

Rethinking World Englishes through the Ghanaian Experience: Toward a Practice-Oriented and Ideology-Sensitive Paradigm

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Abstract

This position paper argues that the Ghanaian experience necessitates a theoretical reorientation in World Englishes scholarship. While frameworks such as Kachru's Three Circles model have decentered monolithic conceptions of English, their classificatory focus obscures the ideological, pragmatic, and translanguaging dynamics shaping English in postcolonial contexts. Using Ghana as a focal case, the paper critiques static, territorially bounded models. It demonstrates that English operates within multilingual, fluid repertoires characterized by tensions between endonormative innovation and persistent exonormative allegiance, particularly in education and public discourse. To account for these dynamics, the paper proposes Repertoire-Convergence Theory (RCT), a framework that conceptualizes English as a site of interaction among linguistic resources, sociolinguistic scales, and ideological hierarchies. By foregrounding the interaction among feature norms, behavioral norms, and language ideology within translanguaging practices, the paper calls for a shift from taxonomic description to an ecologically grounded, sociocultural analysis.

Keywords: Endonormativity, Ghanaian experience, Language ideology, Postcolonial sociolinguistics, Translanguaging, World Englishes

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Introduction

The emergence of World Englishes (WE) as a field marked a decisive shift in global English studies. Through his influential tripartite model, Kachru (1985, 1992) challenged the assumption that legitimate English emanates exclusively from Britain or North America. By distinguishing Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles, he foregrounded the sociolinguistic legitimacy of postcolonial Englishes institutionalized in multilingual societies. This intervention destabilized deficit-oriented frameworks and repositioned English as a pluricentric global language shaped by localized histories and sociocultural ecologies.

Notwithstanding its transformative impact, the model's classificatory logic has limitations. While it recognizes pluralization, it risks reifying geopolitical categories and under-theorizing dynamic processes of norm negotiation, ideological contestation, and translanguaging practice. As Schneider (2007) later argued in his Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes, English varieties evolve through historically contingent phases shaped by identity construction and sociopolitical realignments. However, even dynamic frameworks require recalibration in context. Recent scholarship since 2020 has increasingly questioned stage-based or territorially bounded models, arguing that mobility, digital communication, and neoliberal globalization complicate assumptions of linear stabilization (Buschfeld & Kautzsch, 2020).

In particular, newer debates have foregrounded the need to integrate language ideology more centrally into WE theorization. Studies on the English language. The hegemony demonstrate that global English continues to function as symbolic capital within unequal power structures, often reinforcing metropolitan prestige norms even in institutionalized Outer Circle contexts (Zeng & Yang, 2024). These analyses extend earlier critiques of linguistic imperialism by demonstrating how colonial hierarchies are rearticulated through contemporary educational systems, accent preferences, and global labor markets. In Ghana, for instance, recent empirical work indicates a persistent preference for British-oriented standards among teachers and educational gatekeepers (Mensah, 2024), suggesting that institutionalization does not necessarily equate to ideological autonomy.

Concurrently, scholarship between 2020 and 2026 has emphasized the importance of translanguaging and repertoire-based approaches to understanding English in multilingual settings. Building on earlier work by García (2009), applied linguists have argued that English should not be conceptualized as a discrete, self-contained system but as one resource within fluid multilingual repertoires (García & Wei, 2021; Li, 2023). Such perspectives challenge the ontological assumptions embedded in the notion of stabilized "varieties." In highly multilingual ecologies like Ghana, English is rarely used in isolation; it is interwoven with Akan, Ga, Ewe, Dagbani, and many other Ghanaian languages, as well as Ghanaian Pidgin, in ways that resist categorical containment.

Moreover, recent work on glocalization and pragmatic localization in African Englishes further complicates structuralist accounts of variation. Adogpa et al. (2024) demonstrate that educated Ghanaian speakers strategically adapt English to align with indigenous communicative norms, embedding local epistemologies within global linguistic forms. Similarly, emerging research on pragmatic variation across new Englishes underscores that discourse strategies, politeness systems, and semantic extensions are culturally grounded rather than evidence of incomplete acquisition. These findings reinforce a broader disciplinary shift from codification toward communicative practice and sociocultural functionality.

The cumulative effect of these developments is a growing recognition that WE require theoretical expansion. Rather than treating postcolonial Englishes as endpoints in evolutionary trajectories, scholars increasingly conceptualize them as dynamic, ideologically mediated, and mobility-driven formations (Buschfeld & Kautzsch, 2020; Zeng & Yang, 2024). Ghana provides a particularly instructive case in this regard. English in Ghana is neither a stable “Outer Circle” variety nor a straightforward case of endonormative stabilization. Rather, it is a socially stratified, ideologically contested, and multilingual repertoire operating across educational, digital, literary, and everyday domains.

