

## *International English in Context: Which Pedagogies?*

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### **Abstract**

In its unmissable spread as the international language for communication by excellence, the English language is a classified detectable entity which is both product and agent of the global interconnected world. Deeply entwined in the globalisation process, International English is a multifaceted term that is nonetheless given meaning in the way it is being understood and used in context. The number of non-native speakers teaching the English language outnumbers native speakers of the language by 3 to 1. Ergo, many claims of ownership of the language by native English speakers - as well as any prescriptive doctrines about what needs to be taught and how when one studies English as a non-native language — have become as unreasonable as obsolete. The surge of the different types of ‘Englishes’ entails that cultural authenticity, real life situation and world issues need to be embedded into the communication and teaching of the language. This paper will discuss pedagogies employed by non-native English educators to facilitate the understanding and use of the English language in context. It will also highlight the pertinence of the sense of awareness of the self and one’s surroundings in second language learners. By developing a manifold and critical understanding of the issues related to the learning of English as a lingua franca, this paper also makes recommendations about the recognition and appreciation of diverse range of linguistic, cultural, ethnic student backgrounds of the learners in developing course content and methodologies.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca, Globalisation, Internationalisation

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## **Introduction**

### *English language in the global interconnected world*

Seventeenth to nineteenth century British colonisation and imperialism has managed to firmly institutionalise the English language in many countries through the laws written in English and by establishing it as the language of instruction in secondary and tertiary education. Then in the twentieth and twenty-first century, the United States' economic achievements built on the British legacy to reaffirm the critical importance of the English language. Indeed, today the United States account for 22 per cent of the gross world product at market exchange rates and over 19 per cent of the gross world product at purchasing power parity. Culturally also the United States is a superpower; its culture, arts or entertainment have worldwide appeal and significant international popularity on much of the world, especially through music and cinema. This culture is expressed through the medium of the English language. Globalisation, through modern communication, trade, the constantly increasing rate of international travels, travelling itself, is constantly reaffirming the importance of the English language. In the fields of business, academics, science, computing, education, transportation, politics and entertainment, English is already established as the global language. An estimated 85% of international organisations have English as at least one of their official languages. Hence, the English language is both agent and product of the process of globalisation.

While Robertson (1992) sees globalisation as “the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (p. 8), Waters (1995) defines it as “a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding” (p. 3) This process as noted by Al-Rodhan and Stoudmann (2006), encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and transcultural integration of human activities. Giddens (1999) sees globalisation as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (p. 64). Importantly, as noted by Giddens (1999), globalisation has an interactionist dimension, a dual process: global flows beyond the local context affect the local, and the local can affect the global. Harvey (2003) views the process through the lens of the interdependence of societies on a world scale and the reaffirmation and intensification of existing cultural or economic links between individuals, communities, nations and organisations. But there are some dangers and negative effects associated with this process.

### **The dangers and possibilities of globalisation**

For instance, Smith (2003) argues that, *globalisation is fraught with various new kinds of identity crises, ranging from eroding senses of national identity to unprecedented losses of indigenous languages and cultures under the homogenising pressures of global capital* (p. 36).

As English has become the language of communication in the global world, globalisation can promote the perception and usage of the English language as an imperialist tool. Walker (2004) notes that a hyper-globalist perspective - globalisation

perceived and implemented in a forceful way - often means that “the nation states are subsumed by single, overarching world policies” (p. 78-79). For instance, the learning of English is becoming more and compulsory from primary school to university across many geographical spaces and cultures where it is not a first language. Understandably, many countries find it important to equip their citizens with the linguistic skills to become global citizens, but as Smith (2003), Faulconbridge & Beaverstock (2009) underline, globalisation can promote and be a strong advocate for generic values and uniform cultures across otherwise originally different and diverse cultural spaces. Held *et al.* (1999) claim that globalism involves an imposition of cultures, ideas and beliefs. According to them, it is translated mainly by a recessive dominant relationship of the Western ideals and values over non-Western ones. But Dewey (2007), argues that the potential of globalisation far outweighs its dangers, and notes that “English is important for the enormous cultural diversity of the speakers who use it” (p. 333). Canagarajah (2002) militating for a necessary resistance of linguistic imperialism in the teaching of English, affirms that through the globalisation of the English language, “information exchanges can become more democratised and made less hierarchical, or more levelled” (p. 12).

