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Revisiting World Englishes through tag questions: Linguistic variation in Korean English

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Lee, En Hye. 2025. Revisiting World Englishes through tag questions: Linguistic variation in Korean English. *Linguistic Research* 42(Special Edition): 233-259. This paper challenges the prevailing illusion in South Korea that American Standard English represents the ideal model for language learning. It offers a rationale for moving beyond the dominance of so-called standard English and addressing the anxiety often associated with speaking non-standard varieties. Grounded in Kachru's concept of liberation linguistics and his three concentric circles, the study critiques the hierarchical structure of this model and calls for a reimagining of the boundaries between the Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles in light of evolving linguistic realities. To support this perspective, the study compares Langendoen's Walrus-Alligator data on English tag questions with corresponding data collected from Korean university students. The findings highlight critical implications for English education policy in South Korea, calling for a shift away from entrenched linguistic hierarchies toward more pluralistic and inclusive understandings of World Englishes. **(Yong In University)**

Keywords Standard English, liberation linguistics, Walrus-Alligator, tag question, linguistic realities

1. Introduction

More than thirty years ago, in 1994, the South Korean government officially declared the advent of globalization as part of its national policy (Su 2005; Lee 2011; Kim 2015; Choi 2023). South Korean society did not hesitate to embrace the future it envisioned. Instead, it plunged headlong into the sea of the English-speaking world. This plunge led to numerous initiatives in English language teaching and learning (Kwon 2000; Terhune 2003), particularly emphasizing the importance of

communicative competence—an aspect traditionally marginalized in Korea's grammar-focused English education system (Lee and Lee 2002). Among these initiatives, early English education emerged as one of the most significant policy shifts in Korea's efforts to adapt to the English-oriented age of globalization (Shaffer 2000; Kim 2015; Choi 2023).

Accompanying this national push for early English education was a controversial phenomenon that reflected the intense societal pressures associated with global competitiveness: children's tongue surgery. This issue became emblematic of the extreme lengths to which some families were willing to go to ensure their children's success in English acquisition. A vivid account of this trend was captured in a Los Angeles Times article published on January 18, 2004:

> South Korean mothers know few bounds in trying to give their kids a leg up in speaking English. Now they're even turning to surgery to sort out [a child's] misplaced L and R sounds.... It shows a young mother, obsessed with her son's pronunciation at the kindergarten's all-English Christmas play, rushing him to the clinic for a quick fix. The boy screams as the mother and nurses hold him down, the mother insisting: "It's all for his future." (Choe 2004)

This excerpt highlights three critical aspects of English education in South Korea during that period. First, it reflects a substantial pedagogical shift from grammar-based instruction to communicative competence, particularly emphasizing spoken English. Second, it underscores the prevailing belief that acquiring accurate English pronunciation—especially emulating a standard American accent—is essential for success. This belief, illustrated by concerns over "misplaced R and L sounds," even led to surgical interventions in pursuit of phonological conformity (Lee and Lee 2024). Third, and perhaps most importantly, the phenomenon of tongue surgery raises profound questions about linguistic ideology—specifically, the lingering influence of Quirk's deficit linguistics (Quirk 1990; Kachru 1991). This ideology maintains that there exists a 'standard' form of a language deemed correct and superior, while other variations are dismissed as deviations or deficiencies. Despite recent shifts in English education aligned with globalization efforts, this ideology continues to shape attitudes toward English in Korea (Terhune 2003).

This paper seeks to liberate Korean English from its ongoing entanglement with so-called Standard English, through the theoretical lens of Kachru's concept of Liberation Linguistics, in the context of the current era of World Englishes. To this end, it first explores Kachru's framework and critiques the limitations of his well-known Three Circles Model. While Kachru's sociolinguistic and functional approach successfully legitimizes Outer Circle Englishes, it falls short of extending the same recognition to Expanding Circle varieties, such as Korean English. As a result, it fails to fully realize the inclusive vision of World Englishes.

To advance a more comprehensive and authentic conception of World Englishes, this study argues for moving beyond a sociolinguistic framework narrowly bound by the criterion of institutionalization. Instead, it emphasizes the need to attend to the internal mechanisms and linguistic dynamics that foster language variation and development, regardless of a speaker's placement within the concentric circle model. As an exploratory step in this direction, the study investigates the formation and variation of tag questions, analyzing usage among American English teachers (representing Inner Circle Englishes) and Korean university students (representing Expanding Circle Englishes). By examining these linguistic variations, the study aims to identify a theoretical foundation for the legitimacy of Expanding Circle Englishes and to contribute to an enriched understanding of World Englishes.

Within this framework, Korean English (Ahn 2014; Hadikin 2014; Choi et al. 2021; Lee and Lee 2024)[1] merits recognition as a legitimate variety within the Expanding Circle. To explore ways of overcoming the persistent anxiety toward non-normative, peripheral Englishes (Shaffer 2000; Park 2009), this study engages with the rationale for extending Kachru's liberation linguistics to the context of Korean English.

1 These authors share a common contribution in promoting the use of the term Korean English. While their research foci may differ slightly, they all seek to position Korean English within the framework of World Englishes, drawing on data from questionnaires or corpora. For instance, some examine changing Korean attitudes toward English (Ahn 2014) or compare perceptions of English among British, Singaporean, and Korean speakers (Hadikin 2014) in an effort to establish Korean English as a distinct variety. Their work can be seen as an attempt to apply the concept of institutionalization—a key criterion for the development of English in Outer Circle contexts—to the Korean case. In contrast, the present study sets aside the traditional Circles model and instead explores World Englishes through the lens of internal mechanisms and linguistic dynamics across all Englishes, regardless of Circle affiliation.

