



English as an International Language: Issues and Implications

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Abstract

This paper explores the complexities and implications of English as an International Language (EIL), emphasizing its evolving role beyond native-speaker contexts and its significance within language education. Drawing on frameworks such as Kachru's three-circle model and concepts of World Englishes, it examines how English functions differently across inner, outer, and expanding circle countries. The article investigates issues surrounding dialects, varieties, standards, and the impact of globalization on English usage and teaching. It highlights the need for intercultural competence and critically examines traditional pedagogical norms that prioritize native-speaker models. Ultimately, it argues for a paradigm shift in English language pedagogy toward recognizing localized, pluralistic forms of English and promoting communicative competence over native-like accuracy. These insights have profound implications for curriculum design, teacher education, and instructional materials in global English language teaching.

Keywords: English as an International Language, Global English Language Teaching, Intercultural Competence, Language Pedagogy, World Englishes

INTRODUCTION

The community of English language teachers worldwide includes countries where English may have different roles and functions. In some contexts, English is a medium of instruction and is widely used in the community alongside other local languages, while in others English may have the status of a school subject with limited functions elsewhere. In addition, English is spoken in many different ways around the world, raising the issue for both teachers and students of which variety of English students be taught or aim to master. Should they be taught to speak like native-speakers of English in English-speaking (Anglophone) countries such as the USA or Australia? But this would not be a suitable goal in countries such as Singapore or India where there are rich local varieties of English. And in other situations is it acceptable for students to speak English with an accent that reflects their mother tongue which might be French, Spanish or Korean? An awareness of the role English plays in today's world and

History:

Received : March 9, 2025
Revised : May 10, 2025
Accepted : May 11, 2025
Published : November 11, 2025

Publisher: UIN Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember

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particularly the issues raised by the spread of English as an International Language (EIL) is an important part of the professional knowledge required of English teachers today and has an impact on many decisions teachers need to make (Sharifian, [2009](#)). These issues are the focus of this chapter.

DIALECTS, ACCENTS, AND VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

For many people “English” refers to the nature of English as a mother tongue or first language for people in Anglophone countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the USA. However, even within the so-called English-speaking or Anglophone countries, “English” means different things. There is great variety in the ways in which English is spoken, as is reflected in differences in the use of some vocabulary items, and of grammar and pronunciation (Galloway & Rose, [2015](#)). Varieties of English with their own distinctive features are often referred to as *dialects*. In the United Kingdom four main dialects are often identified: *Southern English dialects*, *West Country dialects*, *East and West Midlands English dialects* and *Northern English dialects*. In the United States linguists estimate the number of U.S. dialects range from a basic three, *New England*, *Southern and Western/General American*, to 24 or more. Different varieties of spoken English are found in every Anglophone country, since they serve to mark important differences among people such as the region in which they live (regional dialect), their social class (a social dialect or sociolect) and their culture. A dialect is often associated with a particular accent. Sometimes a dialect and its accent gains status and becomes the standard variety of English in a country and is the variety used to teach those learning English. The variety of English used in this way in the UK is referred to as RP (*Received Pronunciation*), which is only spoken by about 15% of the population. Dialects and *accents* (how a dialect is pronounced) are a culturally-based aspect of language and accents differ in every country and even territories within a country. In the US, people from other regions say that Texans speak with a “twang”, southerners are said to speak with a “drawl” by people from other parts of the US, and those in the Northeast are said to speak faster than their Southern neighbours. A person’s region is often recognized through their speech patterns and accents.

KACHRU’S INNER CIRCLE, OUTER CIRCLE AND EXPANDING CIRCLE TERRITORIES

Today English is no longer primarily associated with the ways in which it is used in Anglophone countries or by “native speakers.” English has spread beyond its original boundaries and there are now greater numbers of users of English beyond its original territories. Many different factors account for the spread of English beyond its traditional status as a “mother tongue.” In order to clarify the distinction between what was traditionally referred to as English as a *first language*, *second language*, and *foreign language*, the Indian linguist Kachru ([1985](#)) introduced the terms *Inner Circle*, *Outer Circle*, and *Expanding Circle* using the image of three concentric circles to describe the status of English around the world, a distinction that is less clear-cut today though still a useful reference. The *Inner Circle* refers

