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THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

This article presents principles of teaching English not as a second language or as a foreign language, but as a language of international communication. The article describes practical problems and solutions for teaching English as an International Language.

Key words: English language teaching, international communication, varieties of English.

There are multiple terms used in English that connect English language pedagogy with the learning goals, speaker characteristics, and places where English is used. *English as a Second Language* (ESL) refers to English being learned by youth or adults living in a country that speaks predominantly English as a native language for use in a wide range of functions in that country. *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL) is taught in countries where it is neither an official language nor a language of wider communication. The term *English Language Philology* narrows the focus to university students who are not native speakers of the language and are studying English language (and literature) as their major or specialty within a university. Terms such as *English as an Additional Language* (EAL) or *English for Speakers of Other Languages* (ESOL) are designed to be broad enough to refer to second language, foreign language, or language philology education. Such terms also acknowledge that a person may be learning English not as a second language but as a third or even fourth language.

As the use and study of the English language has become a global phenomenon, some sociolinguists and methodologists have proposed a theoretical approach which accounts for the global nature of English; they use the term *English as an International Language* (EIL) to refer to this approach. This article first briefly will describe the factors in the spread of English worldwide which support an EIL approach. Second, the major principles of the theoretical and practical framework for teaching EIL will be identified. Third, potential issues with implementing this teaching approach in the classroom and suggested solutions will be presented.

Crystal [5] and McKay [10] identify multiple factors in the development of English into a global language. First and foremost is the political and economic power of English-speaking countries – namely, Great Britain and the United States. As a result, English has emerged as a dominant language in the spheres of business, pop culture, entertainment, and travel. English is also a predominant language of scientific reading and writing because historically the first industrial countries with technical publications were Great Britain and America. This means that English plays an important role in acquiring and disseminating academic knowledge [5, 10; 10, 21].

English is also an international language in terms of its use as a first, second, or foreign language worldwide. Braj Kachru has identified three levels or concentric circles of English language use: the *Inner Circle*, the *Outer Circle*, and the *Expanding Circle* [see Figure 1]. The

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Inner Circle consists of countries where the majority of people speak English as their first language. The *Outer Circle* consists of at least 75 countries [5] where English is an official first or second language. Often these are countries which were introduced to English through British or American colonialism. The *Expanding Circle* refers to countries like Ukraine where English operates primarily as a foreign language. While estimates are difficult to obtain due to the fluctuating numbers of learners and the diverse criteria for defining a speaker of English, the data in Figure 1 suggest that close to 2 billion people worldwide speak English – one third of the population on Earth.

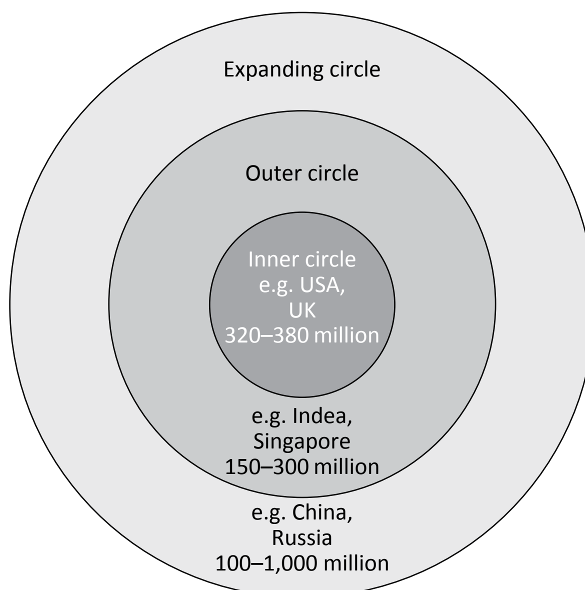

Figure 1. Kachru's Concentric Circles*
***Retrieved from http://www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/engl/WE/kachru2.gif**

It would be incorrect, however, to conclude from these facts that the English language is entirely hegemonic – that is, accepted as important worldwide only due to pressure placed on people by Great Britain or America to learn English. In some Outer Circle countries, for example, people had to fight both for the right to use English and for their political freedom. When India and South Africa were British colonies, only members of the local elite had the right to learn English for the purposes of working for the British Empire. The number of people who could learn English was kept small to minimize the local threat to colonial power [1; 3]. Locals eventually sought to learn English in these countries both as an act of liberation in itself and to express their desire for independence [9].

Regardless of the history of English in a particular country or region, in all contexts the language undergoes changes; often, these changes are conscious and intentional. As the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe wrote, «I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of African experience. But it will have to be a new English» [3, VIII]. In Singapore, where English has been one of four official languages since 1965, there are documented variations from British English in grammar, structure, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Collectively, this variety is known in Singapore as «Singlish,» and while the government has tried to encourage people not to use Singlish, research has shown that many people consider Singlish a reflection of Singaporean identity [8]. In other places such as a continental Europe, where English is only a foreign language, there are reports of an emerging localized variety of English [7]. In Nigeria, even pidgin forms of the language are preferred to Standard Nigerian English among some youth [4]. In all of these cases, new words or new meanings of old words are coined to reflect local experiences, local ideas, and local cultural norms which do not exist in Britain or America.

