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A Passage in Time

From *Learner language* by Carl James (1990, Volume 23.4, 205–213).

> There is no denying that English is an international language, and as such we must expect to encounter a multitude of local varieties: not only the national Englishes, such as American, British, Australian, etc. but also an even greater number of learner Englishes, such as French English, Brazilian English, Japanese English and the like. But the analogy between these two types of varieties must not be forced; while it would be absurd to condemn American English 'faucet' or 'Do you have children?' as errors, the same should not be said for Spanish 'a real (royal) prince' or German English 'We smoke not here'. In this vein, Quirk (1989) finds it odd that Bartsch admits to having written her book *Norms of language* (1987) '... in the German variety of English ... one of the many varieties of the supervariety International English'. Notice the sleight of hand: the reasonable observation that English is an international language has been upgraded to the dubious assumption that there is a *language* called 'International English', a claim that begs many a question, such as: What are the norms of this language? Who are its native speakers? What are its origins? How are its varieties (or dialects) circumscribed? Davies (1989) asks whether English as an International Language (EIL) is an IL: they are both simplified, he contends, the former in terms of function, the latter in terms of form. A serious study of the sociolinguistic status of the foreigner's language is Janicki (1985). It is said that the ultimate arbiter of the question of what language or dialect an individual is speaking is that individual's own belief: the fact that so many speakers of this International English consider themselves to be speakers of one of its nonstandard dialects is sufficient reason for us to concede that some of the forms they use are errors. Such learners have trouble enough understanding the native-speaker dialects and accents of British English (Hughes & Trudgill 1986); if the many regional learner dialects are to be nurtured in the way that some suggest, global intelligibility will deteriorate and English will cease to be serviceable as an international language.

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