

ISSN 2072-3334

Development Compilation

Volume 10. Number 02. March 2014

ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE AND ELT IN BANGLADESH : THE CONCEPT OF WORLD ENGLISHES AND RELATING IT WITH THE CONTEXT OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract : English as an International language or EIL is considered a separate field of study today. The growth and expansion of this field has opened new possibilities and shows English language in a new dynamics of use by its users in the global context which is far different from the dynamics in which it has been used so far. This article focuses on the concept of English as an international language and how it can be related to the context of ELT in Bangladesh. The purpose of this paper is to create an awareness of why it is important to keep in mind the context, both temporal and spatial, while planning to teach English. This piece of writing tries to argue that, EIL has paved a new way of thinking and we should see English from a global perspective and strive to achieve the target by keeping in mind the context not blindly imitating others.

Introduction

EIL defines English language needs and communicative competence in a significantly different way than they were done before. The theoretical framework of the concept of communicative competence developed by Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1981), Canale (1983) and Bachman (1990) focuses on the native English speakers' linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic norms. But EIL claims that this theoretical framework cannot meet the requirement of the present world realities, especially of the new diversities of the use of English. The works of Acar (2006) gives a critical presentation of this point and claims that the traditional notion of communicative competence reflecting the native English speakers' linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic norms is inappropriate to use as a model for English as an international language pedagogy. Acar (2006) compares two recent studies towards reconceptualization of competence in relation to English as an International language and figures out the components of a new theoretical EIL in the framework, which is based on the features of postmodern globalization as presented by Canagarajah (2006). The international variability in English is no more deniable if the world today.

So more and more scholars are coming to propose and make the world aware about cross-cultural awareness and negotiation strategies to cope with the variability in English.

So the promoters of EIL suggest that, it is the duty of ELT teachers to understand the importance of developing EIL competence in learners if they want learners to be effective communicators in the global context.

English as Global Language or the Concept of World Englishes

The term "International English" refers to the notion of English as a medium of global communication in its various dialects. It is also referred to as Global English, World Englishes, Common English, Continental English, General English Globish or Engas (English as associate language) whatever might be the term, they all suggest the varieties of English that is spoken throughout the world.

In the world today English is considered as 'lingua franca'. Studies show that the numbers of their non-native speakers are higher than that of its native speakers. This reality has forced scholars of this field to think about the English language teaching practices in the world from a different angle. This is one of the reasons why EIL has emerged as a field of study. It mainly focuses on issues like users of English, the intelligibility and different varieties of English. Same kind of opinions are presented by Defne Erdem Mete(year). She mentions that ELT teachers must reconsider how the current status of English can be taken into consideration and used in their classrooms and figure out about the achievable goals. The concept and model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) appears to offer suggestions regarding this matter. Her paper presents arguments that "an inseparable part of teaching English as an International Language should be developing the Intercultural Communicative Competence of learners.

Therefore, ICC should be thought of in the context of EIL and practices in the teaching of EIL foster ICC."

B.B Kachru's (1989) idea of seeing the world in three concentric circles is worth mentioning here. Kachru has explained the use of English by dividing it into: a) the Inner Circle b) the Outer Circle, and c) the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle can be called the 'traditional base of English'. Inner circle countries which use English as the 'primary language', are mainly the United Kingdom and Ireland and the Anglophone populations of the former British colonies of the United States, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, and various islands of the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean.

Outer circle countries are countries where English is considered historically important, has "special significance" and is used for official purposes. Kachru mentions that the outer circle countries are mostly countries of the

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Commonwealth of Nations (the former British Empire), including populous countries such as India, Pakistan and Nigeria; and others, such as the Philippines, under the sphere of influence of English-speaking countries. Among the ethnic and language groups, English serves as lingua franca in these countries. Education, judicial activities, works in business and commercial sectors and many more prominent activities are mainly carried out in English here.