### **Globalisation and Internationalisation**

In the field of education, the global interconnected world has enabled students to travel in pursuit of higher studies. While this is the reality of globalisation, these students need to be equipped with linguistic and intercultural tools to adapt to what is for them a different yet ever changing environment. Acquiring the skills and tools to adapt to globalisation is the process of internationalisation. The Global Policy Forum (cited in Daley, 2006) makes the distinction between internationalisation and globalisation as follows:

*Internationalization refers to the increasing importance of international trade, international relations, treaties, alliances, etc. International, of course, means between or among nations. The basic unit remains the nation, even as relations among nations become increasingly necessary and important. Globalization refers to global economic integration of many formerly national economies into one global economy, mainly by free trade and free capital mobility, but also by easy or uncontrolled migration. It is the effective erasure of national boundaries for economic purposes (par. 4).*

At school and university levels, students need to develop the linguistic and intercultural tools to adapt to the changing world. And this can happen through internationalisation which according to Knight (2015) is “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of education” (p. 7). Through internationalisation, each culture is enriched through the contact with other cultures, and this exchange can happen through the medium of the English language. But the critical issue is how can one avoid the English language to be perceived and used as an imperialistic tool and yet still enjoy its benefits regarding the facilitation of communication and the promotion of intercultural understanding among people who speak many languages? First, there is a need to acknowledge the constantly changing socio-political order. The shift from conservative views on the language to more progressive views is to be considered.

## **Conservative and progressive views about the English language**

Conservative views can occur with a hyper-globalist implementation of globalisation. Conservative views also consider the English language as static and rigid and expressed through a static monolithic lens that remains subject to the cultural and ideological norms and standards of what Kachru (2000) defined nearly 30 years ago as “the inner circle” (p. 3) - a small number of countries where English is the first language of its population and also the official language of the country. In this inner circle, Britain and the United States are the most influential because of the reasons mentioned in the introduction section in this paper. Kachru (2000) also explains that English-speaking people can be divided into three groups. The inner circle has already been mentioned. The outer circle comprises countries that were predominantly colonised by Britain and where English is the institutionalised language used in the laws and in formal education, but not necessarily employed by the natives outside these spheres. The third group is the-yet-to-be linguistically colonised rest of the world. It can be argued that the inner circle nations are regarded as the self-perceived agents of language spread. Indeed it holds quite conservative views about the English language; it often advocates that English is taught in the same way across different geographical spaces - the course materials are the same and the knowledge content is the same and the pedagogy is the same. For instance, Cambridge English Proficiency (CPE), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) are implemented in the same way across different countries. It is true that people who take them, mostly school and university students, would like to gain access to universities in the inner circle. That is the reality of globalisation, but a process of internationalisation as defined by Knight (2015) would have included an intercultural dimension to these entry requirements, allowing learners to express their cultural identity through the medium of the English language.

Conservative views about the English language often focuses on grammatical accuracy. In that paradigm, in learning and teaching, what matters most is that learners are given the tools and skills to develop proficiencies that are close to native speakers. Even if foreign language pedagogies sometimes say to wish to empower the local EFL learners to develop proficiency in the language of the global world, Rizvi (2007) for instance argues that the 21st century dominant Western framings brought about by globalisation means that,

*understanding other cultures becomes deformed [...] only superficial aspects of cultural traditions are learnt, making learning appear patronising, especially to marginalized groups and nations [...] and lends itself to cultural essentialism and thus ignores and obscures the historical and political construction of cultural traditions (p. 295).*

Progressive views on the teaching of the English language stipulate that a holistic approach should be adopted that is context specific and that considers the nature of the learner and the cultural context in which knowledge is developed. Less patronising than conservative views, a more progressive view would be as Hughes (2009) recommends, that pedagogies should aim “for the promotion of greater understanding in those areas of belonging and identity that make up the complexity of any individual” (p. 139)

Progressivists on the other hand emphasise the importance of language socialisation in foreign language learning. They recommend that a whole language approach should be adopted in developing literacy skills in students. Kell, P. and Kell, M. (2013), for instance argue that “knowledge and facts are socially and culturally constructed” (p. 28). So an English as a Foreign Language pedagogy that is constructivist in essence allowing learners to make meaning of the local and global world is necessary. This is moving away from hyper-globalist views that often consider local cultures only anecdotally and encourage more constructivist perspectives that promote the acquisition of knowledge in glocal contexts and an inclusive form of internationalisation. The inner circle needs to become bigger and let more nations in. This is the premise of the internationalisation of the English language as it spreads across diverse geographical and cultural spaces.