By foregrounding the Ghanaian experience, this paper argues for three interrelated theoretical shifts in WE scholarship:

- (1) from Circles to continua that reflect domain-specific and mobility-driven norm orientations;
- (2) from structural codification to communicative and pragmatic practice; and
- (3) from descriptive pluralism to explicit ideological critique attentive to power, prestige, and symbolic capital.

By foregrounding the Ghanaian experience, this paper argues for a theoretical shift in World Englishes (WE) from static classification toward dynamic, practice-based analysis. Specifically, it advances Repertoire-Convergence Theory (RCT). This framework conceptualizes English not as a bounded variety but as a convergence of multilingual resources shaped by translanguaging practices, ideological hierarchies, and sociolinguistic scaling.

RCT builds on and extends earlier models by Braj B. Kachru and Edgar W. Schneider, while responding to recent scholarship that emphasizes mobility, digital communication, and linguistic fluidity. Drawing on Ghana as a critical case, the paper demonstrates that English is not a stable “Outer Circle” variety but a socially stratified and ideologically contested repertoire.

Ghana and the Limits of the Circle Model

Ghana is conventionally classified within the Outer Circle of Kachru’s Three Circles Model, where English is understood as an institutionalized second language embedded in governance, education, and media. While this categorization captures the historical trajectory of English, introduced through colonial administration and retained as a neutral lingua franca, it ultimately proves too static and reductive for Ghana’s contemporary sociolinguistic reality. The model presupposes relatively stable, bounded relationships between language, nation, and function; however, in Ghana, English operates within a far more fluid and dynamic multilingual ecology that exceeds these neat distinctions.

Crucially, English in Ghana cannot be confined to a discrete “second-language” domain. It exists along a continuum of usage, from standardized forms aligned with exonormative ideals to indigenized varieties such as Ghanaian English, often shaped through sustained contact with local languages. Moreover, everyday communication is characterized by pervasive code-switching and translanguaging practices, in which speakers draw on multiple linguistic resources simultaneously. This challenges the model’s implicit monolingual bias, which treats English as a separable system rather than as one component of an integrated communicative repertoire.

Furthermore, the Outer Circle itself lacks internal coherence. Ghana is grouped alongside linguistically and historically distinct contexts such as India, Nigeria, and Singapore, despite significant differences in patterns of acquisition, localization, and sociopolitical function. By

collapsing these diverse settings into a single category, the model obscures more than it reveals. As Braj B. Kachru originally conceived it in 1985, the framework also struggles to account for contemporary forces such as globalization, digital media, and transnational mobility, all of which increasingly destabilize fixed notions of linguistic norms and boundaries.

In this sense, Ghana illustrates the broader limitations of the Three Circles model for analyzing Outer Circle contexts. While the framework remains a useful heuristic for mapping the historical spread and institutional status of English, it falls short in capturing the hybridity, fluidity, and multilingual complexity that define actual language practices. A more adequate account requires moving beyond static, nation-based classifications toward approaches that foreground linguistic repertoires, mobility, and interaction in context.

Multilingual Realities and Language Choice

Ghana's multilingual context means that English rarely functions in linguistic isolation. Most speakers actively alternate between English and indigenous languages such as Akan, Ewe, Dagbani, Frafra, Dagaare, Kasem, and Ga depending on context, register, and interlocutor (Mensah et al, 2025). Research on language attitudes shows that Ghanaian students strongly identify with their local languages while also recognizing the instrumental and prestige value of English, indicating that language choice is both ideologically and pragmatically loaded (Salifu, 2021). These patterns reflect a layered linguistic ecology in which English coexists with multiple indigenous codes rather than replacing them.

Studies of school language environments likewise show that multilingual language repertoires shape actual classroom practice. Evidence from basic and secondary education reveals that students are compelled to use English for formal classroom communication because of policy and prestige, but outside formal settings, they naturally use their local languages, reflecting a diglossic language distribution rather than monolingual dominance (Appiah & Ardila, 2020; Mfum-Mensah). In everyday social domains, code-mixing and code-switching between English and indigenous languages are ubiquitous, making structural boundaries between language varieties porous rather than discrete.

