Issues and Implications of World Englishes for Teaching English in the Expanding Circle

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Introduction

English language teaching has now been one of the most challenging issues in language instruction both in the local and the world community. Roles and functions of English have been changed due to the spread of English as an international language. Issues in English language teaching have been raised among educators who have different views of which English should be taught and learned.

Roles and functions of English have changed; in other words, English can be used as a second, foreign, or international language. Its roles and functions are different depending on which context it belongs to. For example, a language can be made the official language of a country, to be used as a medium of communication in such domains as government, the law courts, the media, and the educational system. A language is often described as a “second language”, because it is seen as a complement to a person’s mother tongue (Crystal, 1997). It can be implied that pedagogy in English language teaching should be linked with roles and functions in that particular context.

This paper begins with roles and functions of World Englishes, particularly in the Expanding Circle countries where English is taught as an international language. Then which Englishes are suitable to serve as teaching models is explored. Finally, implications for English language teaching are examined.

Roles and functions of World Englishes in the Expanding Circle

Kachru divided English speakers into three groups and since then the model of three concentric circles has been the standard framework of World Englishes studies (Yano, 2001). Based on this framework, English serves as a first or native language in the Inner Circle such as in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia; the Outer Circle is where English serves as a second or additional language such as in Singapore, India, and the Philippines; and the Expanding Circle is where English is used as a foreign language such as in Thailand, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea. The two dispersals of English are associated with the spread of English in both the Inner Circle and the Outer Circle. However, the spread of English in the Expanding Circle is largely a result of foreign language learning within the country; there is no local model of English since the language does not have official status and has not become institutionalized with locally developed standards of use (McKay, 2002). Like what Kachru (1985, cited by Gupta, 2001) claims that the users of English are viewed from three perspectives: that of a native user for whom English is a first language in almost all functions; that of a non-native user who considers English as a foreign language and uses it in highly restricted domains; and that of a non-native user who uses an institutionalized second-language...
variety of English. Abed Al Haq and Smadi (1996) support this statement based on their study that the need for English is instrumentally and practically motivated where cultural loading is minimized. The use of English in Saudi Arabia has served as a means for developing and enriching personalities and cultural experiences; in other words, qualified persons in English language are given priority in employment and have more access to promotion and advancement. In Bulgaria, the US and the UK have acted in ways to solidify their distinct roles as producers and distributors of language in the linguistic marketplace, a large segment of the Bulgarian population also wanted to study the English language because it increased economic, social, and cultural opportunities (O’Reilly, 1998). Japan is another example where English is and will certainly stay a foreign language and function only as a means of communication with non-Japanese in international settings. In Thailand as well, Foley (2005) concludes that the role of English in Thailand has become not just a subject to be learned in the classroom but also a medium for social and practical use. A good knowledge of English is no longer a luxury but a necessity.

The roles and functions of English in some countries in Europe are encouraged towards the nativization of English. Even as English is used as a foreign language, Yano (2001) points out that there is growing evidence that English has become the major business lingua franca. Many organizations use English as a working language, if not an official language. It has become the usual medium of instruction in higher education for many European countries as well.

The above evidence has shown that English as an international language has allowed both native and non-native speakers’ use in different roles and functions. However, its spread has brought changes in attitudes among English users; consequently, English language learning and pedagogical implications should be examined to suit roles, functions, and attitudes in each particular context.

**Attitudes toward teaching English as a foreign language**

Debate and issues in English language teaching and learning have been raised since English has become an international language. The term “New Englishes” has emerged with a large number of varieties of English. The features of Standard Englishes which have now been assumed to be British and American standards both lexical, pragmatic, and grammatical, have been developed and transmitted to the varieties of English. In other words, English is not tied to native or specific cultures. For example, Japanese English is a kind of formal and normative form of English, showing little regional variation and meant for only occasional public and formal communication (Yano, 2001). Meanwhile, as a spoken language, Hong Kong English always omits the entire syllables in longer words, or the use of prepositions “on”, “in”, and “at” is always interchangeable (Wikipedia, 2007). Consequently, which varieties of English should be taught in the Expanding Circle? What norms should we follow? Does “standardness” play an important norm in English language teaching?

