Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes: An Interview with Aieshah Arif and Sweta Kumari

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ABSTRACT

This interview features Aieshah Arif and Sweta Kumari, writing instructors at New York University Abu Dhabi, in conversation with colleague Marwa Mehio about their multi-year project, *Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes* (PPPE). Launched in 2021, the project investigates how diverse varieties of English are perceived, valued, and assessed in academic and professional contexts, with particular focus on the NYUAD campus. Arif and Kumari discuss the project's podcast, its engagement with Kachru's World Englishes framework and its limitations, the implications of generative AI for linguistic identity, and the project's pedagogical interventions with students and faculty. They reflect on their own experiences of linguistic discrimination as non-inner-circle English speakers and describe how the project has initiated shifts in assessment practices, faculty awareness, and student agency across the curriculum.

Keywords: first-year writing, postcolonial Englishes, World Englishes, linguistic heirarchies

The Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes (PPPE) project, according to its page on the New York University Abu Dhabi website,

> explores the perceptions, positions, placement, acceptability, influence and impact of Postcolonial Englishes. One of the major aims of the project is to give agency, legitimacy and space to diverse student/speaker voices in spoken and written expression. (PPPE)

The PPPE was started in 2021 as part of the Writing, Languages, and Pedagogy Research Kitchen at NYUAD by Aieshah Arif, Neelam Hanif, and Sweta Kumari, instructors in the Writing Program and tutors in the Center for Writing. The project's goals were material, not just conceptual, as the researchers, stemming from personal experiences with language inequity and hierarchy and observing it in their work with the diverse students at NYUAD, aimed to explore these issues through dialogue with "various stakeholders e.g. students, academics, journalists, content creators, speakers and writers of varieties of Englishes" (PPPE). Their end goal, which has been actualized, was a podcast[1] to share these conversations and potentially pave the way for curricular change.

The result of the project was not just a podcast, which is by no means a small feat, but transformation across their classes, the curriculum, global NYU network, and the disciplinary community, and their own sense of their agency. They presented their work at conferences, but it was the practical component that mattered most to them: to have an impact beyond the academic conversation and

make it a pedagogical one. They were invited to conduct workshops in classes and talk to faculty about their observations and what they meant for teaching in English to a largely multilingual student body at a translingual university. Their observations align with the conversation on Global Englishes and linguistic hierarchies, reflecting the grand diversity of language usage and experience and the significant implications. We can no longer teach to a standard that assumes only one or two varieties of English are "native" and we need to recognize the devastating impact on student confidence and agency that these frameworks have had.

This project is an example of the often unnoticed work, with great transformative potential, that happens in institutions in the region. Through this interview, we invite readers to share in the accomplishments of this project as well as its decolonial pedagogical goals, issues which matter to us as instructors of writing and language as they mean empowerment for students and faculty. We hope through this interview not only to shed light on one of the many projects instructors have initiated often with little visibility but to also encourage conversations and even projects about Englishes, power, and agency among students and other faculty.

Impetus of the Project

Marwa Mehio: Let's start with the project title.

Aieshah Arif: It is Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes.

MM: And what does it involve? If you can tell us what are the different parts of it? What is the project?

Sweta Kumari: The project began with very practical observations at NYU Abu Dhabi as writing instructors where the students come from all over the world and from very different linguistic, school curriculum and learning backgrounds. Often in the Center for Writing we would see students coming to us and wanting to polish their English or sort of "fix" their English, and usually these are the comments given by their faculty. And that upset us because, again, these students are speaking English and they are understood well. But at the same time, what does "fixing the English" really mean? And the comments are often very vague. Is it grammar? Is it the sentence? Is it the type and style?

Therefore, with this experience and interest, we came into this project, Perceptions and Positions of Postcolonial Englishes. This project is based on the conceptual and theoretical work of Braj B. Kachru, who is a pioneer in the field of World Englishes. The field initially started to trace how different varieties of English have emerged in the world and what their positionality is, what the power dynamics are, and then how that impacts the individuals who speak Englishes, not just one English.