Emerging Varieties: Pidgin and Youth Registers

Beyond standard English, Ghana's linguistic ecosystem includes emerging forms such as Ghanaian Pidgin English, which functions as both a cross-ethnic lingua franca and a youth register in urban centers. Although the Circle Model focuses on standardized varieties, the growth and social spread of pidgin varieties highlight the inadequacy of static classifications. Ghanaian pidgin, in both educated and non-institutionalized forms, operates across social, educational, and professional domains, demonstrating that English-based contact varieties are part of everyday speech practices. Research on student pidgin further reveals regional variation and differing attitudes toward these forms, suggesting that pidgin is neither marginal nor uniform but in a dynamic relationship with localized language ecologies.

Hybridization and Pragmatic Innovation

Empirical work on language use in Ghana indicates substantive substrate influence from indigenous languages on Ghanaian English. Corpus-based research shows that Akan discourse-pragmatic markers, such as *bi*, *dee*, and *ankasa*, are integrated into English syntax and discourse patterns, functioning as stance markers, intensifiers, and affective devices (Anderson, Appah & Thompson, 2025). These pragmatic borrowings are not incidental code-mixing but systematic adaptations reflecting deep structural and functional negotiation between English and local languages. Such hybrid practices demonstrate that English in Ghana cannot be fully understood

through the lens of exonormative standards alone; rather, it is actively indigenized through substrate shaping and pragmatic innovation.

Similarly, discourse studies highlight that phonological and intonational patterns in Ghanaian English differ systematically from native-speaker norms yet serve coherent communicative functions within the local context (Lomotey, 2025). These findings support the view that phonological variation in postcolonial Englishes should not be seen as a deficiency but as a context-specific realization shaped by local interactional norms.

Ideological Forces and Attitudes

While English functions institutionally, its role is also shaped by ideological forces. Research on teacher and student attitudes indicates an ongoing negotiation of identity and prestige in relation to English. Some teachers express positive attitudes toward Ghanaian accents distinct from native-speaker models, revealing resistance to a homogenizing orientation toward British or American norms (Mensah et al, 2024). At the same time, broader societal attitudes reveal that “deep English, characterized by extensive vocabulary and metropolitan-aligned pronunciation, is often seen as a marker of education and status, illustrating how ideological hierarchies continue to shape perceptions of linguistic legitimacy.

Language attitudes studies also show that, while indigenous languages enjoy strong affective identification, English is widely associated with educational success, national mobility, and international opportunities, reinforcing its hegemony in formal domains despite popular multilingualism.

In sum, Ghana’s sociolinguistic ecology complicates the Outer Circle classification: English is institutionally anchored yet intricately interwoven with multilingual repertoires, hybrid contact forms, pragmatic innovations, and ideological negotiations. Rigid geopolitical categories cannot adequately capture their use but must be understood as part of a dynamic, heterogeneous, and contextually embedded language ecology.

Feature Norms, Behavioral Norms, and Pragmatic Localization

A critical dimension of rethinking World Englishes (WE) lies in moving beyond purely structural description toward an integrated account of how linguistic forms interact with sociocultural norms. Anchimbe and Janney (2017) draw a productive distinction between feature norms, such as phonological, syntactic, and lexical patterns, and behavioral norms, which include pragmatic and interactional expectations that regulate appropriateness within specific communities. Ghanaian English offers a compelling illustration of this interplay, demonstrating that structural innovation and pragmatic localization are deeply intertwined rather than separable domains. At the level of feature norms, Ghanaian English exhibits systematic phonological patterns, such as the neutralization of vowel-length contrasts, syllable-timed rhythm influenced by substrate languages, and the simplification of consonant clusters, particularly in word-final positions (Huber, 1999). Lexically, it incorporates semantic extensions and calques from Akan and other Ghanaian languages, producing items such as “chop” for ‘eat,’ “outdoorings” for a child-naming ceremony, and “funeral donation” to denote culturally embedded practices of communal financial support (Sey, 1973; Huber, 1999). Syntactically, pluralization patterns such as “equipments” or “informations,” and progressive constructions in stative contexts (“I am understanding”) reflect substrate influence and analogical leveling; yet, they remain internally coherent within local usage patterns (Bobda, 2000; Huber, 1999). These structural features are not arbitrary deviations from exonormative standards but represent processes of nativization

consistent with Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model, in which local norms gradually stabilize and gain endonormative legitimacy.

Equally significant are behavioral norms and pragmatic localization strategies that shape how Ghanaian English functions in interaction. Expressions such as "I am coming" to mean "I will return shortly" exemplify pragmatic transfer rooted in indigenous sociocultural schemas of hospitality and spatial orientation. Similarly, greeting sequences are often extended and elaborative, reflecting communal orientation and respect hierarchies. Any failure to engage in such ritualized exchanges may be interpreted as impolite regardless of grammatical correctness. Indirectness strategies such as prefacing requests with "Please, I want to ask..." or mitigating refusals through narrative explanation index culturally valued norms of deference and relational harmony (Nartey, 2018). Titles and honorifics are pragmatically salient, with forms such as "Sir," "Madam," "Senior," or occupational labels used frequently in address, signaling hierarchical awareness and social distance. Even declarative constructions may function pragmatically as softened directives, as in "You will close the door," which in Ghanaian contexts can operate as a polite instruction rather than a prediction. Such patterns underscore the argument that communicative competence involves alignment with behavioral norms as much as mastery of structural features.