2. Theoretical background: World Englishes and liberation linguistics

There appears to be, to some extent, an ongoing tug-of-war between Quirk's deficit linguistics and Kachru's liberation linguistics (Kachru 1991) in many non-native English-speaking countries, especially regarding language policy and English education. Despite their fundamental opposition in approaching World Englishes, it is both striking and significant that these two perspectives share a number of underlying assumptions (Kachru 1991):

- Linguistic motivations underlying variation
- Sociolinguistic, cultural, and stylistic motivations for institutionalization
- The institutionalization of English in the Outer Circle
- A cline of varieties within non-native English
- The emergence of endocentric norms in the Outer Circle
- A distinction between users of the Outer Circle and those of the Expanding Circle

What distinguishes the two is not the assumptions themselves, but rather their treatment. Quirk's deficit linguistics is based on the rejection of these assumptions, motivated by a desire to uphold the myth of a norm-based Standard English. His framework marginalizes linguistic varieties found in the Outer Circle (OC) and Expanding Circle (EC), elevating only the standardized forms of the Inner Circle (IC). In contrast, Kachru's liberation linguistics is based on the recognition of these assumptions, advocating for the legitimacy of multilingual realities and the institutionalization of non-native Englishes. In doing so, it emphasizes concepts such as the cline of varieties and endocentric norm development in the OC.

However, as these assumptions suggest, Kachru's liberation linguistics remains largely centered on the Outer Circle, with limited engagement with the Expanding Circle (Kachru 1985; Botha and Bernaisch 2024). The EC is acknowledged only once—in the final assumption—by noting the distinction between OC and EC users. Even within Kachru's broader discussions of World Englishes, the focus tends to remain on Outer Circle Englishes, which are seen as institutionalized, contextually rooted, and embedded in multilingual societies (Kachru 1985; Botha and Bernaisch 2024). To further explore this tendency, consider Kachru's Three Concentric Circles Model

(1985), illustrated in Figure 1.

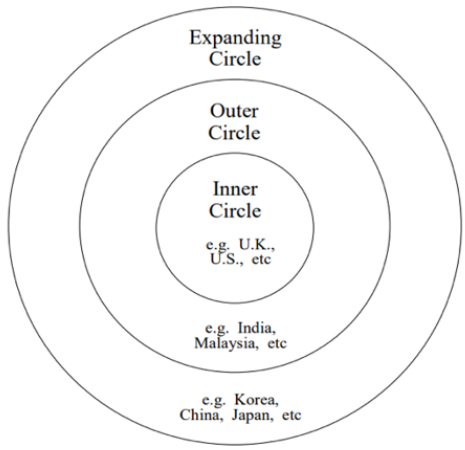


Figure 1. The three concentric circles of English

In this model, the Inner Circle represents native English varieties at the core, encircled by the Outer Circle, which is in turn surrounded by the Expanding Circle. This layout implies a hierarchy based on degrees of nativeness and institutionalization. The three circles also correspond to distinct roles: the norm-providing Inner Circle, the norm-developing Outer Circle, and the norm-dependent Expanding Circle (Kachru 1987; Pung 2009).

Although widely adopted, this model has drawn criticism, particularly for its inability to reflect the fluid and evolving realities of English use in the 21st century. First, the model is too rigid to account for contexts where boundaries between circles are becoming increasingly blurred. For instance, Australia, traditionally an Inner Circle country, now exhibits Englishes associated with all three circles due to high levels of migration and multiculturalism (Sharifian 2009). Additionally, the boundaries between OC and EC are not fixed: Malaysia, previously viewed as part of the OC, is now seen to be shifting toward the EC; conversely, Nordic countries such as Finland, Norway, and Sweden are gradually moving from the EC toward the OC (Phillipson 1992). As Clyne (1992) observed, World Englishes are increasingly pluricentric, and the distinctions among the three circles are becoming interchangeable and permeable.

In response to these developments, the original model may be revised as shown in Figure 2.

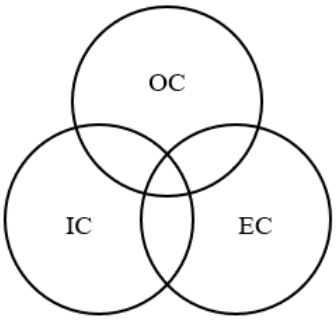


Figure 2. Three intersecting circles of English

Since Kachru's pioneering work on World Englishes in the mid-1980s (1985, 1986, 1987, 1990), research has highlighted English not merely as a tool for importing cultural norms from the Inner Circle, but also as a medium for exporting local traditions and cultural identities from the Outer and Expanding Circles back to the Inner Circle. Far from being transient interlanguages striving for native-like status, non-native Englishes are now increasingly recognized as institutionalized varieties in their own right (Sridhar and Sridhar 1986; Hao and Phuong 2017).

Aligned with Kachru's liberation linguistics, this study contends that even Standard English within the Inner Circle is not immune to internal change. These changes are not limited to sociolinguistic or functional shifts; they also reflect inherent linguistic dynamics. If such variation can be theoretically validated, it would not only support a more explicit expansion of Kachru's concept of World Englishes, but also provide justification for recognizing Korean English--an Expanding Circle variety--as a legitimate and autonomous member of World Englishes, free from subordination to Inner or Outer Circle norms.

3. Methodology

Kachru's concept of World Englishes extends beyond Inner Circle (IC) varieties,

incorporating sociolinguistic and functional considerations that enable the institutionalization of Outer Circle (OC) Englishes. In the previous chapter, however, we argued—based on Figure 2, "Three Intersecting Circles of English"—that the concept of World Englishes should also encompass Expanding Circle (EC) varieties. This argument was grounded in the view that the intrinsic linguistic realities and evolving dynamics of English itself justify such inclusion, irrespective of which circle a particular variety belongs to.