We took that as theoretical knowledge and theoretical field work, and we tried to apply it to our campus and in the UAE region broadly. We were really interested in assessing what different varieties of Englishes are spoken on campus, used on campus, but also what varieties are really perceived to be the standard or enforced as standard because we are in the academic field and we are also an American institution in the UAE. What does that mean for the varieties of Englishes being taught in class, being assessed in the classroom? But also what do the speakers of these varieties and also the so-called non-standard varieties think of themselves? The perception part of this project very much means how you perceive yourself, your own linguistic identity, and how others perceive you.

Project Goal

AA: In terms of the initial deliverables that we wanted to get started with, the more tangible one was the podcast. And there was not really a key angle that we were going in. We just wanted to know what kinds of conversations were going on about varieties of Englishes in and around the Gulf, and also internationally as well. We had a bunch of interviews with different stakeholders, everything ranging from historical linguists to media personnel to students to peer tutors and a variety of others, talking about different aspects and different ways that this conversation has been panning out, not just in NYU, but also, like I said, regionally and internationally.

The main reason we also wanted to sort of kickstart that conversation was this broader, slightly less tangible goal of decolonizing the pedagogy, because this conversation has been going on for several years now, in the Abu Dhabi context, and especially in NYU Abu Dhabi. But then there was not really enough conversation about how language in itself contributes to imperialist reinforcement of the way that the curriculum is taught, or the way that only certain varieties of English are perceived to be academic or polished or formal or intellectual. So we just thought to kickstart this conversation and see where it would ripple out in a little bit more of a formal way, although it was through informal conversations with different stakeholders.

The PPPE Podcast

MM: So the initial idea was a podcast?

AA: Yes.

SK: We wanted a podcast for two main reasons. One is because we were talking about languages, so unless you really hear how each variety sounds, you don't really get much. That's why the audio part of it was very important. And second, because we wanted to reach out to a broader audience and not just the audience who are academic. If we only publish in a journal and in formal spaces like this, they get confined to some audiences only, and we wanted to widen it

because we were also working very closely with students and people who are non-academic, such as journalists. Therefore, in order to make it widely accessible and because it was about languages, we decided that a podcast is the best medium.

AA: And one thing that we also paid pretty close attention to was to have representatives of as many varieties of English as we could. So the three collaborators who started this project were myself, Aieshah, and I'm from Singapore; Sweta is from India; and Neelam Hanif, who is our colleague, is from Pakistan. And so in the course of the podcast, we ended up speaking to people of at least 40, 50 different varieties of English. So it was great getting a sense of that.

And the reason why NYU Abu Dhabi was a really interesting spot to do all of that is because we're thinking about this world Englishes framework, where there are certain dominant, "inner circle" or "standard" varieties of English, as well as all of these varieties that exist on the peripheries, the outer circle and the expanding circle. NYU Abu Dhabi is a microcosm of that. We're an American institution in the UAE, hosting students and staff and faculty and community members from over, I think 130 different countries, something like that. So because of that, NYU Abu Dhabi became a really interesting space to kickstart some of these conversations, at least for us, because it's replicating the diversity of Englishes around the world. It is an American institution where British and American English are considered the standard or acceptable ways of presenting your academic work when, on the flip side, the actual Englishes that are being spoken on the ground are vast and unyieldingly expansive. So that was one of the main things that we were trying to both ask questions about, but also showcase in the same breath.

Project Participants and Scope

MM: I actually wanted to ask about that. You mentioned interviewing people who are having these conversations. But you also mentioned that you want people to be able to hear the different varieties of English. So what types of people did you end up interviewing? Because of the way you started it, you said it's more about what are the conversations happening, but it seems to have changed over time.

SK: Initially, when we started it, we went with the most accessible people available - with our colleagues, with our students in the Center for Writing, and then we expanded it to also experts who are teaching and writing on these topics. We went to Oxford for a conference, we found historical linguists there, and later found people who were practitioners in the US, academics who are actually involved with terms like linguistic justice and are very deep into this discourse.