to the role of English in Anglophone countries, where it is the primary language and the native language or mother tongue of the majority of the population, such as in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and anglophone Canada. The Outer Circle of English refers to countries where English has become established as a legacy of colonialism such as in India, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, the Philippines and where local varieties of English have developed, a process sometimes described as indigenization. These indigenized or localized varieties of English developed because of the widespread use of English within colonial administrations and particularly through the use of English medium instruction. Populations within these territories were typically multicultural and multilingual and used English across a variety of domains since English was often the only language people from different cultural and linguistic groups in their community had in common. Some interactions required minimal levels of fluency and ability in English (such as communication with traders, merchants, domestic workers, laborers) and where code switching or translanguaging may have been a feature of transactional interactions when possible. Other settings for the use of English (such as in education, the law, and administration) would have required a much higher level of ability in English.

In outer circle contexts English came to play an important part in people's sense of their personal, cultural, and national identity and their use of English expressed their identity as Nigerians, Indians, or Singaporeans. They are not simply speakers of English, but speakers of Nigerian, Indian, or Singapore English, sometimes referred to as "world Englishes." Commenting on the indigenization or "Indianization" of English in India, Mozaheb & Monfared (2018) observe:

"These processes of Indianization go beyond the surface linguistic levels, and involve the underlying cultural presuppositions and their linguistic realizations. India's multilingualism and ethnic pluralism have added further levels of complexity. In "mixing" words, phrases, clauses and idioms from the Indian languages into English, or in "switching" from one language into another, one is not just using a code, one is also expressing an identity, a linguistic "belonging." Such mixing and switching take for granted, for example, the multilingual and multicultural competence of the interlocutors. In such interactions, naturally, the "native" speaker becomes peripheral: Indian English thus has become a code of local culture and local cultural presuppositions."

Linguists describe the differences in the communicative functions of English in outer circle settings as reflecting differences between a *basilect*, *mesolect*, and *acrolectal* variety of English. The uses of English reflect a continuum from one variety of English to another. The sub-variety used by individuals with high levels of English-medium education — the *acrolect* — is typically regarded as the local standard form of English (e.g., Standard Malaysian English, Standard Nigerian English). The *basilect* is the sub-variety often used by those with lower levels of education or by people in informal casual settings (known in Singapore as "Singlish") and the *mesolect* refers to the sub-varieties between, although there are no clear boundaries between these "lects." Educated speakers of English in these settings (e.g. in

Singapore, Malaysia, Nigeria) may sometimes use the acrolect or an upper mesolect in more formal situations, and something closer to the basolect in a more informal context (Platt & Weber, [1980](#)).

ENGLISH IN THE EXPANDING CIRCLE

Kachru used the term Expanding Circle to refer to countries where English has no official role but is widely used as a medium for accessing knowledge and information and for international communication, such as in China, Poland, Russia, Japan, Egypt, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries, where English has usually been referred to as a foreign language. Today, speakers of English in the outer circle and expanding circle countries are said to make up the majority of the total number of speakers of English worldwide. Traditionally in the expanding circle countries, English was one of several foreign languages that students could choose to study in public education and for most people had restricted uses beyond the school setting. School leavers' proficiency in English was often quite restricted since learning opportunities were largely confined to the classroom and use of the textbook. Today, however, in expanding circle countries, English is now much more widely understood and used and is no longer regarded as a foreign language since for many people it may be the language they use for much of their higher education and also in their work-place. This is a consequence of its role in globalization, commerce, trade, tourism, popular culture, English medium education (Richards & Pun, [2022](#)) and the use of English as a lingua franca. In addition, the internet, technology and the media, and the use of English in face-to-face as well as virtual social networks provide greater opportunities for learners and users of English to engage in meaningful and authentic language use than were previously available in the classroom. Consequently in countries where English once had little impact beyond education, today's students often graduate from high school with considerable fluency in English. For them, English is no longer a "foreign language" and the property of native speakers but one which forms an important part of their identity and communicative competence as citizens of the world and as users of English as an international language as these comments from students in Finland and Denmark reveal:

"English has gained a particularly prominent role in Finnish homes through various media technologies. Films and television programmes, for example, are not usually dubbed. Internet sources are abundant and available, as are iterate games, console games, computer games and music. Many children also seem to be fearless in looking for solutions in various manuals, instructions, tutorials and 'walkthrough' in the English language. You can hear English all the time in Denmark, on television, on the radio, on the internet, in newspapers etc. I'm sure you learn something even from a passive language situation like this, at least the language starts to sound familiar. Above all you understand how ubiquitous and important a language like English is."