To provide empirical support for this claim, two sets of data on English tag questions are analyzed: the first originates from Langendoen's (1970) "Walrus and Alligator" study, and the second consists of responses collected from Korean university students using the same instrument. Langendoen's Walrus and Alligator game is an exercise in forming English tag questions. In this activity, a declarative sentence (the 'Walrus') is presented, and participants are asked to generate an appropriate tag question (the 'Alligator').

Langendoen's data were derived from responses provided by 46 secondary school English teachers from 13 U.S. states, all of whom participated in the eight-week NDEA Institute held at Ohio State University during the summer of 1968 (Langendoen 1970). These participants, all native speakers of English and practicing secondary teachers, were assigned a homework task consisting of 91 English statements—each functioning as a hypothetical 'Walrus.' They were instructed to play the 'Alligator' by selecting an appropriate question tag for each statement. For the purposes of this study, we selected nine of the 91 examples to allow for a focused analysis.

While Langendoen's data represent a prototypical IC variety, based on responses from native speakers, the second dataset reflects a representative EC context—specifically, Korean university students. Participants were drawn from two institutions in South Korea: English Language and Literature majors at a national university in a provincial area, and English Education majors at a private university in a metropolitan city. Using the same nine Walrus examples from Langendoen's original set (see Appendix: Instructions for the Survey), we collected responses from these Korean students—referred to here as the Korean Alligators. The participant breakdown is as follows:

Table 1. Details on Korean alligators

Department	Course title	No. of participants
English Language and Literature	English Phonetics	32
	General English	38
English Education	Foundations of English Language Education (Section 1)	16
	Foundations of English Language Education (Section 2)	14

Although the Korean participants are non-native speakers and thus part of the EC, all were English majors who had studied the language for more than ten years[2] within the Korean education system. Further details on the Korean Alligators, as presented in Table 1, are as follows. In the Department of English Language and Literature, English Phonetics was offered as an elective course with 32 students enrolled —15 male and 17 female. By academic year, there was one first-year student, 22 second-year students, five third-year students, and four fourth-year students. The course used *Introducing Phonetics and Phonology* by Davenport and Hannahs as its textbook. The second course, General English, was a required course for first-year students in the department and covered all four core language skills. The main textbook was the 5th edition of *Interchange* by Richards, published in 2017. A total of 38 students participated in the survey for this course, including 12 males and 26 females. In the Department of English Education, 30 second-year students were enrolled in Foundations of English Language Education, which was divided into two sections of 16 and 14 students, respectively. The assigned textbook for this course was *Introducing Second Language Acquisition* by Saville-Troike and Barto. This background suggests that their exposure to English had been primarily through grammar-oriented instruction. Moreover, as students accustomed to exam-focused learning, they were familiar with binary judgments of grammatical correctness.

To counteract the influence of this prescriptive orientation and to promote open-minded participation, we presented an illustrative example from Langendoen's original dataset:

2 This may hold true, as South Koreans begin learning English in the 3rd grade of elementary school. This is followed by six years of secondary school (equivalent to 7th-12th grade in the U.S.), during which most students are also taught the language as EFL.

W:	I have to go home now.	Responses
A:	Don't I?	36
	Haven't I?	9
	Do I?	1

This example was introduced to demonstrate that even native English speakers—including in-service teachers—exhibit variation in their tag question usage. It was intended to challenge the common belief among Korean students that only one 'correct' Alligator exists for a given Walrus. Given their prescriptive training, many Korean students view have to as a semi-modal verb expressing obligation, and thus prefer a main verb structure for tag formation (e.g., don't I?), often rejecting alternatives such as haven't I? or do I? as incorrect.

By presenting this example prior to the main survey, we aimed to reduce students' anxiety and encourage them to respond freely and confidently. After securing the Alligator responses from both the Inner Circle (IC) and Expanding Circle (EC) participants, we proceeded to analyze their similarities and differences. The raw data were then interpreted through the lens of World Englishes, with the goal of contributing to a deeper understanding of English variation across sociolinguistic contexts.

4. Analyzing tag questions in Korean and American Englishes

The 'Walrus and Alligator' game, as applied in Langendoen (1970), is a valuable tool for describing the role of the two major parts of a sentence known as a tag question. In this game, the first part of the tag question is provided by the Walrus, who gives a declarative sentence. The Alligator then responds to the Walrus's declarative by creating a grammatically acceptable question tag. To successfully play the part of the Alligator, one must follow three key sub-rules of English grammar.

- The subject of the Alligator's part should agree with the subject of the Walrus's statement in person, number, and gender.
- The verb in the Alligator's part should match the verb used in the Walrus's statement, whether it's a helping verb or a form of the verb 'do,' in the

same tense.
- The Alligator must use a negative form of the verb when the Walrus uses a positive form, and vice versa.

To elicit Alligator's responses to each of Walrus's hypothetical statements, Langendoen provided a set of ninety-one declarative sentences to forty-six students. All of these students were junior high and high school English teachers from thirteen states in the U.S. (Langendoen 1970). For the purpose of our discussion, we have selected nine examples from his dataset, which are presented in the Appendix section of this study. The same nine examples were provided to 100 South Korean students majoring in either English Literature or English Education at two universities to obtain a variety of Alligator responses. Although these survey participants are non-native speakers of English in the EC, they are all considered to have been learning the language for more than ten years. The following are three questions that need to be addressed:

- How can Alligator's various question tag candidates for each of Walrus' statements be accounted for from the perspective of Standard English?
- Are there any similarities or differences between Langendoen's Alligator responses and their Korean counterparts?
- How is the variety of different candidates for a question tag related to Kachru's concept of liberation linguistics?