According to Braj Kachru (1989) the expanding circle refers to those countries where English is not used officially, though it still holds an important place in many sectors and especially in international business. British council reported that by the twenty-first century, non-native English speakers are thrice in number in comparison with the number of native speakers. Professor Darius Degherat Malmö University in Sweden, also refers to the term '*de-centered English*' while describing this change.

English as a Lingua Franca and its relation with "English in the Expanding Circle" and all its researches are comparatively recent. Christiane Meierkord and Joachim Grzega, Jennifer Jenkins and Barbara Seidlhofer are some Linguists who have made very active contributions in this field.

Till today Braj Kachru's model of World Englishes is considered as the most powerful and influential model explaining the spread of English.

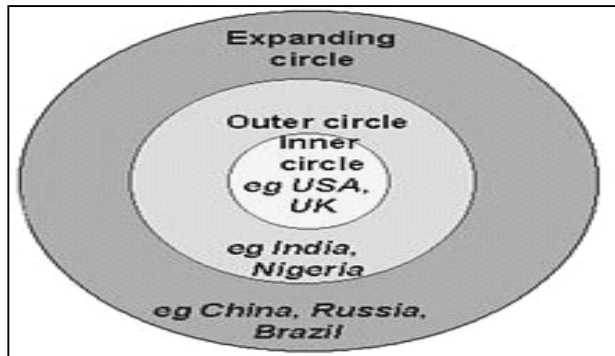


Image: Braj Kachru's Three Circles of English.
International Associations for World Englishes

The emergence of different indigenized or localized varieties of English language is known as World Englishes. These are varieties which have mainly grown and developed within nations that were colonized by United Kingdom or influenced by the United States. Different varieties of English used in different and diverse sociolinguistic global contexts are the main materials of World Englishes. Moreover it tells how different multicultural backgrounds

and contexts of function and different sociolinguistic histories affect and mould the use of colonial English in various regions of the world.

It was in 1978, when for the first time the issue of World Englishes was raised. The purpose was to examine globally the concepts of regional Englishes. Factors which helped the justification about the use of English as intra-national as well as an international language were mainly pragmatic like- appropriateness, comprehensibility and interpretability. It was in 1988, when at a Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, the International Committee of the Study of World Englishes (ICWE) was created. Then in 1992, at a conference of "World Englishes Today", at the University of Illinois, USA the ICWE formally launched the International Association for World Englishes (IAWE) and a separate academic journal devoted to the study of this topic, titled *World Englishes* is published now.

Studies show that, at present there are approximately 75 territories where English is spoken either as a first language (L1) or as an unofficial or institutionalized second language (L2) in various sectors such as government, law and education. But it is really hard to establish the total number of Englishes in the world, as new varieties of English.

English as an additional language (EAL) is mainly dependant on the standards of either American English or British English and also on incorporating foreign terms. When EAL gives emphasis on learning different major dialect forms it falls in the category of English as an international language (EIL); in other words, its main target is to provide students with the linguistic tools helping them communicate internationally. A reference by Roger Nunn can be mentioned here where he considers various types of competence in relation to the teaching of English as an International Language. There he presents his argument that, "linguistic competence has yet to be adequately addressed in recent considerations of EIL."

With reference to the term "Globish", Robert McCrum has used this to mean "English as global language". Jean-Paul Nerriere uses it for a constructed language.

A main point often missed is the notion of World English and World Englishes. These two are far from being similar. Usually these two terms are often mistakenly used interchangeably. "*World English* refers to the English language as a lingua franca used in business, trade, diplomacy and other spheres of global activity." But the term *World Englishes* refers to "the

different varieties of English and English-based creoles developed in different regions of the world.”