Teaching English as an International Language, then, is based on the premise that not only does such language variation exist in the world, the reality of its existence should be accepted and not viewed as wrong [6, 12]. EIL is also intended to account for that fact that learners of English may never speak with an American or British native speaker. McKay [10, 12] identifies four principles of teaching English as an International Language:

1. English is no longer connected with «Inner Circle» countries. In other words, one who learns English as an International Language does not need to learn how to speak like an American or British person and learn only the cultural norms of American and British speakers. It allows for the (quite likely) possibility that interaction will take place between Outer Circle-Expanding Circle speakers, or people from two different countries within the same circle.

2. English is partly global. It is used by individuals to communicate with people from anywhere in the world. It is also a lingua franca, a language of common communication and a language of common ground.

3. English is partly connected to the local culture. This is true both in terms of pedagogy and practice. That is, English learned as an international language is studied according to the local cultural norms of learning, not necessarily according to the methods and philosophies of Inner Circle countries. This means English teachers should not feel obligated or pressured to teach English using methods developed in other countries if such methods are so contrary to local norms that using them is counterproductive in the long run.

English is also connected to expressing or explaining local ideas and local culture. This can include explaining local foods, discussing ways of celebrating the New Year, and analyzing different practices around time. While many teachers may be engaging in such conversations already, EIL puts an emphasis on asserting the value of local cultural traditions and norms.

4. English is not the language only of the elite – it should be accessible to everyone. This last point is a reaction to the historical colonial practices which restricted access to English, and the legacy that exists today.

What does an EIL class look like in practical terms? The first question is who should teach it. Contrary to the popular notion that speakers of English from the Inner Circle are the best teachers, McKay [10] argues that non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTS) are better prepared for the task. They know what will motivate students (topics and methods), and they know what standards students will be held to. They also know what students will have difficulty learning and can offer extensive explanations and corrections both in English and in the students' native language.

The second question is what variety or varieties to teach. McKay [10] acknowledges that especially in the Expanding Circle countries, teachers may need to continue to teach a standard, widely accepted variety of English. Grammar teaching should also be oriented to a standard variety. At the same time, teachers can raise awareness about variation in use, especially in vocabulary. For example, students can be told the apparatus used to show information from a computer on a big screen is called a «projector» in America, a «beamer» in Germany and a «data show» in Honduras. In terms of pronunciation, some researchers argue that EIL should consist of a more simplified pronunciation system than standard American or British English. For example, most international speakers of English do not have the voiced and voiceless interdental sounds (θ and δ) in their repertoire. These sounds and other features that do not impede intelligibility should not be taught in an EIL class [7].

A major component of the EIL class is teaching about culture. Many EFL programs already include units on the cultures of English-speaking countries. McKay [10] raises further questions about whose culture should be taught, and how. As stated earlier, studying EIL need not be confined to studying the culture of Great Britain or America. In addition, some aspects of American or British culture may not be of interest or relevance to students outside the U.S. or UK contexts. McKay [10] gives the example of a teacher who gave students in Saudi Arabia an exercise to decide on prices for various items to sell at a garage sale. In America, a *garage sale* is a special one-time sale held by people who have too many things in their garage (or house) they no longer need or want. Usually these items are sold at a fraction of the original price solely for the purpose of getting rid of the clutter. It is also sometimes called a *yard sale,* or in New York, where space is more limited, a *stoop sale* (items sold on the steps outside the apartment

building). Some people (either collectors of items or people on limited incomes) make a habit of visiting garage sales to get things they need at a very low price. In Saudi Arabia, however, such a practice does not exist and most likely never will. In that context, then, using the exercise as designed was senseless.

A teaching activity centered on culture, then, should both engage students in an interesting way and develop cross-cultural understanding. It should treat other cultures positively. It should recognize that not all cultures are uniform, and it should give students a chance to reflect on their own culture. These last two points in particular are interdependent. For example, the teacher's resource book *Cultural Awareness* [11] talks about the relative necessity of being early, on time, or late for given contexts. While the book indicates which events people in America and Britain arrive early, on time, or late for, not everyone follows these rules exactly. For example, being on time for a meeting is generally important, but some people are constantly late to meetings. If students reflect on habits in their own country around time and discuss the different points of view and different habits connected with it, they will understand even more deeply that cultural patterns are general tendencies at best, not universal habits. Moreover, they can take a critical approach to understanding this activity. That is, they can discuss whether someone who comes after the scheduled time should even be described as «late.» Are they «fashionably late?» Are they «considerate of the hosts' feelings?» Are they «overextended [doing too much in too little time]?» Are they «constantly stuck in traffic?» Or is it the tolerance for lateness that should be criticized and rethought?