What is Standard English? Gupta (2001) mentions that Standard English is meaningful as a concept largely in the written language. It comes with a concomitant normative tradition, and skill in applying the conventions in perfect detail is socially
highly valued across the English speaking world. While Jenkins (2003) uses this term for a variety of a language which is considered to be the norm and the variety held up as the optimum for educational purposes and used as a yardstick against which other varieties of the language are measured. If English spoken in the Inner Circle is norm-providing; that in the Outer Circle is norm-developing; that in the Expanding Circle is norm-dependent, in other words, if we cannot claim to provide our own standard, what appropriate models or norms should be considered as our standard model for English language teaching in the Expanding Circle?

Modiano (1996) argues that Mid-Atlantic should replace British English as the educational standard in Europe and the English spoken by Europeans is increasingly influenced by American English. The situation is different in Bulgaria, where both British and American standards are encouraged. However, the demand for native-competence cannot be the entire target for English language teaching due to the reflection of local cultures and their own indigenous language that bring forth divergence from the British and American English. Varieties of English are expressed with their own identities and cultures to such an extent that each variety is unique and fit to their own contexts. Butler (1996) lists the lexical items of people’s daily lives which reflect their local cultures and identities:

pakpai (Hong Kong English): Asking for “black money” or “bribes” from hawkers. Pakpai (illegal taxi) drivers, mini-bus drivers, gambling-stall operators, traffic offenders were all mentioned.

Tuk-tuk (Thai English): A three wheeled open-air motorized vehicle.

Long-tailed boat (Thai English): Several long wooden boats were traveling back and forth between the two banks, picking up and discharging passengers. Each boat had an engine which was either an adapted truck diesel engine or a water pump with a propeller fixed at the end of a long shaft extending from the engine. The latter, which sent up a spray of water, were called “long-tailed boats”.

These are some words from the corpus that Butler claims standard items, which mean words that are accepted as perfectly normal in formal writing. Variation in prepositional collocations also occurs in the non-native varieties (Lowenberg, 2002), for example,

She lives in 6th Avenue.
I live in an apartment at Belmont Road.

Thus, attitudes toward English can go into two polls: one to local norms which encourage the learners to preserve their own identities and respect criteria for hierarchization; the other to varieties of English where all varieties are linguistically equal but socially unequal. For example, a Thai-American bilingual in the United States may have mixed attitudes toward the two languages. Even if both Thai and English are considered equal, Thai norms can be promoted at home or in the community. McKay (2002) suggests that local educators should have control over how English is taught, implementing a methodology that is appropriate to the local context rather than looking to Inner Circle countries for models.

Finally, attitudes toward English language teaching in the Expanding Circle can be encouraged by either native variety (British or American English) or nativized variety
(Indian or Singaporean English), but on a deeper level localized norms should be maintained and ensured that intelligibility will take place. Liu (2007) points out that it is important to learn English from native speakers, but it is not only native speakers who are helpful to students. Students can learn different strengths from native and non-native speakers. Native speakers can provide authentic input. Non-native speakers can explain the difficulties in learning and the comparison between students' languages and Englishes. The attitudes toward English teaching in the Expanding Circle should be emphasized on input available to learners. As Kachru and Nelson (2001) conclude, there is no a priori reason to think that the development of one variety is any stranger than the other. In any case, most learners of English in Outer Circle and Expanding Circle contexts never have any serious contact with Inner Circle speakers.