These localized pragmatic strategies resonate with Jenkins's (2007) contention that intelligibility and communicative effectiveness should take precedence over rigid adherence to exonormative grammar in global English use. In Ghana's multilingual ecology, where English functions as a lingua franca across diverse ethnolinguistic groups, successful communication depends less on conformity to British or American standards than on shared pragmatic expectations and mutual accommodation. This orientation challenges codificatory approaches that privilege external standards while marginalizing locally meaningful forms. As scholars of African Englishes have argued, the legitimacy of a variety emerges not only from structural stabilization but also from its capacity to encode culturally specific worldviews and interactional logics (Anchimbe, 2018; Schneider, 2007). Ghanaian English thus exemplifies how feature and behavioral norms co-construct a localized standard, one that is intelligible, socially embedded, and pragmatically effective within its speech community. By foregrounding pragmatic localization alongside structural description, the Ghanaian experience invites a reconceptualization of World Englishes as dynamic continua of form and function, where communicative legitimacy is negotiated locally rather than imposed externally.

Language Ideology and Linguistic Insecurity

Despite the vitality and functional range of localized usage, Ghanaian English remains deeply entangled in prestige hierarchies shaped by colonial history and contemporary global linguistic economies. Although English has been structurally and pragmatically indigenized, British-oriented norms continue to function as the dominant benchmark of correctness in high-stakes domains. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) notion of language as symbolic capital, it becomes clear that linguistic authority is socially produced and institutionally maintained. In Ghana, exonormative British English continues to accrue symbolic capital in education, the judiciary, corporate communication, and national broadcasting. Recent scholarship in language ideology and political economy reinforces this interpretation, demonstrating that postcolonial Englishes operate within stratified global hierarchies in which Inner Circle norms retain economic and epistemic privilege (Piller, 2020; Tupas, 2021; De Costa et al., 2022).

Educational research between 2020 and 2026 further confirms the persistence of normative anxiety. Studies of English-medium instruction in West Africa show that teachers frequently enforce British spelling, pronunciation, and grammatical conventions even when localized variants are widely intelligible and socially embedded (Owu-Ewie & Edu-Buandoh, 2020; Edu-Buandoh & Amissah, 2022). Classroom correction practices often target pluralized mass nouns (e.g., *equipment, furniture*), extended progressive constructions, and localized pragmatic routines such as “I am coming” (meaning ‘I will return shortly’), framing them as deficits rather than nativized patterns. Assessment regimes similarly institutionalize exonormative standards, as national examinations reward conformity to British conventions. Such practices reproduce what scholars of raciolinguistics and coloniality describe as “standard language ideology,” in which linguistic forms associated with colonial centers are naturalized as neutral and superior (Makoni & Pennycook, 2021). Thus, institutionalization does not eliminate insecurity; it often intensifies monitoring and self-surveillance among speakers.

Media discourse offers parallel evidence. Analyses of broadcast language in Ghana (2020–2024) indicate that newscasters frequently approximate British Received Pronunciation in formal news bulletins, while shifting toward localized phonology and lexis in informal talk shows and entertainment programming (Nartey & Yankson, 2021). This stylistic modulation indexes professionalism and authority, reflecting broader global trends in which postcolonial speakers orient toward internationally recognizable prestige accents in formal domains (Bolton & Botha, 2021). At the same time, Ghanaian English features flourish in popular culture, religious sermons, and digital spaces, where communicative solidarity and cultural authenticity are prioritized over conformity to exonormative standards. Recent work in digital sociolinguistics highlights how WhatsApp, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) serve as sites for the creative performance of localized English, translanguaging, and orthographic innovation, thereby complicating static models of normativity (Androutsopoulos, 2020; Tagg & Seargeant, 2022).

Workplace communication also reveals layered norm systems. In multinational corporate settings, Ghanaian professionals often engage in strategic code-switching, adjusting their lexical choices and phonological realizations depending on whether their interlocutors are local colleagues or international partners. Research on professional discourse in Anglophone Africa (2021–2025) shows that speakers consciously suppress stigmatized local features in global-facing contexts while maintaining them in intra-national interaction, illustrating the unequal distribution of linguistic capital (Agyekum & Amfo, 2023). Such patterned alternation aligns with contemporary sociolinguistic accounts that conceptualize English as a repertoire shaped by audience design and indexical alignment rather than as a stable variety (Blommaert, 2020; Busch, 2021).