With these questions in mind, consider the two data sets that evaluate Langendoen's Alligators (LA) and Korean Alligators (KA). For the purpose of a comparative analysis, I have listed Langendoen's nine Walrus statements below, numbered (1) to (9). Each Walrus statement is followed by various Alligator candidates for its question tag.

(1)	W:	I have five cents in my pocket.			
	A:	a: Haven't I?	26	57%	43%
		b: Don't I?	20	43%	57%

(2)	W:	I have not five cents to my name.			
	A:	a: Have I?	29	63%	49%
		b: Do I?	17	37%	51%
(3)	W:	I've got five cents in my pocket.			
	A:	a: Haven't I?	35	76%	68%
		b: Don't I?	8	17%	9%
		c: Have I not?	1	2%	2%
		d: Have I?	1	2%	10%
		e: No reply	1	2%	11%
(4)	W:	I've been waiting a long time.			
	A:	a: Haven't I?	45	98%	76%
		b: Have I?	1	2%	7%
		c: Didn't I?			12%
		d: Did I?			5%
(5)	W:	Everyone likes me.			
	A:	a: Don't they?	34	74%	85%
		b: Doesn't he?	12	26%	14%
		c: No reply			1%
(6)	W:	Seldom did anyone say anything.			
	A:	a: Did they?	22	48%	39%
		b: Did he?	19	41%	7%
		c: Didn't he?	3	7%	23%
		d: Didn't they?	2	4%	31%
(7)	W:	No one watched my sister.			
	A:	a: Did he?	23	50%	14%
		b: Did they?	17	37%	45%
		c: Didn't they?	4	9%	35%
		d: Didn't he?	2	4%	6%
(8)	W:	I believe that Dr. Spock is innocent.			
	A:	a: Don't I?	36	78%	29%
		b: Isn't he?	10	22%	69%
		c: No reply			2%

(9)	W:	Either the girls or John will stay.			
	A:	a: Won't he?	24	52%	12%
		b: Won't they?	21	46%	68%
		c: No reply	1	2%	20%

Note in (1) through (9) that Alligator's responses are represented by a series of three numbers. The first number indicates how many of LAs' students selected a particular candidate for their question tag, followed by the corresponding percentage. For example, the number "26" in (1A-a) shows that 26 out of 46 students chose 'Haven't I?', which represents approximately 57 percent. The third number reflects the percentage of KAs' choice, corresponding to and aligned with the percentage of students who selected that option.

The fact that multiple responses were provided for each of the Walrus statements suggests that there may not be a single 'correct' Alligator reply. Based on his research into Alligator responses to tag questions, Langendoen (1970) concludes that Standard English grammar is not fixed. While there may be a general preference for certain forms as normative within Standard English, minority usages should not be dismissed as non-standard. He emphasizes that, although English speakers commonly follow a broad set of grammatical rules, individual differences in grammatical detail are significant and meaningful.

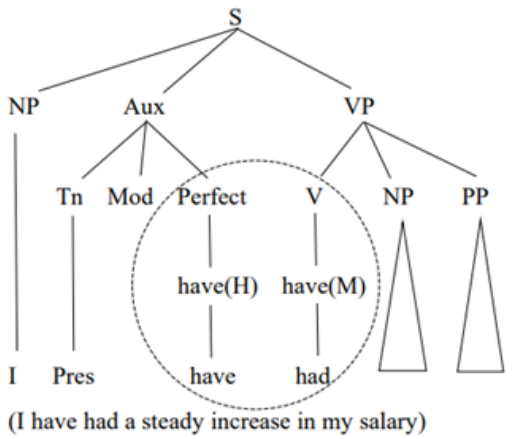
Langendoen further argues that these differences—evident in the range of Alligator responses—stem from the disparity between normative grammar taught in schools and the grammars internalized through individuals' extracurricular language exposure (1970: 28). As noted earlier, the forty-six students who participated in the Walrus–Alligator game, assuming the role of the Alligator, were all English teachers from the United States—typical representatives of Kachru's IC countries. A central insight of Langendoen's research is that Standard English is not resistant to change across time and regions. English grammar, by its nature, is fluid, with shifting boundaries that are often adjacent and blurred—yet these variations rarely result in communication breakdowns.

To illustrate this point, let us examine the English verb 'have' in examples (1) through (4). The form 'have'—whether functioning as a helping verb[3] or as a main

3 Langendoen (1970) uses the term 'helping verb' to refer to what is more formally known as an auxiliary

verb—often appears identical and does not exhibit complementary distribution, especially when it immediately follows the subject. Consider, for example, the sentence: "I have had a steady increase in my salary." In this sentence, both uses of 'have' coexist—first as a helping and then as a main verb—revealing how grammatical roles can overlap in form while differing in function.

(10)[4]



[Abbreviations: Tn= Tense; Mod= Modal auxiliary; H= Helping verb; M=Main verb]

As illustrated in (10), there is no syntactic ambiguity in the use of the two instances of 'have.' The first 'have,' associated with the Perfect node, functions as an auxiliary (helping) verb. The second instance, although inflected in form (had), is appropriately positioned within the verb (V) node of the syntactic structure. However, even in sentences containing only one instance of 'have,' the verb—when used as a main verb—may still be associated with the Perfect node, which is in turn dominated by the higher Aux node. Alternatively, 'have' may be linked directly to the verb (V) node as 'have(H)[5].'