### **Ownership of the English language and cultural plurality**

But one major obstacle to further democratise the English language is the teachers themselves. For instance, Dewey (2007) notes that “many teachers and learners undoubtedly regard language norms as essentially fixed, predetermined, tied to a restricted number of geographic centres” (p. 346). The reality is that parents in many cases would prefer a native speaker over a non-native one when teaching English to their children. So who owns the language? From a hyper-globalist perspective, the English language would be owned by the inner circle but from an internationalist perspective, we would rather speak of Englishes with multiple users and hence owners of the language. Even when we are having different cultures coexisting, Joseph (2006) warns against attempting to codify new Englishes prematurely. Dewey (2007) notes that “the linguist who rushes in to systematise a New English prematurely runs a serious risk of misrepresenting as fixed what is actually still quite fluid” (p 145). The fluidity here obviously refers how language can evolve depending on the socio-cultural contexts of its users and how they use it. Advocates of the English language hence need to be careful not to assume that the language exists as a system that needs to be understood and taught within a framework of the imperialist language, or the native speaker. The term ‘language socialisation’ as endorsed earlier need be emphasised upon where the students need to be able to communicate in a social context intelligibly.

Dewey (2007) urges to “untie the language from any geographical centre” (p.346). In the international context, when we untie a language, we allow plurality and diversity of the language, which automatically leads to many Englishes. In that respect, internationalisation can help to better comprehend the world Englishes and English as a lingua franca arguments in the global world.

### **English as Lingua Franca**

The emergence of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is of great pertinence. How English as a Lingua Franca is experienced in the glocal context, its meaning and its impact is pertinent nowadays. ELF is defined by Seidlhofer (2001) as, *the use of the English language among persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication* (p.240).

The extent to which the English educator understands, respects and celebrates the non-native English learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds significantly influences the learners' sense of engagement with the learning of the English language. While endeavouring to successfully engage and motivate learners, it is important to design curricula that is contextualised and meaningful. They need to be challenging but flexible enough to accommodate the needs and aspirations of the learners and be aligned with their lived experiences and realities. In that respect, a constructivist approach is recommended; learners need to be given the opportunity to develop a sense of engagement with the language and cultures by respecting their own cultures and cultural identities. The ideal of learning English across socio-cultural and linguistic contexts supports the view that ELF is multicultural rather than culture-free. It is certainly not mono-cultural or monolithic. It is true that learning a new language is learning about a new culture or new cultures and cultural practices that are associated with the language, but at the same time, it is critical to infuse local knowledge in the curriculum, that is, design course material that takes into consideration the cultural location in which learning is happening. Therefore, as underlined by Dewey (2007), the hyper globalists contribute to the uniformity of English language education by equating globalisation with Westernisation. Dewey (2007) argues that "English is in any case a hybridized language in the extreme, with a varied, complex trajectory of development" (p. 349). The trajectory of the development of the language is ergo questioned when the number of English users in the world are dominated by people who do not have English as a first language. Countries which have English as first and/or official language is significantly low compared to non-native users of the language. Graddol's (1997) notes that by 2050, speakers of nativised Englishes will far outnumber speakers of native English, that English will be used primarily as a second language in multilingual contexts. So in this new world order, if the English language no longer has any legitimate owner, then non-native English speakers are in a position - perhaps even a better position - than native speakers to be English language teachers.