But we also talked to journalists because we were trying to include stakeholders from all walks of life such as journalists who are producing the newspapers or media articles in the non-standard post-colonial geographies and nations. We were interested in examining what guides their practice because often there is this tension between wanting to represent the local variety,

but at the same time wanting it to be accessible to a wider audience. So we were interested in what negotiation happens and what guides that negotiation.

Later, we also talked to students and a lot of people on campus at NYU Abu Dhabi, and also within the region because while we were assessing what conversations were happening, we were also initiating these conversations, as often in those groups, in those contexts, they had not really thought about it.

AA: So I think that's how it worked. It's not necessarily that they were having these conversations, as it were. For example, in the context of the historical linguistics, which was our first full episode, we kind of set the narrative. We wanted to start out talking about how linguistics and language and perceptions of these varieties and accents evolved over time, historically, and then move into different ways and applications of it. That also goes for the journalists, I don't think they had necessarily ever thought about what variety of English they spoke.

But then we framed it and tried to give a little bit of context to how the conversations were relevant, not just to their field, but also to the larger discourse that was going on. And we ended up also talking to the different (NYU) campuses as well. So although a lot of our conversations were based at NYU Abu Dhabi, we also spoke to representatives from NYU New York and NYU Shanghai because all of those represented very different demographics in terms of their relationship with English.

NYU Abu Dhabi is a space where English is an official language, but it's not the national language by any means. And so that was a very distinctive conversation in the way that Shanghai, with English as a foreign language, where it was being used to teach, but then for the most part, in the country itself, it didn't necessarily have an established place. And these were also interesting to compare to NYU New York, where English is the medium of instruction and is also the medium of all social interaction, where again, that dynamic and the tension is completely different for somebody coming in as, say, I mean, we don't like to use that, but like a "non-native" speaker or a multilingual speaker of English.

And then the conversations really evolved over time as well, because we started out just finding out what were the perceptions and positions in terms of status and hierarchy. The hierarchies are established by these varieties of English, but over time, these conversations started to evolve and expand. And we started talking to people from different fields as well. So one of the big sub-projects that it also evolved into was Whisper and World Englishes, where we were working with oral history archivist, Lauren Kata, at the NYU Abu Dhabi Library Archives. And we looked at this application of varieties of English on an oral histories perspective, not just in academia, because that's also something that is huge in terms of –

SK: – preserving the voices of the people in their own voices.

AA: Exactly, whilst at the same time, addressing a lot of these tensions of hierarchy and stereotype and discrimination faced by the differences in the kinds of English that they speak.

AI and the Whisper Project

SK: And that happened around the same time when the whole world got involved with generative AI technology. We ask if AI is an opportunity or a disturbance or a challenge. Does it completely break apart the world and efforts of World Englishes? Because the efforts of World Englishes has been preserving your voice, your variety, giving that variety equal status and prestige and perceptions. But then came generative AI, which has been described as "flattening" the language. Everyone's writing is now going to sound and look the same, we worried.

And a lot of these conversations were in fact inspired by our conversations with NYUAD Library archivist, Lauren Kata. She was very interested in it because what Lauren was doing as an archivist was recording oral interviews, under the Memory Project, as part of NYUAD archives. She was also involved in transcribing those interviews, so it's during this transcribing activity that she figured that the AI tools such as Whisper could maybe pose more challenges. Even outside of this AI technology, she was involved in training her students, researchers and student assistants in transcribing work. A lot of her work involved actively thinking about how much editing she does and what guides those principles, which is when she reached out to us.

AA: So the questions there were twofold. One, in terms of the AI technology that she was using, which is Whisper, a speech-to-text technology that is used for oral history transcriptions for interviews. And so one of the questions was, when it comes to AI technologies and their transcription capabilities, what are the distinctions between their capacities with regards to varieties of English? Because they did seem to have issues with varieties that were considered to be outside of the "inner circle."