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verb. This paper retains his terminology for consistency.

4 Note that a syntactic structure presented here is based on Chomsky's Standard Theory (1965). Setting aside any more advanced theories of syntax developed later (Chomsky 1981, Chomsky 1995; Radford 1997), this old theory of syntax (Lester 1971) is sufficient to account for the blurred or muzzy characteristics of 'have(H)' and 'have(M)' in their positions.

5 Note that 'have(H)' refers to the case in which the verb 'have' is used as a helping verb, while 'have(M)' refers to its use as a main verb.

In other words, the two adjacent instances of 'have' may exhibit functional fluidity or positional overlap, depending on their syntactic interactions with nearby constituents. 'Have(M)' may be interpreted as a helping verb, while 'have(H)' may function as a main verb. As shown in examples (1) through (4), this functional ambiguity helps explain why multiple candidates for the question tag are possible—not solely on the basis of grammatical correctness in terms of standard versus non-standard or normative versus non-normative forms.

In this context, 'Tag(H)' refers to question tags that begin with 'have' or its derivatives, while 'Tag(D)' refers to those that begin with 'do' or its derivatives. Considering the syntactic differences between (1) and (2), there appears to be an assumption that the greater the syntactic distance between 'have' and the following noun phrase (NP), the more likely 'have' is to be interpreted as 'have(H).' For instance, the insertion of 'not' between 'have(M)' and the NP in (2) increases the likelihood of a 'Tag(H)' interpretation compared to (1). This is reflected in the data: Langendoen's results show a 63% rate for 'Tag(H)' in (2) versus 57% in (1), while the Korean data shows a 49% rate in (2) versus 43% in (1).

The uses of 'have' in the examples above may be categorized into two types: 'have(M),' as seen in (1) and (2), and 'have(H),' as in (3) and (4). Regarding the former, both Langendoen's data and the Korean data reveal a clear trend: the likelihood of selecting 'Tag(H)' increases in (2) relative to (1). What is particularly noteworthy in these two examples is the contrast between Langendoen's and the Korean data in the ratio of 'Tag(H)' to 'Tag(D).' In Langendoen's data, 'Tag(H)' surpasses 'Tag(D)'—57% versus 43% in (1), and 63% versus 37% in (2). In contrast, in the Korean data, 'Tag(H)' is outnumbered by 'Tag(D)'—43% versus 57% in (1), and 49% versus 51% in (2).

From the perspective of traditional English grammar, both instances of 'have' in (1) and (2) are main verbs associated with the V node within the VP. Therefore, it is traditionally unlikely that a main verb would be confused with elements of the auxiliary system. This discrepancy may relate to the observation that Korean speakers—represented here—tend to exhibit a greater degree of syntactic rigidity or fossilization than native English speakers in Langendoen's study. Such a difference may be viewed as a reflection of Korea's grammar-centered approach to English education, which tends to prioritize rule-based instruction over functional flexibility.

A similar observation can be made in (3) and (4), where the verb 'have' is clearly

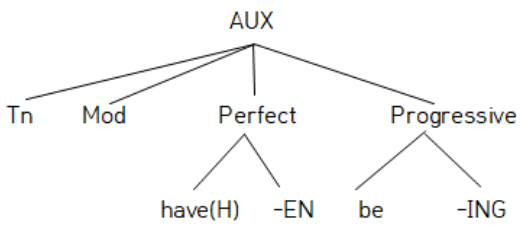
used as a helping verb, as it is followed by the main verbs 'got' and 'waiting,' respectively. The data shows that the rate of 'Tag(H)' is consistently much higher than that of 'Tag(D)' in both (3) and (4), regardless of whether we consider Langendoen's Alligator (LA) data or Korean Alligator (KA) data. Refer to Table 2 below for details.

Table 2. Statistical analysis of question tag variation

	LA		KA	
	Tag(H)	Tag(D)	Tag(H)	Tag(D)
(3) "I've got..."	80%[6]	19%	80%	9%
(4) "I've been waiting..."	100%	0%	83%	17%

Similar to the case of (1) and (2), it is also possible to explain why the rate of 'Tag(H)' is consistently higher in (4) than in (3). This appears to result from the insertion of the additional element 'been' between 'I've' and 'waiting' in (4), which is not present in (3). Regarding the syntactic structure of 'AUX' in (4), consider the following.

(11)



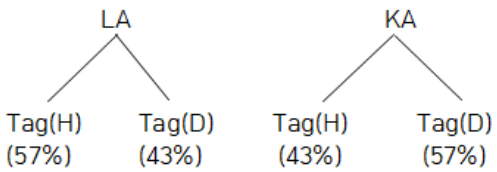
Given this structure, 'have(H),' dominated by the Perfect aspect, is not immediately followed by the main verb due to the insertion of -EN, be, and -ING, resulting in the constructions 'be + EN' and 'wait + ING.' What is significant here is that 'have(H)' is more likely to function as a helping verb when it is syntactically distanced from the main verb through the insertion of these elements—such as the insertion of 'been'

6 Note that the 80% rate for 'Tag(H)' here represents the total sum of rates for tags starting with 'have' and its derivatives. Specifically, the rate for 'Tag(H)' in (3) includes 76% for 'Haven't I,' 2% for 'Have I not,' and 2% for 'Have I.' This applies to the other rates given in Table 2 as well.

between 'I've' and 'waiting' in (4), which is absent in (3).