Public debates about “declining standards” further expose the ideological stakes of English in Ghana. Newspaper editorials and online commentary between 2020 and 2025 frequently lament perceived erosion of British standards among students, often equating deviation from exonormative grammar with intellectual or moral decline. Scholars have interpreted such discourses as manifestations of colonial linguistic nostalgia, in which the authority of Inner Circle norms is reproduced through affective attachment and educational policy (Tupas, 2021; De Costa et al., 2022). These anxieties resonate with earlier insights from Kachru (1985) regarding the enduring centripetal pull of Inner Circle standards within Outer Circle contexts. However, recent scholarship complicates the assumption that institutionalization automatically leads to endonormative stabilization.

Indeed, while Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model predicts eventual endonormative stabilization, post-2020 analyses caution against teleological readings of this trajectory. Makoni and Pennycook (2021) argue that colonial epistemologies continue to structure language hierarchies long after political independence, while Piller (2020) emphasizes that global English is embedded within neoliberal regimes that reward alignment with internationally recognizable standards. Ghana thus exemplifies a situation in which structural stabilization coexists with ideological ambivalence. Ghanaian English is functionally entrenched, pragmatically localized, and socially widespread, yet British-oriented English retains elevated symbolic capital in high-stakes institutional domains.

Consequently, rethinking World Englishes through the Ghanaian experience requires integrating recent advances in language ideology, raciolinguistics, and global political economy into WE scholarship. The Ghanaian case demonstrates that institutional presence does not necessarily entail ideological acceptance; rather, speakers navigate layered prestige systems shaped by colonial legacies and contemporary globalization. Integrating scholarship from 2020 to 2026 underscores that legitimacy is not merely a matter of codification but of power, circulation, and recognition. Without foregrounding these ideological dynamics, WE risk overstating the degree to which localized varieties have achieved full sociocultural emancipation.

Multilingualism and Translanguaging in Ghana

Traditional World Englishes (WE) scholarship often conceptualizes varieties as relatively bounded systems with internally coherent phonology, lexis, and grammar, implicitly aligning with Kachru's Circle model. However, Ghana's linguistic ecology, encompassing languages such as Akan, Ewe, Ga, Dagbani, and over seventy other indigenous tongues, renders English inseparable from broader multilingual repertoires (Mensah et al, 2025). In urban and peri-urban contexts, speakers routinely alternate between English and indigenous languages within a single conversational turn, blending lexical, pragmatic, and discourse features to achieve communicative goals. This fluid practice aligns closely with translanguaging frameworks articulated by García (2009), who argues that bilingual and multilingual speakers draw from integrated repertoires rather than treating their languages as discrete codes. Recent studies in West African schools demonstrate that students seamlessly combine English and local languages in classroom discussions, peer interactions, and digital communication, often using local languages to scaffold comprehension or manage interpersonal dynamics (Owu-Ewie & Edu-Buandoh, 2020; Adogpa et al., 2024).

From this perspective, "Ghanaian English" is less a self-contained variety than a socially situated repertoire embedded within multilingual practice. For example, speakers may insert Akan discourse markers such as *dee* or *ankasa* within otherwise English sentences, or employ Ewe question particles to convey politeness and emphasis. These hybridized forms are neither random nor peripheral; they reflect culturally coherent communicative strategies that make English intelligible and locally functional. This challenges the notion that postcolonial Englishes can be fully understood through structural analysis alone and demonstrates that the boundaries assumed by Circle models dissolve in lived interaction.

Comparable multilingual practices are evident elsewhere in Africa and Asia, further justifying a repertoire-based approach to WE. In Nigeria, English is constantly interwoven with Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa in informal speech, media, and literature, giving rise to dynamic code-switching and hybrid registers such as Nigerian Pidgin English, which functions both as a lingua franca and a marker of local identity (Adegbiya, 2021). Similarly, in Kenya, studies document

fluid alternation between English, Swahili, and indigenous languages in classroom instruction, political speech, and urban youth discourse, illustrating the coexistence of functional standard English and localized pragmatic forms. In South Asia, research on Indian English shows that speakers routinely embed Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, or Punjabi lexical and pragmatic features within English sentences, creating context-sensitive, hybrid repertoires that defy neat classification within Kachru's Outer Circle norms (Bose, 2021 et al.; Zeng et al., 2025). Across these contexts, English functions less as an autonomous variety and more as one semiotic resource among many, deployed strategically depending on audience, register, and communicative purpose.

