Universal Grammar in World Englishes

Brief Summary:

Approximately 400 million people (Crystal, 2006) acquire L2 English in postcolonial societies primarily to communicate intranationally rather than to approximate to L1 norms, which calls for a more pluricentric perspective on the processes and goals of language acquisition than that typically found in mainstream second language research. This series of projects attempts to narrow the gap between research traditions in World Englishes and SLA.

In consonance with mainstream research on World Englishes (e.g. Kachru, 1986, 1992) and with work in the multi-competence framework (e.g. Cook, 2002, 2003), I differentiate between ‘L2 users’, who regularly engage in real-world second language interactions, often in multilingual situations where monolingual competence is not the target; and ‘L2 learners’, who typically study the language explicitly in the classroom for use in the future.

In Stringer (in prep), I used Active Perl (5.10.0.1004 – MSI) to search the spoken files of the ICE-India corpus to investigate the commonly repeated claim that inversion with wh-movement in Indian English appears to be exactly the opposite of the L1 standard (Trudgill & Hannah, 1994; Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008), arguably in violation of the Structure Preserving Constraint (Emonds, 1970) and the Penthouse Principle (Ross, 1973). The results are compared to findings on variation in the syntax of inversion in L1 dialects such as African American English, Belfast English, and Tyneside English; it is argued that all L1 and L2 varieties are subject to the same constraints in this domain.

Future work will examine the roles of specificity and definiteness in varieties of World Englishes with a three-way article system (the, a/n, one).