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SYNTACTIC CHANGE IN POSTCOLONIAL ENGLISHES: SUBSTRATES AND INPUT

The birth of New Englishes offers an ideal testing ground for factors such as universals or language transfer in 'offspring' varieties. However, the tendency to compare a new grammar to its contributing systems overlooks a dynamic aspect of the actuation problem, namely "why certain instances of variation become changes and others don't" (McMahon 1994). I assess this question in the context of contact settings: Why does only a subset of variable usage become entrenched over time in a given contact variety? Comparing Indian English and Singapore English, an analysis of several distinctive syntactic features initially points to a substrate, rather than universalist, explanation. However, a closer examination shows that only some of these variable features have stabilised and become deeply embedded across the community. Substrates cannot fully account for this subtler distribution. To better understand this, I turn to a sociohistorical hallmark of postcolonial Englishes: diminishing input from the source variety. Integrating models of input sensitivity from Second Language Acquisition theory (the Subset Principle; the Interface Hypothesis), I develop a four-way typology along the two dimensions of L1-L2 difference and input demand (the degree to which rich input is needed for the acquisition of a specific syntactic form). Both contribute to stable outcomes in New Englishes, with substrates potentially the more powerful force. This typology of New Englishes can test some aspects of the Interface Hypothesis, including the debate over precisely which interfaces are vulnerable (Sorace 2011), and the extent to which the Interface Hypothesis can account for overall contact outcomes. The analysis thus uses empirical data from New Englishes to test recent generative theory, while also using these new theoretical constructs to offer a more dynamic view of stabilization in New Englishes, incorporating social contact and learner cognition alongside substrate effects in an account of historical change.