And this might be a moment, which we probably should have mentioned a little bit earlier, to say that also Kachru's World Englishes Model, although it was a start in our theoretical framework, a jumping off point for our research, we did identify a lot of issues with it as well. Like the fact that it doesn't take into account the, first of all, non-geographical boundaries, the fact that it doesn't take into account the power and dynamics, the fact that it's, at the end of the day, reinforcing the stereotypes of what we're trying to avoid. Because the inner circle automatically gets categorized as the "native category," and everything that falls outside of that is not.

MM: But then even spaces like the UAE don't fit in any of the categories, right? Because they're not expanding. It was colonized, but not in the same area. Is it the same as India or Singapore? But then even India and Singapore, that history is very different, right?

AA: Yes, when it comes to Singapore, for example, I have lived my entire life with English as my primary language. I don't even say Native Language. And I consider myself to be completely fluent, but then I would, for example, not be able to get a job in about 90% of these language instruction contexts because their job descriptions require a "native speaker," which I do not fall in, in terms of these World English categories.

So, the way that we were looking at it was also through breaking this assumption of there being a native and non-native dichotomy. The first issue being Whisper's capabilities in transcribing and reading "non-native accents." And the second thing is in terms of categorizing readers. Because for oral archival purposes, you have to give some sort of indicators and markers of like, names, ages, geographical background. And one of the tags that was consistently in the oral history archives was of the "native" or "non-native" English speaker. But then that in itself holds a lot of prejudice and stereotypes immediately.

In-Class Application with Students

AA: The two-fold considerations that we were making were first on Whisper's capabilities, and second on the categorization of the speakers because when these archives are accessed by people from outside, there are labels which carry a lot of weight. Whether you're saying it's a native, non-native, there's immediate pejorative assumptions that pop up as you're reading these labels. So we worked with Lauren on that. That was when we had the conversation about the native, non-native speaker and how to break the binary, proposing an alternative of categorizing maybe as primary and secondary speakers, which we have been testing out during class, working with our students in class.

And that's actually worked out really well because they always pause for a second and they're like, well, yeah, I guess my first language that I spoke was Arabic and I speak it at home, but then I use English a lot more. And so that becomes the focus of the question: What is it that you speak the most? And that's been one of the interesting things that's come out, I feel, from the research because the way that the agency and the self-perception or your ownership over the languages changes your agency and use of the language when you do. And that really applies very closely to how they also express themselves in their writing.

MM: Okay, so you're reframing how you talk about language, and that's reframing how we talk about linguistic identity specifically, and it's reframing how students think about the language, and then it actually impacts the work that they do?

AA: Yeah, it seemed like that, and I think it happened so subtly and so quietly that we didn't really notice it at first. But I feel like this language has rippled out across the entire, at least first year

writing seminar1, and we're trying to bring it across the campus as well, where there is a decentralized focus on getting this absolute polished or certain "Standard English" presented in the writing. Because why is that necessary when the key purpose is to be understood?

SK: And in fact, I think our project is very timely because in the age of AI flattening all the linguistic flavors and identities, the emphasis on preserving the voice is even more important now. We had already begun emphasizing that your variety of English is also valid, your variety of English tells us what your individual voice is, and what that way of expression is. It's individuality that we want to preserve.

Conversations with Faculty

SK: And when we talk about emphasizing, we also work a lot with Writing Program faculty and then also broadly other faculty and practitioners because sure, you can encourage the students, but if you're not still modifying the syllabus and the assessment, it's not going to go very far. You need to check what you are assessing your students on, especially when it comes to writing, because writing tends to be formal and in the formal language, somehow, if not directly, in subtle ways, you still kind of promote or encourage "British or American, or one of the inner circle" varieties. So we really tried to work with faculty more in the sense of creating awareness, having those discussions, but also really thinking about revising and revisiting your assessment practices. And that started to happen a lot, especially on campus.

MM: So not just in the first year writing seminar?

