### ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

### Initial Concepts and Assumptions

Probably between two and three billion people speak English to an acceptable level. These may be defined according to Kachru’s three circles: inner, outer, expanding (Kachru, 1985).

But today the majority of English speakers are located in the outer or expanding circles, using English for international communication.

It is used for: academic purposes; political negotiation; tourism; entertainment; business and finance; information; interpersonal relationships.

Most educated speakers of other languages are at least bilingual (‘English-knowing bilingualism’ (Pakir, 1999)).

Both centrifugal and centripetal trends are developing: an increase in the number of local ‘Englishes’, side by side with a generally comprehensible ‘standard’ variety.

### Some general implications

The user of English as an international language: may be either ‘native’ or ‘non-native’; is typically bi- (or multi-)lingual, or bi-dialectal; is likely to be skilled in communicative and comprehension strategies.

The fully competent speaker of English as an international language is a speaker with a wide vocabulary, accurate grammar, easily understood accent, who may or may not be originally a native speaker.

Perhaps it is more useful, therefore, to re-define the circles of users of English in terms of their level of competence in the language rather than in terms of where they live and whether or not they are ‘native speakers’.

### Some implications for English teachers worldwide 1

#### The language to be taught

1. Various options:
2. One of the mainstream native varieties
3. Varied models: diversity
4. A world standard model
5. A native model

#### 1. One of the native varieties

Advantages:

 - Traditional, conventional model

 - Prestigious?

 - Plenty of reference and course materials available

 - Easy to assess

Disadvantages:

 **-** Not used by most fully competent English speakers

 - Not appropriate for international contexts

 **-** Difficulty of deciding which native variety to choose

 - Full competence not usually achievable

#### 2. Diverse, flexible models

Advantages:

 - ideologically acceptable

 - allows for local variation

 - sidesteps need for codification and definition

Disadvantages

 - no clear model or set of priorities

 - very difficult to teach

 - very difficult to assess

 - very difficult to design syllabus and materials

#### 3. A standard variety

Derived, basically, from one of the main native varieties, or a combination

BUT

1. Eliminating specific local idiom, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, grammar e.g. *fortnight, cheers, aluminum, billfold*

2. Including variants that are acceptable worldwide e.g. *zee, cellphone*.

Advantages:

 - a range of acceptable forms

 - based on usages of fully competent speakers

 - comprehensible / acceptable worldwide

 - achievable

Disadvantages

 - its existence is questioned

 - ideologically unacceptable to many: rejection of ‘imposed’ standards

 - not (yet) defined or codified

Does it exist? Probably.

Evidence: Similarity of formal written texts from all over the world: vary according to genre rather than place of origin; the fact that fully competent speakers can intuitively usually identify which features of their own speech are and are not internationally standard

Ideologically unacceptable?

Post-modernist reluctance to accept ‘imposed’ standards and frameworks. But standards are likely to be based on a consensus. Agreed standards are not incompatible with diversity: on the contrary, they are arguably necessary for it: you cannot diverge if you have nothing to diverge *from*.

Codification?

For the moment: standard American / British English reference books; but sooner or later, there will be international standard English ones. A possible solution is a ‘wiki’, which is based on consensus, has a large number of contributors, has built-in change and updating, is constantly and readily available to teachers, learners, materials writers and testers

A question: If we adopt such a standard, how rigidly does it need to be applied in the classroom? Should teachers treat forms widely used by English speakers such as ‘she go’, or ‘the man which…’ as acceptable variants rather than as errors? (Jenkins, 2006)

### Some implications for English teachers worldwide 2: Culture and cultural awareness

The English used for international communication is to a large extent ‘culture-free’: a ‘chameleon’ of a language, able to express the identity and culture of a variety of users, with some international cultural norms developing.

#### Implications

English needs to be taught as expressing three types of culture: the ‘home’ culture, the cultures of all those who are able to speak English, the culture of English speaking peoples (?)

The importance of *intercultural competence*: sensitivity to other cultural norms and the ability to adapt and function appropriately when interacting with people from other cultures.

### Some implications for English teaching 3: The model English speaker: the native-speaker or the fully competent non-native?

Many teachers and learners today still prefer a ‘native speaker’ model. But native speakers often speak a local dialect; more and more non-natives are today ‘fully competent’; non-native fully competent speakers are good role models; and the language level of the (non-native) fully proficient speaker is achievable.

Bottom line: irrelevance of native/non-native issue

What is important: level of competence, teaching ability, intercultural competence

### Some implications for English teaching 4: Materials

Content: culture, situations, texts, characters …

Culture: ‘source’ and ‘international’, not just British/North American

Situations: more international

Characters: more likely to be ‘international’ or ‘home’.

Texts: more adaptations of international or local sources, fewer ‘inner-circle’ texts or literature.

Language: based on international usages rather than any particular native dialect; more acknowledgement and use of the learners’ L1.

### To Summarize

The teaching of English as an international language rather than as a foreign language implies…

* A change in the ultimate goals of English teaching: full competence rather than ‘native-like’ mastery
* Acknowledgement of the place of the fully-competent user of English as the model
* A change in criteria for selection of language to be taught
* A change in criteria for content of materials

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