EIL and its future

If we take reference from the article by Sandra Lee McKay “English as an International Language: Where we are and where we need to go” we can see that she focuses on ‘the developments of English as an International Language (EIL) during the past forty years and suggests where the field needs to go in the next forty years.’ She throws light on the important issues of EIL and speaks about looking back at the researches taken regarding EIL. She has presented the fact that, if anyone takes careful consideration of the research taken in the last 40 years regarding EIL, it will be very clear that people have gained fuller understanding about how the mystic surrounding English has gradually resulted in many individuals having an imagined view regarding ‘the benefits of belonging to an English-speaking community.’ According to her, those individuals start to believe that to get better educational and economic benefits they must practice speaking English. They believe that speaking English is the key to their locked door, a door that will give them a new identity and will make them ‘cosmopolitan and global citizens’. She shows that going in depth of the research on topics like ‘imagined communities and identity’ can give people a clear understanding about the role of English and English language learners. She believes there are three specific areas which need reflection and must be seen from new perspectives. They are-

- 1. ‘A greater awareness of the manner in which English is becoming the language of the more affluent, leaving those without economic and educational assets to fall further behind in a globalized world.’
- 2. ‘the manner in which a good deal of rhetoric in the ELT profession promotes an Othering of bilingual speakers of English in which these speakers are seen as less competent in critical thinking, verbalization and professional capability.’
- 3. And finally, ‘a need to reconsider the issue of standards, realizing that because of the global spread of English there are bound to be pluricentric standards, each valid within its own context.’

While speaking about English and the issues of Seeing English from a global and local perspective, McKay (2002) revises Smith’s (1976), opinions on the relationship between an international language and culture, she states that:

- English as an international language is used in a global sense for international communication between countries as well as in a local sense as a language of wider communication within multilingual societies.
- 2) The use of English can be no longer connected only to the culture of Inner Circle countries because it is an international language.

- 3) English is an international language but in local context, it becomes entwined with the culture of the country in which it is used.
- 4) English functions as a communicator between people from different parts of the world and helps the speakers to share with others their ideas and culture. This is how English as an international language acts in a global context.

Context and ELT Methods-in Use

The article by Roger Nunn “Comparing Teachers’ Method-in-Use across Local Contexts” focuses on ‘the description of the method actually being enacted in particular contexts (method-in-use) to help us compare unique experiences across contexts. Though his article is said to lack any unified particular focus, the theme is clear.

He presents his argument about cross cultural comparison. According to him, “We have to assume that there is something in common between even the most divergent teaching contexts, for cross cultural communication to be possible at all.” He then selects the two most different situations from his own experience and also from his research and then compares the two for a clear understanding.

His main purpose in this paper was actually to offer an approach which describes method-in-use in context which can support improvement. It was not suggesting any improvements in particular context.

English as an International Language and ELT in Bangladesh

Being a third world country Bangladesh always strives to establish her identity in the world. And this endless and continuous struggle to be recognized in the world has made the people realize the necessity of being global. And to be global, the first barrier they had to overcome was that of language. The colonial predecessors left this subcontinent long ago, but they left their mark on the people. Bangladeshis are the proud nation known to the world that fought for their mother tongue and received an international status for it. But, the emerging importance of English and only English being used in business transaction, diplomatic talks, and in settling other international issues made the people of the country attached towards English more and more. The fear of being cut off from the rest of the world, the fear of being called backdated, gradually made them accept English. They wanted to incorporate English in their lives. The more they became acquainted with this language, the more they noticed its global features. With all these, gradually they became familiar with the concept of west. But the main problem was that in name of becoming ‘global citizens’ they were again becoming colonized. The teaching and learning system was focusing on making so called ‘global citizens’ “a class of persons [Bengali] in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in *intellect*” just like Macaulay mentioned in his most famous writing. With a desire to be globalized people

stated to follow west unknowingly. The books which were written for the western context were followed here. The practice still continues. But is this the desired goal which we want to achieve? With the notion of EIL, the whole world is now gradually understanding the importance of the globalized use of English, rather than following the native speakers' standard English. We must not encourage complacency or blindly accept the status quo. Every context is different. We have to be the decision makers about what to follow and what not. We must think about what we are going through, the top down or the bottom-up approach? And then must decide which way suits us. Blindly imitating the west, or doing things keeping in mind our context. In case of English language teaching of Bangladesh the real progress is only possible when we can take things from a new perspective. It seems like now we are looking at things from the wrong and opposite side of the telescope and as a result the goal seems to be far away. We have to start seeing things from the wider angle, giving a closer look to things happening around us, understanding our own context. We have to consider all the contextual factors and mould our teaching according to it.

