

Principles and Practices of Teaching English as an International Language

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Principles and Practices of Teaching English as an International Language

Edited by
Aya Matsuda

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Introduction

Teaching English as an International Language

Aya Matsuda

English: An International Language

English is now widely recognized as an – if not *the* –international language both in and out of the field of TESOL. The ambiguity in the definition of ‘English users’ and the lack of statistical information across countries make it difficult to arrive at the exact number of English users, but Crystal (2003: 61) estimated it to be somewhere between 1.1 billion and 1.8 billion, 320 million to 380 million of which are the native speakers of the language.

Of course, the number of users alone does not give us a sense of how *globally spread* the language is. Crystal (2003) argues that ‘a language achieves a genuinely global status’ (p. 3) when its special role is recognized not only in the countries where it is spoken by a large number of people as their mother tongue, but also beyond. English certainly meets these criteria. The concentric circle model proposed by Braj Kachru (1985) provides a convenient way to capture the various functions that English performs in different parts of the world. The model divides countries into three groups, or circles, according to the types of spread, patterns of acquisition and the function of English found in each country.

In the *Inner Circle*, which includes such countries as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, English is used as the dominant language of the society. The majority of people who are born and educated in these countries learn English as their first language. Even when they speak another language at home, English is likely to become their strongest language because of their extended exposure to the language outside the home and the numerous functions the language performs in the society. In other words, even if it is not legally designated as an official language, it is the language one must know in order to function in the society.

English plays an important role also in the *Outer Circle*, former colonies of the Inner Circle countries such as India, Singapore, Hong Kong and

Nigeria. In these countries, the majority of people acquire English as an additional language either simultaneously with or after acquiring their first language, although there is an emerging generation that is acquiring a nativized variety of English as their first language (Kachru, 1998). English in the Outer Circle often has an official status in the country and is used for important functions in the society (e.g. language of law, medium of education). Unlike the Inner Circle countries, where most transactions are conducted in English, however, English in the Outer Circle co-exists with other languages, usually indigenous languages, which still maintain important functions.

In the *Expanding Circle*, including such countries as Brazil, China, Germany and Japan, English does not have the extended functions it has in the Inner or Outer Circle. It is, however, often taught as the most popular foreign language, and widely is used for its symbolic effect in such areas as ads, store and brand names and pop culture.

In addition to these important roles in individual countries, English has an important status in international contexts – contexts where people from diverse linguistic, cultural and national backgrounds interact and communicate with each other. For instance, there has been an international agreement to use a specialized variety of English for air traffic and mariners (e.g. English for Aviation, 2011; International Maritime Organization, 2011; Strevens & Johnson, 1983), and international agencies such as the United Nations and ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) use English for their communication, either as an official language or a working language. It is the language of international academic and professional conferences. Furthermore, the development of the internet and online communication in recent years has created more opportunities to use English for international communication.

In addition to the actual use of EIL, we cannot ignore the fact that the status of EIL is also discursively and ideologically constructed and reinforced. As Kubota and McKay (2009) pointed out, there are many multilingual situations where languages other than English are used for international communication. But yet even in those circumstances, the assumption that English is the language to be used for international communication is still pervasive. Similarly, English learners in the *Expanding Circle* often believe that English is an important language to learn because it provides them with new international opportunities that are not available to them otherwise, even when they cannot think of any specific ways they might be using the language in future (Matsuda, 2003, 2011). In other words, people's beliefs that English is the international lingua franca

sometimes override reality and gives even more power to English in the global context.

The status of English as the default international language – both *actual* and *imagined* – makes it popular in foreign language programs around the world. The national curriculum in Japan, for instance, specifies that English be taught as the required foreign language in middle schools because it is an international language (Monbusho, 1999). Hong Kong's Education Bureau promotes the use of English as an instructional medium by arguing that '[b]y enhancing students' ability to learn in English, [Education] can prepare them to embrace new challenges and enhance Hong Kong's status as an international city' (Education Bureau, 2009). Nunan's study (2003) also illustrated how the status of English as a global language impacted educational policies and practices in Asian-Pacific countries in various ways, including the lowering of the age at which the instruction is made available to students. In Qatar, a key component of the nationwide education reform called 'Education for a New Era' is an internationally benchmarked curriculum in four core subject areas, with English being one of them (Supreme Education Council, 2011). In Turkey, too, English is the most widely taught and preferred foreign language (Genç, 2004, cited in Bayyurt, 2006) because of its 'special status... as an international language of communication, science and technology' (Bayyurt, 2006: 237).

English: Diverse and Complicated

However, a closer look at the current sociolinguistic landscape of the world presents a picture of English that is linguistically and culturally diverse, and the recognition of such diversity complicates the way we approach ELT, which traditionally constructed English as a more static and monolithic entity.