So far, we have examined various examples from both LA data—representative of Kachru's IC—and KA data, which represents the EC. What is particularly striking and noteworthy is that their responses to question tags reflect a notable fluidity and a blurring of syntactic boundaries, regardless of whether the speakers are native or non-native. To understand this phenomenon more clearly, let us now explore the linguistic realities revealed in example (1), briefly summarized in (12).

(12)



From both the IC-based and Standard English-oriented perspectives, the most appropriate question tag for (1) should be Tag(D), since the verb 'have' in the sentence functions as a main verb (have(M)) associated with the V node in the VP. However, in light of the linguistic realities presented in (12), at least two important questions arise:

- How can these linguistic realities be accounted for?
- Does it make sense to suggest that non-native Korean English speakers may, at least in this case, be closer to Standard English than native speakers represented by Langendoen's Alligators, simply because their selection rate for Tag(D) is higher?

As discussed earlier in (10), the syntactic structure appears to be strictly hierarchical, with all nodes and grammatical constituents directly linked to their dominating nodes. However, it is important to note that constituents may shift position when necessary, which is precisely why movement rules exist in syntax (Radford 1997, 2004; Carnie 2013). In addressing the issue of question tags, the boundary between AUX and V -represented as a distinct division in (10)- can become blurred in response to various syntactic dynamics. Interestingly, this syntactic fluidity aligns with contexts in which phonological blurring occurs. Segments may be repositioned within syllable

structure, as demonstrated in the analysis of syllabic consonants (Hogg and McCully 1987). A single segment may even be simultaneously linked to both the Onset and Coda nodes, resulting in ambisyllabicity.

Regarding example (1), although there is a significant difference in the rate of 'Tag(D)' between LAs and KAs—43% versus 57%, respectively—it may be misleading to suggest that KAs are closer to Standard English than LAs, although as both rates extend beyond Quirk's concept of deficit linguistics. Instead, it is more plausible to attribute the higher rate of Tag(D) among KAs (57%) compared to LAs (43%) to the traditionally grammar-focused English education in Korea, which emphasized strict adherence to English syntax. The same holds true for (2). Multi-valued Alligator candidates for the question tag, as revealed in (3) and (4), are sufficient to show that the issue of question tags extends beyond the scope of Quirk's norm-focused deficit linguistics and should be open to Kachru's liberation linguistics, aligning with World Englishes.

Another group of sentences, (5)-(7), also indicates that there may be a range of different forms of question tags, which deviate from Standard English grammar. These sentences, among others, are characterized by the inclusion of indefinite pronouns such as 'everyone,' 'anyone,' and 'no one.' In relation to question tags, the crucial issue is how these indefinite pronouns in the statement can be linked to the corresponding tag pronouns.

Before delving into this issue further, it should be noted that indefinite pronouns are typically treated as singular nouns. Consequently, they are required to align with the third-person singular present tense verb ending '-s,' as shown in (13).

(13) a. Everyone wants [*want] to be the first in class.
b. Is [*Are] there anyone in the classroom?
c. No one knows [*know] the answer.

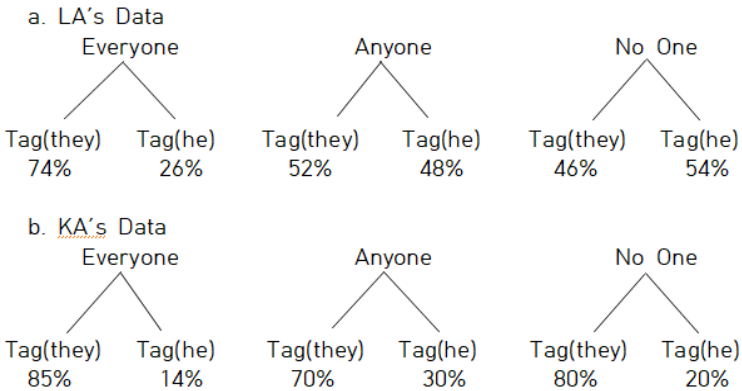
Nevertheless, it is striking to observe that in (5)-(7), the same indefinite pronouns are, to a great extent, treated as having plural characteristics, as illustrated in the following examples, where the third-person plural pronoun, 'they,' is used in the question tags.

(14) a. Everyone likes me, don't they? (74%) [= (5)]
b. Seldom did anyone say anything, did they? (48%) [= (6)]
c. No one watched my sister, did they? (37%) [= (7)]

As indicated by the third-person plural pronoun 'they' in the question tags in (14), indefinite pronouns appear to be associated with the concept of plurality, although they exhibit varying degrees of plurality depending on the specific indefinite pronoun. According to the data in (14), the semantic plurality inherent in these indefinite pronouns ranks as follows: 'everyone' (74%), 'anyone' (48%), and 'no one' (37%).

To conduct a comparative analysis of both LA data and KA data concerning the issue of tag pronouns, let us consider the following, based on (5)-(7)[7].

(15)



When looking closely at the data in (15), there are similarities and differences between LA's data and KA's data regarding tag pronouns. Specifically, both LA's data in (15a) and KA's data in (15b) share a common feature: 'Tag(they)' outnumbers 'Tag(he)'for' Everyone' and 'Anyone,' with ratios of 74% versus 26% and 85% versus 14% in the former, and 52% versus 48% and 70% versus 30% in the latter. However, regarding 'No one,' LA's and KA's data diverge. In KA's data, 'Tag(they)' overwhelmingly outnumbers 'Tag(he)' with a ratio of 80% to 20%. In contrast, in

7 Note that the rates assigned to both 'Tag(they)' and 'Tag(he)"in (15) are based on no consideration of the positive-negative reversal in forming a question tag. In (6), for example, the rate of 'Tag(they)' includes both 48% for (6A-a) and 4% for (6A-d) in LA, summing up to 52%.