If we look at the suggestions by Kachru (1985) we will also agree that this is no longer an age where native speakers can go on emphasizing about standardization. This is a sociolinguistic fact now which acts in favor of many countries like ours. New visions and new paradigmatic uses must be promoted now. We need to show linguistic creativity while using and teaching English in multilingual situations.

Another problem, side by side with standardization, is the difference in perception about English between Outer Circle English speakers and Inner Circle speakers or native speakers as the latter don't identify with the former. The Outer Circle English speakers are usually not interested in the norms of English based in Inner Circle. As a result, a kind of fossilization occurs because of not considering the sociocultural context and local Englishes (Outer Circle).

Many discussions about World Englishes are now forcing us to think about teaching and teacher education from a different perspective keeping in mind the context. Questions are arising in the mind of teachers and educators of Bangladesh as well as of those in other Expanding Circle countries. These days, teachers are in favor of an intelligible variety of English which will allow our students to communicate across cultures. We should teach students English in such a way that they can understand many varieties and accents. Creating awareness plays an important role here. A lot of studies on cross-cultural communication strategies are also recommended. Teachers should exercise tolerance of differences and keep in mind the settings. Being well informed about varieties is also recommended. If they are provided opportunities to collaborate with other teachers in all three circles this will surely be beneficial. The intelligibility of the uses of English in different

regions or countries can be achieved if the publishers all over the world come forward in this case and include World Englishes and ELF perspectives in all their books and materials, and also in their practices of language testing and assessment.

Developments that we describe as 'The emergence of English as an International Language' is one issue, and the reality that is termed as 'World Englishes' is a different issue and does not altogether focus on the same thing. The first is part of colonizing effects; the other is an attempt for decolonization. The first has one centre and one English spread all over, the second recognizes and respects local varieties. The first emphasizes the centre, the second argues for decentralization. The first focuses on Anglo-American culture, the second emphasizes on Inter-cultural knowledge and communication.

So the focus in language education also is different in the two. The first emphasizes Anglo-American pronunciation, stress and accent; the second encourages local pronunciations. So, in case of teaching the speaking skills, we can also propose that the varieties should be accepted and used as referred in Kachru's work. Kachru was against the label 'errors' because he believed utterances that are considered as errors may not apply to the local Englishes as they may be perfectly acceptable. The same argument can be established in case of teaching other skills also.

English language has been touched the lives – economically, culturally, socially and politically and these factors are responsible for the shift of English to World Englishes. For the educational change process, we must take into consideration the scope of this shift. According to Giroux (1993) pedagogy means to rewrite the relationship between theory and practice as a form of cultural practices. So, educators should play the role of cultural workers.

The integration of World Englishes in designing syllabus, materials, and methods and also in testing will be very far reaching. The curriculum should introduce students with the existence of the varieties of World Englishes. The scope of World Englishes is very promising and it already provides a huge market in Asia, North America and other parts of the world. So, if a new curriculum is offered to the students it will open doors of new possibilities for them to learn the subject and also will be of great help in their career development. From the references of Kachru, (1994) we get a clear picture how cross-cultural function of English has greatly expanded in many spheres and this has raised the status of English as an a global and cross-cultural code of communication. Because of this fact, English is now seen as the 'language of all seasons'.

Though this shift in terminology from English to World Englishes has been full of conflicts, it is a well known fact that the scope of World Englishes is huge in the present world.

Conclusion

The fact of seeing English is an international language is now unquestionable. The expansion of this field of study as a separate branch establishes the truth. 'Lingua franca', 'world English' and 'world Englishes' are topics which are getting more and more attention from scholars all over the world. As different contexts will definitely have their own unique constraints, people of every part of the world should learn English keeping the contextual factors in mind. This is also applicable in case of learning English as an international language in the context of Bangladesh. Only then we will be able to achieve our desired goal and be truly globalized.

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