AA: Yeah, broadly. I think it's because also in our position as writing instructors, we are embedded in the first year writing seminars, but also embedded in the Center for Writing. And because of that, we have a little bit of a reach across the campus. On top of that, we do run workshops for the faculty, and we go into classes for the core curriculum, running workshops there as well. And so there's training that happens on multiple layers there. For us, in terms of having this conversation; for the students, in terms of sort of reinforcing and reshaping the way that their relationship with writing and their linguistic identity is; and also for faculty, because in the way that we speak about writing, we hope that it also promotes a way of thinking about writing and languages that's not unidirectional and also not still accidentally or implicitly imperial at heart.

Workshops and Conferences

MM: You mentioned workshops in the class, but you have done workshops outside to talk about these things? Can you tell us a little bit more about the other workshops and any other things that have come out of it?

[1] The First Year Writing Seminar is the first-year composition class required across all NYUAD students in their first year.

AA: Sure, I'll first talk about the core workshops. We go into classes and work with the faculty in designing workshops tailored on writing or different stages of the writing process: reading, listening, speaking, thinking, everything. And in the process of that, we have tried to fold in these conversations as well. And it's interesting how we're talking about varieties of English, which seems very niche, but then if you think about the fact that we're an English medium institution, and English has become the lingua franca of the world it means that this conversation is actually the basis of pretty much everything. So in terms of the writing that's being produced in class, the communication that's happening informally, the way that we think, the way that we engage, the internet and all of that is still tied to the language that we're working in as well.

We've also attended seven conferences regionally and internationally. Those were really good spaces to bring this conversation out and share with other people. Because we're looking at it also, I think, from a pretty multidisciplinary perspective, being writing instructors and being composition experts. So in the International Association for World Englishes Conference, we brought in this angle of writing instruction and AI. And then for the Oral Histories Conference, we were talking about oral histories from the perspective of World Englishes. So it's really about cross-pollinating the disciplines which are having these conversations (or not having these conversations) to just give them a little bit more access and reach because we work across so many disciplines and in so many different ways.

SK: At the NYU Abu Dhabi campus, there is a center for faculty workshops and faculty training, the Hilary Ballon Center for Teaching and Learning. We have also run workshops a couple of times in that space where usually a variety of faculty from different disciplines came to attend. Writing is at the core of everything. Even though the faculty who are teaching content mostly and don't really think about writing actively, they are still teaching writing or at least assigning writing assessments and assignments in their classes. Through these workshops and conversations, the faculty came to realize how much they could influence student work. And then through students' writing and work, they could also influence general discussions about language identity, linguistic identity, linguistic justice, and even encourage inclusion and empowerment. I think all of this eventually empowers speakers to take ownership of the language they speak and not be embarrassed about committing errors and mistakes.

We have encountered that often on this very diverse campus, the first year students feel very overwhelmed and some of them feel like they're at a competitive disadvantage with the people who have had more exposure or access to English. I do remember one student saying "I feel very sad for myself. American students can access everything very clearly whereas I cannot." In situations like this, we want to let students know that you are equally valuable regardless of whatever language you have access to. And that multilinguals have a variety of linguistic devices that they could use in order to speak with impact using the whole range of their linguistic

repertoire. Sometimes they just don't know that these tools can be used interchangeably and to their advantage. Through these conversations, research and workshops, we try to encourage and empower students. They are certainly not behind if they are not better than a monolingual speaker of English.

Institutional Response to PPPE Interventions

MM: You mentioned the importance of bridging the gap, because you can tell students: you're empowered, the variety of English that you use is valuable, is English, all of that. And you mentioned how it's important for faculty to actually respond to that and not preach it or come to the workshop and then be like, yeah, but I'm still going to put 30% on grammar. What is your approach to bridging that gap, among faculty and students?

SK: NYU Abu Dhabi campus has been very receptive to whatever discussions we have had. We haven't really received strong resistance to this. I think everyone has been very welcoming. The gap sometimes comes into actually implementing that and how much control or even just time and resources you have. I think the intention is there.