LA's data, 'Tag(they)' is outnumbered by 'Tag(he)' with a ratio of 46% to 54%.

However, despite the detailed statistics, which place special emphasis on the comparison between the two groups of data—representing the norm-providing IC and the norm-dependent EC—what is at stake is that Alligator's tag pronouns are not so much based on fixed rules or constraints, as suggested by Quirk's notion of deficit linguistics, but rather characterized by multi-valued or pluricentric dynamics.

The same holds for the discussion of examples (8)-(9), These two examples share a common feature: each contains two subjects: 'I' and 'Dr. Spock' in (8), and 'the girls' and 'John' in (9). In the former, one subject, 'I,' is in the main clause, while the other, 'Dr. Spock,' is in the subordinate clause. Regarding which of these two subjects is associated with the pronoun in the question tag, both options may be considered available, though there is a sharp contrast between the LA and KA data. In LA, 'don't I?'—with the main clause subject I—accounts for 78% of all instances, as seen in (8A-a), compared to 22% for 'isn't he?,' which refers to the subordinate clause subject 'he' in (8A-b). In KA, the distribution is nearly the reverse, with a ratio of 29% to 69%. For the sake of more detailed analysis of this, (8) needs to be repeated as follows.

(16) W: I believe that Dr. Spock is innocent,

A:	a: Don't I?	36	78%	29%
	b: Isn't he?	10	22%	69%
	c. No reply			2%

Given that 'I believe...' is the main clause while 'Dr. Spock...' is a subordinate clause in English, it is generally assumed that the pronoun required in the question tag is more likely to be associated with the subject of the main clause. What is intriguing in this case is that Koreans, despite the sentence being in English, tend to consider the subordinate clause ('Dr. Spock...') as more important than the main clause ('I believe that...'). This tendency seems to be related to their semantic and/or psychological arrangement of ideas in (16), as illustrated by the Korean translation of the sentence provided below:

(17) [Dakteo Spock-ga mujoe]-rago na-neun mitneunda
[Dr. Spock-SM innocent is]-that I-TM believe.
"I believe that Dr. Pock is innocent"

As shown in (17), the subordinate clause in English (Dr. Spock...) precedes the main clause (that I believe) in the declarative sentence. Although KAs produce this sentence in accordance with English syntactic norms—as typically taught in Quirk's norm-based English instruction—their underlying stream of thought may be substantially shaped by Korean word order, which customarily places the main clause at the end, as in (17)[8]. This influence likely accounts for the finding that 69% of KAs prefer the tag 'isn't he?,' compared to only 29% who favor 'don't I?' What is both striking and noteworthy is that as many as 22% of LAs exhibit the same preference as the majority of KAs in selecting the pronoun for the question tag. Setting aside English-specific syntactic conventions, this suggests that the subordinate clause may

8 The English sentence in (16W), "I believe that Dr. Spock is innocent," can be translated into Korean not only as the version shown in (17), but also as "na-neun [Dakteo Spock-ga mujoe]-rago mitneunda." (I-TM [Dr. Spock-SM innocent is]-that believe.) There is nothing grammatically incorrect about this Korean sentence; it is entirely acceptable. However, the point to be emphasized here is that in spoken Korean, the structure in (17) tends to sound more natural. Moreover, an even more natural and casual variant omits the subject 'na-neun' ('I'), resulting in the form "[Dakteo Spock-ga mujoe]-rago mitneunda." ("[That Dr. Spock is innocent], I believe"). This observation highlights the syntactic flexibility of Korean, where, as seen in the following three sentences:

- [Dakteo Spock-ga mujoe]-rago mitneunda.
- [Dakteo Spock-ga mujoe]-rago na-neun mitneunda.
- na-neun [Dakteo Spock-ga (innocent) mujoe]-rago mitneunda.
(SM=Subject Marker, TM= Topic Marker, na= 'I', rago=COMP (=that))

the relative order between the main clause and the subordinate clause can vary freely. Notably, the subject of the main clause, 'na-neun' ('I'), may be optionally omitted—especially in casual speech—whereas the subject of the subordinate clause, 'Dakteo Spoke' (Dr. Spock), cannot be omitted under any circumstance. This syntactic characteristic of Korean likely influenced KAs in the study to favor 'Isn't he?' as the question tag in 69% of cases. It is plausible to infer that their judgments were shaped by the Korean word order, where the subordinate clause carries greater salience, both structurally and psychologically, leading them to select the pronoun based on the subordinate clause subject. It is interesting to observe cases in English where the subject pronoun in a question tag refers to the subject noun of a subordinate clause as illustrated in the following examples (Quirk et al. 1985: 811).

I suppose you're not serious, are you?
*I suppose you're serious, don't I?
I don't suppose he's serious, is he?
*I don't suppose he's serious, do I?

carry greater psychological salience for some speakers in the IC as well. These linguistic realities—particularly the multiplicity of norms evident in the use of question tags—pose challenges to the explanatory power of Quirk's deficit linguistics. They indicate that even Standard English within the IC may be subject to variation and change, driven by the internal dynamics of speakers' language use.

Finally, in example (9), the two potential antecedents for the pronoun in the question tag are 'the girls' and 'John' in the phrase 'either A or B.' As shown in the analysis of this example, the distribution in LAs is 52% for 'won't he?' and 46% for 'won't they?,' whereas in KAs, the corresponding ratios are 12% for 'won't he?' and 68% for 'won't they?.' This data, which highlights the pluricentricity and variability in the usage of tag questions, underscores the relevance of Kachru's concept of liberation linguistics not only in Phillipson's (1992) so-called periphery-English countries—represented by both the OC and EC—but also in core English-speaking countries within the IC.