### **The status of the Non-native English teacher**

Lin *et al.* (2005) note that non-native speakers are still regarded as the other, marginalised and "in some senses dispossessed" (p152). Still, Ur (2010) affirms that these teachers "are often the only role-models their students have readily available (p. 86). This is because these teachers understand how the teaching of the English language is so closely linked to an understanding of local cultures, values and traditions. Medgyes (1994) notes that non-native English speaking teachers provide a good learner model for imitation and describes non-native English speaking teachers as follows:

- 1) They teach language learning strategies more effectively.
- 2) They supply learners with most information about the English language.
- 3) They anticipate and prevent language difficulties better.
- 4) They are more empathetic to the needs and problems of learners.
- 5) They make use of the learners' mother tongue. (p. 157)

But irrespective of who teaches, a native or non-native, what matters more is how they teach. It is a matter of finding the pedagogy that is relevant for the context. Referring to the discussion about globalisation and internationalisation, what is

needed is a pedagogy of English language that develops in students an awareness of the global connected world from home and that helps them become internationally minded. For instance, Poonoosamy (2015) notes that in the enacted curriculum, it is important that language teachers and students explore knowledge and cultures of the wider world that includes local context and contemporary issues and concerns globally. This could address some of the challenges faced by many students from non-Western backgrounds in engaging with an ESL curriculum that is often not sufficiently representative of their cultures. This curriculum is often prescriptive which can make learning patronising. The focus must be on the communicative competence through a global English that bridges cultural differences for users of multiple proficiency levels and native or non-native (like) features. For non-native students, it is important that the language programs do more than anecdotally explore knowledge that pertains to their countries of origin. Also, Dewey (2007) suggests that instead of viewing globalisation as the imposition of the global onto the local, emphasis must be made on pedagogical norms and practices more locally defined and regionally interchanged.

### **Effective Pedagogies in Context**

For these international and intercultural skills to be developed in learners, learning needs not to be patronising. Learning needs to focus on knowledge that is accessible, understandable and culturally relevant first, and then it can be stretched to what is international. There is a cultural flow which we need to acknowledge, native and non-native alike. As mentioned earlier, what is important is the ELF pedagogy and the philosophy. Both the non-natives and the natives can collaborate and learn from each other. Simply put, the non-natives can share their knowledge of the local culture, norms and traditions and the native can help in their linguistic expertise. They can thus learn from each other.

This collaboration is indeed important, as these differences in learners' perceptions about native and non-native English teachers, according to Rattanaphumma (2016) there are some various positive comments about having native teachers. Native teachers are good role model and use a variety of classroom activities. Yet there are some weaknesses in grammar teaching. On the other hand, Rattanaphumma (2016) notices a determination of teaching among non-native teachers and clear transference of knowledge. Nonetheless, the use of text-based and few activities in classes become a common scene in the non-native teacher's class. This makes classes more serious and inauthentic.

Finding ways to make classes more authentic would be part of the domain of teaching and learning English as a Lingua Franca. Adopting a lingua franca approach to the teaching of the English language can promote successful cross-cultural communication amongst students. Communication among native and non-native students needs to be valorised by sharing ideas without prescriptive accents and grammatical standards being the primary focus.

## **Conclusion**

As Rattanaphumma, (2016), Dewey (2007) note, the effective teaching of the English language does not entail having a native accent or a native command of the language. Even more so, Seidlhofer (2001) suggest that native English can sometimes experience difficulty in understanding the complex and intricate meaning and linguistic expression in English because their competence in the language sometimes is inherent and unconscious, while non-native speakers can understand the challenges that learners may experience because of their training in context. So, what is needed is to provide to non-native teachers and native teachers likewise appropriate training in context. The segregation between natives and non-natives must be bridged. Poonoosamy (2015) and Held *et al.* (1999) for instance recommend the recognition and appreciation of the diverse range of linguistic, cultural and ethnic learners' backgrounds in developing course content and methodologies in contexts. As noted by Dewey (2007) and Seidlhofer (2001), the transformationalist hypothesis of globalisation has the potential of developing a sense of awareness of the self and one's surroundings in second language learners that is if proper language pedagogies are employed. Ur (2010) clearly points out that,

*there is no doubt that practitioners can and should, learn from the insights provided by research; but in the process of this learning, these insights need to be examined and interpreted using experienced-based reflection and professional considerations such as classroom practicability, learner aspirations and motivation and pedagogical credibility (p. 90).*

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