We talk about diversity of students, but we also have a great diversity of faculty. The faculty themselves are multilinguals, bilinguals, so they do respect and really admire the fact that we are talking about linguistic variety and linguistic identity and diversity and inclusion in general, but often either they don't have time at hand to do a major revision of their syllabus, or they don't have control over assessment because approvals from many different stakeholders need to be in place. But as much as there is control, I think the faculty is very much willing to adjust.

Since we started to have these conversations, at least in the first year writing seminars and the faculty that we have worked with, the faculty are telling the students actively: look at the grading rubric; I do not grade on your syntax and grammar and techniques. I prioritize your critical thinking, and the weight has been adjusted, or at least it's being adjusted, so it's been very encouraging here on campus.

AA: Two things also. For one, the fact that it's not anything revolutionary, actually, what we're saying, if you think about it. And I think that has been obvious because a lot of times we're like, oh, is there going to be resistance and this and that? But this is the kind of conversation that is like a switch. The second you flip it on and you're aware of it, it's very hard to unsee it. And it's very hard to come back and say no, but I want to reinforce the imperial dynamics that have existed in the world. It's ironic. Because at the end of the day, we realize that the faculty and staff who are more stubborn and more resistant to change, are a little bit more sticklers for this standard English, happen to be the ones from the postcolonial countries. So it's really a mental shift but then at the same time I think, like Sweta said, it's a very receptive campus and space that we are working in.

But then on the other point that I was going to bring up, it was this idea of how the imperial standards that exist are also so tied to a lot of the other conversations that are going on in the world right now. I will not go too much into the political situations, but we mentioned earlier, this idea of AI. And the reason why our project also evolved so much into an analysis and study on AI is because the concerns that are mapped out in our project in terms of varieties of English are almost directly correlating to the concerns that people have with the advent of generative AI. Because if you think about, like we mentioned earlier, this idea of authenticity, your voice, preserving your critical thinking, how do you maintain some kind of an identity in a space where not only is your language being flattened, but your thinking being flattened? And so a lot of that has been in an attempt to empower students and also staff and faculty alike to think about how your agency and ability to govern your own language, your own thought, is also something that appears in your variety of English. Because that's all your individual identity.

This idea of a standard English is very much tied to the professional or academic standards that students are also striving towards in an academic setting. And that's also a lot of the reason why they tend to turn to AI. Apart from not having time or being lazy, there's this desire to fulfill this academic standard, which is very much tied to these imperial standards of academia as a whole. So in order to decolonize the curriculum, we also have to have people decolonize their ways of thinking, including faculty. So a lot of the conversations that we've been having have been trying to have them aware of the fact that there are different ways of thinking about it. And there's also this arbitrary notion of superiority or imperialist supremacy, which we need to break ourselves out of because it's not serving anyone, especially in today's day and age. And that's something generative AI unfortunately is seeking to reinforce rather than break down.

Personal Motive for Project

MM: What is your personal interest in the project? Personally, what brought you to the project?

SK: English is not my first language. I grew up learning English in my later stage pretty much from high school to college. I struggled with the accent and pronunciation a lot. I grew up being embarrassed about some of the linguistic features that were impacted by my first language, which was Hindi, and also due to the regional variety of Bihari Hindi. So it took me years to come to an acceptance that whatever accent or expression or choices I have, they define my individual identity. I don't need to sound like someone else. I was inspired by this personal journey and I wanted to make sure that other speakers, the students who are coming to this very established and "prestigious" university don't get into the same trap.

I feel like with my positionality now as someone who kind of feels a little more empowered to own my language, I have some negotiation power when it comes to linguistic discrimination. For example, my most recent win is fighting with a European university where I got admitted into a master's program, and it took me many emails and a lot of strong statements explaining

why I should not have to write the IELTS. By default, any "non-native" or "multilingual" student has to somehow provide proof of English proficiency if they want to go further in higher education. I, as someone who has been practicing teaching in an English medium university for over a decade, having to prove my English abilities was offensive. I, in fact, used this project as justification for why I didn't need to take an IELTS test again. They finally accepted that, so it was such a great win personally, and I feel like people who have come through this linguistic complexity and identity and perceptions now have a position to fight for it. We should continue to fight for it. Had I not done this project, I don't know if I could really stay firm in my decision not to retake the IELTS test.

