based	0	1	2	0	3
Qualitative Analysis	12	16	26	13	67
Word Query/Analysis Tools	1	4	17	41	63