Perhaps the most important aspects to teach in an EIL class are those connected with pragmatics – the practical intent of the words uttered, choosing the right words for the right context, and negotiating meanings. As Blommaert [2] says, «We need to develop an awareness that it is not necessarily the language you speak, but ***how*** you speak it***, when*** you can speak it**,** and to ***whom*** it matters. It is a matter of ***voice,*** not of language» [196]. This is a natural consequence of Englishes becoming specialized at various scales of society. When an American travels to London, for example, they hear a different variety of English. Occasionally, one person in the party may say a word that is unclear to the other party, triggering a negotiation. For example, if a British person says to an American, «Did you see the size of that lorry?» the American will most likely ask, «What's a lorry?» The British person will then either explain it's a big car, or will point one out and the American will then say, «ah, a truck». Theoretically, such negotiations can also be triggered within countries where speakers have a heterogeneous identity – when grandparents are speaking with grandchildren who use new slang, when two people who love football start talking about it in front of a third person who knows nothing about it, and so on. Ideally, then, EIL teaching should train or prepare students to be prepared to engage in such negotiations and explanations.

Current teachers of EFL may express a number of concerns with implementing such an approach to teaching. One is the relative value of different varieties of English. As Blommaert [2] acknowledges, localized varieties may not offer opportunities for mobility across time and space to communicate with people outside the locality, and may not be received as well as speakers of prestige varieties [96–97]. There is also still some question about how to discern which language variations are errors and which ones are markers of a variety. Who decides – the individual speaker(s), government bodies that regulate the development of a language in their country, organizations that develop dictionaries and encyclopedias, exam writers, linguistics researchers, or someone else? Even if other varieties are recognized, the sheer numbers of varieties are difficult to cover in the classroom. This is especially true for students who are at the beginning levels and still learning to cope with a single variety of English. There are also concerns about the time it would take to talk about other varieties and other cultures. There are questions about whether and when a teacher would have time and means to obtain information about other cultures–both general topics and linguistic features. Finally, for some professions there may still be a need to learn skills for translating words from a variety of English into the native language.

The situation is not as bleak as it seems, though; there are a number of measures a teacher can use to adopt an EIL-oriented approach:

1. Teachers can start by recognizing the unequal and unwarranted power granted to American and British English, taking some ownership over localized forms of the language, and feeling free to acknowledge the value of multiple varieties of English, including their own.

2. There are more and more textbooks available which take a more inclusive approach to language and culture by covering more hypothetical interactions between non-native speakers from all over the world. When teachers have the freedom to do so, they can seek out these textbooks and encourage their students to buy them for use in the course.

3. Teachers can ask students to take an active role in gathering information as an autonomous learning project. Students may be asked to make individual presentations on a country of interest to them besides the U.S. or Britain. Similarly, they can do research about the history, the culture, and any awareness of peculiarities of culture or communication or English use in the area.

4. Teachers can plan to discuss varieties of English only when students have or are developing a sufficient working knowledge of the language to engage in a direct discussion. That said, even basic (A1) learners can be taught simple dialogues that develop communicative skills which lay the groundwork for future interaction and negotiation, such as:

– A: Excuse me, Where is the bus stop?
– B: At Macy's.
– A: Sorry, where?
– B: At 34th and 7th.

In this dialogue, Student A hears a cultural landmark which is unfamiliar. The student requests clarification (Sorry, where?) and hears an answer that is more comprehensible. Students could do exercises replacing «Macy's» and «34th and 7th» with Tsum, Harrods, Tai 101 (a 101-story building in Taiwan), and so on. B's second response could be further altered by the teacher with possibilities such as «I'll show you.»

5. Teachers and students can be reminded that the people they encounter from other countries, whether in their home country or abroad, are likely to be highly educated and well-versed in a variety of English that is fairly intelligible (possible to understand). Any differences in language use will be minor and can be resolved through negotiation of meaning.

Overall, teaching English as an International Language does not mean getting rid of standard varieties of English, but it does mean letting go of the idea of a single ideal standard. This may be particularly hard for cultures that value the purity of a language or teachers who prefer a grammar-translation approach. However, it can also be an opportunity for teachers to liberate themselves from any negative feelings connected with the notion that they and their students do not know the language like a native speaker from America or Britain. They can refocus their efforts on helping students acquire enough of the language to communicate their meaning explicitly, and on preparing them for–hopefully–communication with people from beyond their borders.

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Статтю присвячено принципам навчання англійської мови не як другої або іноземної мови, а як мови міжнародної комунікації. Обговорюються існуючі проблеми такого навчання та пропонуються певні практичні рішення.

Ключові слова: навчання англійської мови, міжнародна комунікація, варіанти англійської мови.

Статья посвящена принципам обучения английскому языку не как второму или иностранному языку, а как языку международной коммуникации. В статье обсуждаются существующие проблемы такого обучения и предлагаются некоторые практические решения.

Ключевые слова: обучение английскому языку, международная коммуникация, варианты английского языка.

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