AA: And that's what I was actually going to say. I did have a thing to add because one of the big things as I was growing up, you take your language for granted. But then at the same time, I think I was first confronted by it when I was applying for an MFA in creative writing and they insisted that I do TEFL, English as a foreign language test. Although I had submitted a 20-page manuscript of my writing in English, and I had been accepted, they insisted that I submit this in order to start with the program. And I did eventually do the test, but then I didn't do the program because I was like, I can't support this. And on top of that, when I was looking for jobs, when I first graduated, and I realized I couldn't apply for so many of them because I was, "non-native," it was this deep sense of injustice that I think fueled me to think about it a little bit more. And honestly, I wish I had the project back then, like a decade ago or whatever it was, because I would not have caved. And the fact that I did cave still kind of stings for me. And I would love to spread the word enough that if it can be one less person's fight, then I would have succeeded in some way.

At the end of the day, it's like, you also know that language is power and it is a tool of those in power. So I think it's a great spot that we're in right now because I feel like we're at a point in history when all of the systems in power are being questioned systematically and may eventually be disestablished or dismantled. But I feel like language is one big one that I feel like that has been under a lot of scrutiny recently. So I think our work is really timely in that sense, both in terms of its importance in general, in terms of a globalized world, but also the political situation, and also with generative AI.

Resources Supporting the Project

MM: What material and non-material resources that you have, like financial, but even support, do you feel like there were elements that here kind of helped you actually do this project?

SK: I think the Arts and Humanities Research Fund was such a great resource because, how much research you can do without the actual funding, right? And they were very supportive.

AA: And also giving us access. Because when it comes to things like conferences, I don't think we would have been able to do that by ourselves. And this allowed us to speak to some of the

people that we did, great members of the community, including the wider international community, not just the ones at NYU Abu Dhabi.

SK: And especially because of our rank as instructors, right? Often in many institutions, these kinds of research funds are only reserved for faculty positions, but here they were very inclusive, and they let us drive this project. This was the only project that had instructors only, not even another faculty as a dedicated member, so it was great support and encouragement.

And as we said, in general, whoever we have spoken to, whether it was faculty or program heads or directors, they were all very receptive. And in fact, we were asked to present our work to the provost office research forums in NYU New York and Shanghai, and so whoever we have reached out to either to be our guest or to talk to or support our project, they have always been very supportive and encouraging.

AA: And I think it's also great because the research itself, one of the things that we were very resistant against was doing research for research's sake. And that was also why we didn't want to do a paper. Although we eventually did some writing, as a main output, we didn't want these conversations to be just reserved to academic journals because it's such a practical and tangible subject. And I think the reason why it's also been really rewarding for us is because like I said, it's not just research for research's sake. We are applying it every day in our work. In our work with the students, our work with the faculty, with the staff, with the entire community, and also how we live and advocate for ourselves and for other people as well.

Future of the Project

MM: What do you plan to do in the future with this project?

AA: We've been working on the project for about four years, and the key thing about the project is that we started out intending to have conversations and expand the conversations. And because of that, although there hasn't been a distinct starting point and a distinct ending point or specific outputs that we wanted to produce apart from the podcast. We have followed the trail of where the research has led. And so, now, at the moment, we've done a lot of work with AI and putting in conversation this aspect of World English, varieties of English, and AI in instructional spaces, but also outside of that. So that seems like the spot that we would go in, and I'm interested in continuing to pursue that line of reasoning because obviously the question on AI is only going to keep evolving. And that, in conversation with World Englishes, varieties of English, and AI in instructional spaces, but also outside of that.