One well-known implication of the global spread of English, for example, is the emergence of multiple varieties of English (see Chapter 6 for more details). While British and American Englishes still dominate the field of ELT, descriptive studies from various parts of the world illustrate the existence and vibrant use of localized forms of English, especially from the Inner and Outer Circles. When English – or any language for that matter – is transplanted to a new sociolinguistic and sociocultural environment, it goes through a process of *nativization* – adaptations and changes that allow the language to be more appropriate in the new context (Kachru, 1992). Nativization can be found not only in pronunciation (phonology), but also in morphology, lexicons, syntax, semantics and pragmatics (i.e. discourse) (e.g. Alsagoff & Lick, 1998; Arua, 1998; Bamgbose, 1992; Bao & Wee, 1999;

Bokamba, 1992; Cheng, 1992; Kachru, 1999, 2001). Nativized Englishes differ from their original varieties, but linguistically they are no less. The recognition of numerous 'new' varieties of English leads to a realization that any of these Englishes could be potentially used for international communication.

The form of English is not the only thing that has expanded and diversified as a result of the global spread of English. The demographics of the English-speaking population have also changed. While there is still a strong belief among English learners that the language belongs to its native speakers (Matsuda, 2003), it is not used only among native English speakers or between native and non-native English speakers anymore. Especially in the context of international communication, interaction often takes place exclusively among non-native speakers of English (Graddol, 1997; Smith, 1983; Widdowson, 1994). In other words, the assumption that non-native English speakers learn English in order to communicate with native English speakers and learn about their culture does not always hold true anymore. Furthermore, if the majority of English users come from the Outer and Expanding Circles – where other languages play dominant roles in the society – it implies that the majority of English users are also multilingual, whose linguistic proficiency cannot be reasonably measured solely against that of monolingual English speakers (Canagarajah, 2007; Cook, 2008).

Implications for English Language Teaching

When one tries to capture such a wide range of linguistic forms, functions, and profiles of English users today in the context of English language teaching (ELT), there are a number of questions that need to be addressed: Which variety of English should be selected as the instructional model in an English classroom? What functions should students learn to perform using English? Who should be presented as 'model' English speakers? Whose culture should be presented as an English-speaking culture? How can we teach our students to respect other languages and protect the language rights of speakers of other languages while teaching English? Are we, as English teachers, contributing to the wider spread of English and linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992)? Should we be teaching English in the first place? These questions force us to re-examine various pedagogical decisions that we take for granted.

A number of scholars have pointed out the limitations of the traditional approach to ELT, which tends to conceptualize English as a static language of native English speakers from the Inner Circle, in the context where English is learned as an international language. In World Englishes (WE)

studies, language pedagogy was one of the well-explored foci since the conceptualization of the notion of World Englishes in 1960s until around the mid-1980s. Through active participations in ELT conferences and publications in language-pedagogy journals, WE scholars used the socio-linguistic reality of the Outer Circle to challenge the status quo and assumptions of ELT (e.g. Kachru, 1976, 1984) and also contributed perspectives from new Englishes that broadened the understanding of SLA and other related fields (e.g. Sridhar, 1994; Sridhar & Sridhar, 1992) (see Matsuda, forthcoming, for a more detailed discussion of the history of World Englishes and the field of ELT).

In the field of ELT, in the past decade or so, there has been an increased interest in exploring the use of English as an International Language (EIL) specifically and its implications for teaching in the field of ELT. *TESOL Quarterly*, for example, now regularly publishes articles that explore the intersection of EIL and TESOL (e.g. Matsuda, 2003; Bruthiaux, 2010), although they may still 'be the exception rather than the rule' (Jenkins, 2006: 158). The TESOL board of directors approved the position statement on English as a Global Language in March 2008 (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2008). At conferences, sessions and workshops dedicated to the discussion of teaching EIL have a strong presence. In fact, there have been conferences entirely dedicated to this theme: the First Conference on World Englishes in the Classroom, held at Chukyo University in 2003, and the eighth Asia TEFL conference in 2010, just to name two.

One strong message found in the collective voice of these scholars and teachers is that 'the teaching and learning of an international language must be based on an entirely different set of assumptions than the teaching and learning of any other second or foreign language' (McKay, 2002: 1). As mentioned above, the assumption that English learners learn English to communicate with native English speakers is only partially true, and thus pedagogy that introduces students only to the English varieties, people and culture of the Inner Circle countries is simply inadequate. In order to prepare effective users of EIL, some significant changes must occur in both teachers' and learners' mindsets as well as the specific classroom practices (e.g. Matsuda, 2002, 2006; Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008; Sharifian, 2009).

There is also increasing awareness and sensitivity toward the social and political aspects of ELT in general that is particularly relevant to its teaching for international communication. Phillipson's work on linguistic imperialism (1992), for instance, has encouraged teachers to be mindful of their own power and influence on the spread of English and its consequences, and has