In Ghana specifically, the translanguaging repertoire extends to digital spaces. On platforms such as WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok, speakers fluidly integrate English, Ghanaian Pidgin, and indigenous languages, often employing nonstandard orthography and creative punctuation to convey affect, humor, and solidarity (Androutsopoulos, 2020; Tagg & Seargeant, 2022). Such practices highlight that communicative competence involves not only grammatical knowledge but also sociolinguistic sensitivity and pragmatic skill. They further demonstrate that English in Ghana, and in comparable African and Asian contexts, cannot be adequately theorized as a discrete, codified system. Rather, it is embedded within a dynamic, ecological, and contextually grounded repertoire of multilingual practices. Consequently, rethinking WE requires adopting models that account for translanguaging, multilingual repertoires, and the ecological distribution of linguistic resources, positioning English as a socially and interactionally mediated tool rather than a bounded object of description.

Cultural Production and the Indigenization of English

English in Ghana functions not only as a tool of communication but also as a vehicle of cultural memory, identity construction, and creative expression. West African literary traditions, influenced by figures such as Chinua Achebe, demonstrate how English can be indigenized to reflect African epistemologies and worldviews. Achebe's (1965) assertion that English must "carry the weight" of African experience resonates across Ghanaian literary and media practices, foregrounding English's capacity to encode local histories, values, and narrative structures. In Ghana, writers such as Ayi Kwei Armah, Amma Darko, and Taiye Selasi extend this legacy, using English not merely as a neutral medium but as a creative instrument infused with local syntax, proverbs, rhythm, and semantic innovation. These authors embed indigenous narrative structures such as cyclical temporality, communal perspective, and oral performance techniques into English prose, illustrating the language's adaptability and expressive potential.

Proverbs, in particular, serve as powerful sites of indigenization. In Ghanaian novels, short stories, and plays, traditional sayings are rendered in English either through direct translation or through semantic and syntactic adaptation, preserving metaphorical meaning while aligning with English grammatical frames. For example, the Akan proverb "*Obi nnim obiara na ohu ne ho*" ('No one knows another's life, only one's own') may appear in narrative English as "*No one truly knows another; each sees only their own path,*" preserving the conceptual content while mediating between African epistemology and English lexicon. Such translation practices exemplify what contemporary scholars describe as creative appropriation, where English becomes a repository of local culture rather than merely a colonial imposition (Mensah, 2022; Adogba et al., 2024).

Beyond literature, cultural production in Ghanaian media similarly demonstrates the indigenization of English. Radio and television programs, podcasts, and online content routinely

mix standard English, Ghanaian Pidgin, and indigenous lexical items to reflect local humor, social norms, and communal ethos (Nartey & Yankson, 2014; Tagg & Seargeant, 2022). Popular Ghanaian songs in highlife, hiplife, and afrobeats genres embed English phrases alongside Twi, Ewe, or Ga expressions, creating hybridized lyrical forms that resonate both locally and globally (Agyekum, 2021). For instance, artists like Sarkodie and Shatta Wale fluidly interweave English with local languages and idioms to convey social commentary, identity performance, and relational nuance, illustrating English's functional expansion into domains of affect, prestige, and creativity.

Academic and journalistic writing also reflects these dynamics. Ghanaian newspapers, magazines, and blogs often employ localized English structures and idiomatic expressions that align with culturally familiar communicative expectations while maintaining broad intelligibility. Even in formal institutional texts, writers strategically integrate culturally salient concepts, such as *"libation pouring"* or *"outdoorings"*, into English discourse, signaling the inextricable link between language and local worldview.

These examples collectively indicate that English in Ghana functions as a cultural archive, preserving and transmitting indigenous thought patterns, moral frameworks, and collective memory. The implications for World Englishes scholarship are significant. Literature, media, and other forms of cultural production should not be treated merely as illustrative or secondary data; they are central arenas where norms are negotiated, identities are constructed, and linguistic legitimacy is contested. Recognizing the role of cultural production expands the analytical lens beyond structural and pragmatic dimensions to encompass ideological, symbolic, and creative functions of English. In this sense, Ghanaian literary and media practices exemplify the indigenization of English, demonstrating that the language can simultaneously operate as a global communicative medium and a locally meaningful cultural resource (Mensah et al, 2025; Adogpa et al., 2024; Nartey & Yankson, 2021).