SK: In the four years, we have also had some tangible outcomes, like this podcast, the whole series is going to live and hopefully have a ripple effect and perhaps have more collaborations. We also wrote a book chapter, for teachers, on how to incorporate World Englishes and AI into teaching.

It's an instructional book. It's going to be published soon. We also conducted several workshops and presented at conferences. These were really great conversations. And for our podcast, with season one finishing, the project came to a natural pause, we are now at the stage of rethinking what the next focus and goal are going to be.

Final Thoughts

MM: Is there anything you want to add at all?

AA: Thank you for having us on here, and also thank you to all of the people who have made and the project possible apart from the resources from Arts and Humanities department, the amazing, amazing people we spoke to, and all of the guests who were so receptive because I think having the conversation is the first step to making some sort of change. And the fact that people were actually open to having the conversation and rethinking how they do things, which they might do very much and for a very long time, has been really rewarding. And the fact that we see that spill over to the students is just… [chef's kiss]

SK: And not just that, when we reached out to people to talk to, people listened to us on very different platforms and reached out to us as well. Lauren's collaboration was because she was really inspired, and we had a lot of other faculty reaching out to us from New York.

AA: Teach Talks2 reached out to talk about it, and then also now we're expanding to different disciplines and faculties as well, because it's easy to talk about it like in writing spaces necessarily, but then now we are also able to talk about it in STEM, in computing and engineering and the arts.

SK: Something that we didn't quite manage to, but we started with, is to expand this more into other regional institutions. We did run workshops et cetera, but we didn't really get to work more closely with our regional partners, so maybe that's something we can do.

AA: We were thinking of reaching out to the other writing programs and writing centers in different universities in the region to find out more about how the varieties of English work in there and how they're being instructed as well, because I think not all institutions are like NYU Abu Dhabi. But then there's also a lot of teacher training that we imagine might be useful in terms of the framing because, goodness knows, students can do with a little bit more support as well.

Conclusion

The PPPE podcast, and the discussions, workshops, pedagogical interventions, conferences, and publications that have resulted from it are a testament to the often invisible and undervalued

[2] According to the Teach Talks page on the New York University website, "TeachTalks is a series of interactive, faculty-led programs on teaching hosted by the NYU CTL and its NYU-community partners every semester" (*TeachTalks*).

(Sharp-Ramirez & Kenley, 2025) labor of writing instructors and its impact not only on their classes or departments but across the curriculum. It also demonstrates the breadth of impact when institutions are receptive to the input of writing instructors and programs, valuing their work as not only service programs but shapers of the culture of the university and the identities of students at crucial moments in their entry into the program (Russell, 2020). Students in Aieshah and Sweta's classes were involved in conversations on power and language and came to the realization that their "non-native" variety of English was in actuality representative of their voices and empowered by their ideas, rather than inferior due to accent and imperfect grammar. These students' agencies as writers and as learners cannot but have been impacted positively by these identity-shaping experiences, leading to stronger writing and communication not only in the first-year writing seminar but beyond.

The openness to the work they did extended to faculty who themselves are put into boxes based on the diversity of their linguistic varieties not only to discuss the impact of the hierarchies of language on students but on their own work. These are the ways in which the writing program, through the efforts of the instructors, can be part of cultural and ideological shifts in universities (Bernstein, 2010). When they are supported and recognized, their work, which is impactful and important as is, can have further ramifications. In addition to institutional support is maintenance of such initiatives, as they can be transient in addition to being invisible, especially in the region where faculty are constantly changing (Fleszar et al., 2025). Even with the PPPE project, the impact has expanded beyond expectations, but if it is not formalized through changes in policy or curricula, the impact it has had on specific faculty and even programs cannot be sustained. For writing programs in the region, which vary from traditional and reinforcing native biases, to innovative and critical of linguistic hierarchies, changes happening in the moment and on the surface rarely impact the epistemological frameworks they are in, unless they are maintained and recognized as meaningful to how we teach.

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