Taken together, as illustrated by the discussion on tag questions, there appear to be several grammatical phenomena that cannot be fully explained by the IC norm-based model of Standard English as proposed by Quirk's deficit linguistics. This observation suggests that Kachru's liberation linguistics should broaden its scope to encompass the IC and EC as well, rather than limiting its application to the OC, which is traditionally seen as more susceptible to the dominance of Standard English. Referring back to the syntactic model presented in (10), as indicated by the dotted circle encompassing both 'have(H)' and 'have(M),' the boundaries of Standard English —grounded in Quirk's deficit-based framework—become blurred. This may be due to speakers' internalized grammatical intuitions, which frequently extend beyond the rigid constraints, rules, and principles of Chomskyan theory (Chomsky 1965, 1981, 1995; Ross 1967; Radford 1997, 2004).

5. Conclusion

Despite being renowned as the most influential model for understanding the global spread of English, Kachru's Three Concentric Circles model—aligned with the paradigm of World Englishes—has faced sustained criticism from various scholars (Bruthiaux 2003; Jenkins 2007; Mollin 2007), including Kachru himself (Kachru 2005).

This criticism largely stems from the model's oversimplification and its ambiguous classification of creoles. Although Kachru advocates for liberation linguistics, the model still preserves a hierarchical structure among the circles, as implied by the very design of the concentric diagram.

In Kachru's conception of liberation linguistics, concepts such as institutionalization, variation, and the cline of Englishes play a central role in distinguishing norm-based Standard English in the Inner Circle (IC) from non-native, sub-standard varieties in both the Outer Circle (OC) and the Expanding Circle (EC). Kachru places particular emphasis on the OC in terms of institutionalization, seemingly assuming that the IC holds an extraterritorial status, detached from institutionalization processes. Moreover, his assumptions imply that institutionalization is not directly relevant to the EC. In this respect, Kachru's model, in its current form, does not fully accommodate the evolving realities of World Englishes.

However, the issue of tag questions in English—evident in both LA data for the IC and KA data for the EC—suggests that norm-based Standard English itself accommodates multiple acceptable forms of question tags. This variability indicates that so-called 'norms' in the IC should be understood as just one of many legitimate variations, rather than as a definitive standard applied across all circles. Langendoen's findings, which highlight the existence of multiple valid candidates for question tags in English, directly challenge Quirk's deficit linguistics. They also help extend the reach of Kachru's liberation linguistics by advocating a broader, more inclusive understanding of language norms.

What is particularly striking is that such flexibility in tag question usage is also observable in Korean English, a variety typically viewed as grammar-oriented and closely aligned with Quirk's deficit-based approach to English education. This observation suggests that even within highly prescriptive, grammar-focused contexts, there is room for variation—further reinforcing the need to challenge rigid linguistic hierarchies and broaden the applicability of liberation linguistics across all circles.

In light of these insights, this study aims to explore the linguistic rationale for expanding Kachru's concept of liberation linguistics, particularly with regard to institutionalization. In doing so, it seeks to challenge the entrenched misconception of Standard English as the sole legitimate variety in Korean society and to dispel the deep-seated sense of linguistic inferiority associated with non-norm Englishes. These findings carry meaningful implications for English education policy in Korea,

advocating for a shift toward a more inclusive, pluralistic understanding of English that better reflects global linguistic realities and empowers learners to value diverse English varieties—including their own. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations of this study. Chief among them is the reliance on tag questions only as the basis for analysis, which risks overgeneralization in making claims about Korean English. In addition, the data employed are also outdated and limited in scope, which may constrain the validity of the findings. These limitations warrant careful attention in future research.

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Appendix

Instruction for the survey

Some examples of question tags, shown in parentheses at the end of declarative sentences, are given below. These examples are generally acceptable and familiar to most English speakers:

- I hate the COVID-19 pandemic, (don't I?)
- The thunder sounds threatening, (doesn't it?)
- Your mother can speak Korean, (can't she?)

In a similar manner, you are invited to select what you feel is the most appropriate question tag for each of the nine statements listed below. Please note that this exercise is not an English grammar test—there are no 'correct' answers or test scores involved. Our goal is simply to explore the richness and variety of English usage.

For each statement, choose one question tag from Alligator's (A) potential options that you believe fits best.

(1) W: I have five cents in my pocket, _____ [=9]
A: a: Haven't I?
b: Don't I?

(2) W: I have not five cents to my name, _____ [=12]
A: a: Have I?
b: Do I?

(3) W: I've got five cents in my pocket,_____ [=10]
A: a: Haven't I?
b: Don't I?
c: Have I not?
d: Have I?
e: No Reply

(4) W: I've been waiting a long time, _____ [=8]
A: a: Haven't I?
b: Have I?
c: Didn't I?
d: Did I?

(5) W: Everyone likes me, _____ [=32]
A: a: Don't they?
b: Doesn't he?
c: No Reply

(6) W: Seldom did anyone say anything, _____ [=41]
A: a: Did he?
b: Did they?
c: Didn't they?
d: Didn't he?

(7) W: No one watched my sister, _____ [=30]
A: a: Did he?
b: Did they?
c: Didn't they?
d: Didn't he?

(8) W: I believe that Dr. Spock is innocent, _____ [=42]
A: a: Don't I?

b: Isn't he?
c: No reply

(9) W: Either the girls or John will stay, _____ [=64]
A: a: Won't he?
b: Won't they?
c: No reply

Note: The bracketed numbers at the end of Walrus statements are those assigned by Langendoen to his Walrus statements.

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