Toward a Revised Theoretical Orientation

Drawing from the Ghanaian experience, it is evident that conventional frameworks of World Englishes, particularly the Circle model, are insufficient to capture the complexity of postcolonial English use. Ghanaian English demonstrates that institutional presence does not guarantee ideological acceptance, that localized structural features are deeply intertwined with pragmatic and behavioral norms, and that English operates within dynamic multilingual repertoires rather than as a bounded variety. These observations point to the need for a revised theoretical orientation that foregrounds sociolinguistic ecology, ideological negotiation, and cultural embedding.

First, the WE scholarship must move from Circles to continua. The rigid categorization of Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles obscures the fluidity of linguistic practice in multilingual societies. In Ghana, English functions differently across educational, digital, media, and domestic domains, interacting variably with indigenous languages, Pidgin, and urban youth registers. Similar patterns are observed across Africa and Asia, where code-switching, translanguaging, and hybrid repertoires challenge the notion of discrete, territorially bounded varieties (García & Wei, 2021; Zeng & Yang, 2024). Conceptualizing English along continua of norm orientation, functional distribution, and social salience more effectively accommodates these realities, enabling more nuanced analyses of competence, legitimacy, and identity construction.

Second, there must be a shift from structural codification to communicative practice and pragmatic functionality. Ghanaian English demonstrates that intelligibility, relational alignment,

and locally grounded pragmatics are often more socially consequential than adherence to exonormative grammar. Features such as vowel neutralization and pluralized mass nouns, and behavioral norms including ritualized greetings, indirect requests, and discourse marking with indigenous particles, exemplify systematic, locally meaningful adaptation (Anchimbe & Janney, 2017). Recognizing these patterns as legitimate communicative strategies challenges codificatory approaches that prioritize metropolitan standards, reframing the analytic focus toward functionality, interactional coherence, and cultural resonance.

Third, WE theory must integrate ideology and cultural production as central dimensions rather than peripheral concerns. Ghanaian English illustrates that prestige hierarchies, symbolic capital, and colonial legacies shape both institutional and everyday use, producing ongoing normative anxiety even where English is fully institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1991; Mensah, 2022). Simultaneously, literature, media, music, and digital communication provide arenas for the indigenization and creative appropriation of English, embedding indigenous epistemologies, proverbs, and narrative patterns into global linguistic resources (Achebe, 1965; Nartey & Yankson, 2021; Adogpa et al., 2024). By attending to ideology and cultural production, WE frameworks can account for how speakers negotiate legitimacy, identity, and meaning across overlapping local, national, and global contexts.

Together, these three interrelated shifts - conceptualizing English along ecological continua, privileging communicative practice and pragmatic functionality, and centering ideology and cultural production - offer a coherent, empirically grounded framework for rethinking World Englishes. The Ghanaian case exemplifies the need for this multidimensional approach, demonstrating that English in postcolonial contexts is simultaneously a multilingual resource, a vehicle of creative expression, and a locus of symbolic and social negotiation. Such a theoretical orientation provides a foundation for WE scholarship that is dynamic, contextually sensitive, and attentive to the interplay between linguistic structure, social practice, and cultural meaning.

While translanguaging theory foregrounds the fluid deployment of linguistic resources, it tends to under-specify how these resources are hierarchically valued across domains. Similarly, sociolinguistic scale models account for stratification but do not sufficiently theorize how multiple norm systems are simultaneously mobilized within interaction. Repertoire-Convergence Theory (RCT) addresses this gap by integrating resource fluidity, scalar valuation, and ideological mediation into a single analytic framework, thereby explaining not only *how* speakers mix resources but why particular configurations emerge in specific contexts.

Repertoire Convergence Theory (RCT) Proposal

Building on the foregoing analysis, this paper proposes Repertoire-Convergence Theory (RCT) as a framework for understanding English in multilingual postcolonial contexts such as Ghana. RCT departs from variety-based models of World Englishes by conceptualizing English not as a bounded, stabilized system, but as a dynamic convergence of linguistic, pragmatic, and ideological resources operating within multilingual repertoires.

While earlier frameworks, most notably those associated with Braj B. Kachru and Edgar W. Schneider, have been instrumental in legitimizing postcolonial Englishes, they retain an underlying assumption that English varieties are, or will become, relatively discrete and internally coherent systems. By contrast, the Ghanaian evidence presented in this paper suggests that English does not culminate in a stable national variety. Rather, it remains embedded in a

fluid multilingual ecology in which forms, norms, and meanings are continuously negotiated across domains.

Consider a university student addressing a lecturer in Ghana:

“Sir, please, I want to ask, this assignment, I am not really understanding it, Ankasa.”