Implications for English language teaching

The role of English as an international language has shaped new dimensions in English language teaching and learning. Its spread has increased opportunities for both native English speakers interacting with other non-native speakers and non-native with non-native speakers. As mentioned by McKay (2003), the development of English as a global lingua franca has altered the very nature of English in terms of how it is used by its speakers and how it relates to culture. Consequently, purposes for learning and teaching English in the Concentric Circles have been reexamined. Kubota (1998) argues that teaching and learning English taught and learned in Japan will continue to gravitate toward the Inner Circle varieties and to promote Westernization in various aspects of Japanese life while failing to provide global socio-linguistic perspectives. There are, however, proposals and trends that might change the current situation. Now English as a foreign language in the Expanding Circle can be unrealistic due to the present roles and status in which English is used for wider communication.

Smith (1976, cited by McKay, 2003) indicates the purposes for learning and using English as follows:

1. Learners of EIL do not need to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers of English;
2. The ownership of EIL has become "de-nationalized";
3. The educational goal of EIL often is to enable learners to communicate their ideas and cultures to others.

McKay also suggests important implications for EIL pedagogy. She maintains that

First, it suggests that many learners of English today will have specific purposes in learning English which in general are more limited than those of immigrants to English speaking countries, who may eventually use English as their sole or dominant language. Second, many learners of English will be using English in multi-lingual contexts, with English serving designated purposes in their linguistic repertoire. Finally, many current learners of English may desire to learn
English in order to share with others information about their own countries for such purposes as encouraging economic scholarly exchanges. (McKay 2003: 2)

Such implications are linked to the issues of curriculum, materials, and evaluation in English language teaching. It is suggested that local educators need to take ownership of the teaching of EIL and design pedagogies that are appropriate to the local culture of learning (McKay, 2002). As mentioned above, attitudes toward English language should be counted on both local norms and varieties of English. The concepts, attitudes, and beliefs underlying English language learning curriculum should reflect the practicality and usefulness in English language teaching. Hicks explains the clear and high values of the curriculum:

First, it may be that the subject matter is a global language but it is equally important that students learn more about their own local language and their own use of language through another one. Second, the context of the language, the topics, and issues, can and should be embedded in the real, local world of the students, not in a virtual global world. Whatever becomes the starting point is the world of the student. Such a curriculum and methodology help students feel comfortable in both local and global communities. (Hicks 2000: 3)

Materials and textbooks used in English as a Foreign Language classrooms should also be carefully considered. As an international language, English belongs to no one country or culture (McKay, 2003). Instructional materials need to be interesting, relevant, and meaningful to students. Since cultural background helps and creates mutual intelligibility among English users, three types of cultural information are suggested by Cortazzi and Jin (1999, cited by McKay 2003).

1. source culture materials that draw on the learners' own culture as content;
2. target culture materials that use the culture of a country where English is spoken as a first language;
3. international target culture materials that use a great variety of cultures in English-and non-English-speaking countries around the world.

Evaluation is the last concern which has been debated among native and non-native speakers. Lowenberg (1993) insists that there has been almost no controversy concerning an issue much more central to language tests-identification of the linguistic norms for English against which proficiency in English is being assessed. It has been shown that in language testing, an implicit (and frequently explicit) assumption has long been that the criteria for measuring proficiency in English around the world should be candidates' use of particular features of English which are used and accepted as norms by highly educated native speakers of English. The norms for Standard English in any variety, native speaker or non-native, are not what any outsider native speaker or non-native speaker thinks they should be. The question is raised whether we should accept
those of native speakers' norms or we allow room to determine the norms of other varieties of Standard English. Divergences across varieties of Standard English take place in all linguistic features such as morphosyntactic and stylistic constructions. If these differences are neglected by those who develop the international tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, or TOEIC, can these tests be entirely valid indicators of proficiency in English as a world language?

Finally, Lowenberg (2002) suggests that any test of Standard English as it is actually used internationally will require such accommodation in order to provide valid assessments of proficiency in English as a world language.

Conclusion

The preceding sections have shown that the spread of English as an international language has brought a paradigm shift in English language teaching to all English users both those who are native and non-native speakers. Local teachers are now in the best position to contribute to ELT in the Expanding Circle. They should be aware of roles and functions of English as an international language and develop the appropriate pedagogy for their students regarding the control of curriculum, materials, textbooks, and evaluation.

References


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