This utterance exemplifies repertoire convergence in three ways. First, it integrates features from different systems: standard English syntax, the extended progressive aspect (“I am not really understanding”), and the Akan-derived intensifier *ankasa*. Second, it reflects scalar norm negotiation: the use of “Sir” and formal English indexes institutional hierarchy, while the local pragmatic marker signals shared cultural grounding. Third, it reveals ideological mediation: the speaker aligns with expectations of correctness and politeness associated with formal English, while simultaneously drawing on local resources to enhance clarity and affect.

From an RCT perspective, this is not code-switching between discrete systems but the situated convergence of resources shaped by domain, audience, and ideological constraints.

RCT is grounded in three interrelated principles.

Repertoire Integration

1. English functions as one component of an integrated communicative repertoire that includes indigenous languages and contact varieties such as Ghanaian Pidgin. Speakers do not alternate between fully separate linguistic systems; instead, they draw on a shared pool of semiotic resources in context-sensitive ways. The resulting hybrid forms—whether lexical insertions, pragmatic markers, or discourse strategies—are not peripheral or deficient, but constitute systematic and meaningful communication practices.

Scalar norm negotiation

1. Linguistic resources acquire value across different sociolinguistic scales, and speakers strategically orient to them. In Ghana, exonormative English (often aligned with British or American standards) indexes global mobility and institutional authority; Ghanaian English signals national belonging and local legitimacy. In contrast, Pidgin frequently indexes youth identity, informality, and solidarity. These resources are not used in isolation; rather, speakers converge elements from them depending on domain, audience, and communicative intent. Normativity, therefore, is not fixed but dynamically negotiated across contexts.

Ideological mediation

1. Language practices are shaped by competing and often contradictory ideologies of correctness, prestige, and authenticity. As the Ghanaian case demonstrates, exonormative standards retain symbolic capital in formal domains such as education and media, even as localized forms dominate everyday interaction and cultural production. Communicative legitimacy thus depends not solely on structural conformity but on alignment with locally grounded behavioral norms and sociocultural expectations.

Taken together, these principles reconceptualize English as a convergence zone in which linguistic structure, pragmatic practice, and ideological value intersect. This perspective extends translanguaging approaches (e.g., García & Wei, 2021) by explicitly incorporating questions of symbolic capital and scale, and it moves beyond stage-based models by rejecting the assumption of linear progression toward endonormative stabilization.

In this sense, RCT does not treat Ghanaian English as a completed or stabilized variety. Instead, it conceptualizes it as an ongoing, emergent configuration shaped by multilingual practice, institutional pressures, and global-local ideological tensions. Such a framework better

captures the fluidity, hybridity, and stratification that characterize English use in contemporary postcolonial settings.

By shifting the analytical focus from bounded varieties to convergent repertoires, RCT provides a more flexible and ecologically valid account of World Englishes; one that is attentive not only to structural variation, but also to the social, pragmatic, and ideological processes through which linguistic forms acquire meaning and legitimacy.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the Ghanaian experience provides a critical lens for rethinking World Englishes, demonstrating the limitations of Kachru's Three Circles Model in accounting for multilingual complexity, pragmatic norms, and ideological hierarchies. Evidence from Ghana shows that English is not simply an institutionalized second language, but a dynamic resource embedded in multilingual repertoires and locally negotiated systems of meaning and legitimacy.

The analysis highlights the interdependence among feature norms, behavioral norms, and pragmatic localization. Structural adaptations in phonology, syntax, and lexis coexist with culturally grounded communicative practices such as indirectness, extended greetings, and honorific usage. At the same time, English functions as a medium of cultural production across literature, media, and digital spaces, reinforcing its role as a socially meaningful and creative resource rather than a residual colonial artifact.

However, Ghana also reflects enduring prestige hierarchies, where exonormative standards, particularly British-oriented English, retain symbolic capital in formal domains, even as localized forms dominate everyday interaction. This tension mirrors broader patterns across postcolonial contexts, underscoring the need for more nuanced theoretical approaches.

In response, the paper advances three key shifts: moving from fixed "Circles" to ecological continua, prioritizing communicative practice over strict norm adherence, and foregrounding ideology and cultural production in analyses of English. Overall, the Ghanaian case demonstrates that World Englishes must be understood as a dynamic, context-sensitive phenomenon shaped by multilingual practices, power relations, and ongoing processes of local negotiation.

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AI Statement

This document has been enhanced with Grammarly, which was employed to refine its linguistic style and correct grammar and spelling. While the incorporation of these technologies may introduce some AI-generated linguistic patterns, it is important to note that the core intellectual content, data interpretation, and conclusions presented are entirely the work of the author.

Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, findings, or recommendations presented in this paper. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

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