As the examples above illustrate, attitudes towards English will depend on where the learner is located, and what his or her goals are in learning English. In a study of Indonesian learners of English, Lamb ([2004](#))

found:

“In the minds of learners, English may not be associated with particular geographical or cultural communities, but with a spreading international culture incorporating (inter alia) business, technological innovation, consumer values, democracy, world travel and the multifarious icons of fashion, sport and music.”

TARGETS AND STANDARDS FOR THE USE OF ENGLISH

The spread of English and the emergence of its role as an international language raises important questions in determining policies and practices for the teaching of English (Rose & Galloway, [2019](#)). What kind of English should students aim to acquire? Should the target be British English, Australian English, Singapore English or some other variety of English? The question should really be restated as “What variety of spoken English should be the target and used to determine the standard that will be used as the basis for teaching and assessment?” This restatement of the issue reflects the fact that when people speak of British English or American English, they are primarily referring to speakers’ accent. Although there are minor differences in written English and in spelling conventions between, for example, British English and American English, when a language school identifies itself as teaching “American English” or when a textbook states that it teaches “British English” it usually means that a standard British accent (RP) or standard American accent (General American) will be provided as the model for speaking activities in the materials, or in the case of inner circle countries, production models will be in the standard or acrolectal local variety of English, such as Standard Filipino English. Listening input (e.g. through audio and video resources) may provide examples of many different kinds of English, but if examples are provided as a basis for repetition and practice, they will normally provide a standard Inner or Outer circle model. Much of the world’s teaching of English outside of public education takes place through private language institutes and organizations (such as the British Council). In Europe, most often the stated variety of English taught is identified as British English. English teachers in many countries in Europe would traditionally have sought to learn and teach the use of Received Pronunciation, the accent that carries great social prestige than a regional British accent, as seen in a Croatian student’s comments on her teacher’s pronunciation:

“Some of the professors here speak a very snobbish English, like, I mean, terribly posh. . . . and a lot of other people I meet. So obviously they’d internalize some sort of model of their stays in England, which carries a slightly old-fashioned sense of prestige (Vodopija-Krstanovic, [2011](#)).”

In many other parts of the world (e.g Japan, China, Mexico, South America), language institutes generally advertise themselves as teaching American English, as do the international textbooks that they make use of. An American (or north American) accent is often preferred by younger learners today since English spoken with an American accent is the one most often used in popular culture, though sometimes an institute might seek to distinguish itself from others by offering to teach British English and

to use British English teaching materials, as is sometimes the case in Mexico and Brazil. In Chile and Argentina where there is often a historical association with Europe and with British and European culture, institutes offering British rather than American English are more common than in other parts of Latin America.

EXONORMATIVE AND ENDONORMATIVE STANDARDS

In the contexts above where for many learners the standard or prestige variety of English spoken in an Anglophone country is seen as the ideal learning target, the focus on an external standard is referred to as an *exonormative* orientation to spoken English. The target for learning is “native-speaker English” a variety which is believed to reflect “prestige and legitimacy” (Kirkpatrick, [2007](#)) and which is codified in dictionaries and grammars and used as the basis for textbooks and teaching materials. Mackenzie ([2014](#)) reflecting on the attitudes of many Europeans, argues that “many multilinguals clearly feel that they *do* have some kind of obligation to learn languages ‘properly’, by which they generally mean as the natives speak them ... few people espouse the ‘imperfect learning’ of French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian or Chinese as a pedagogical goal.” This presumably common attitude from learners in Expanding world contexts is despite the fact that at the practical level an exonormative target represents an unattainable (and most often unnecessary) goal for most learners. Even though learners may invest considerable time and effort in trying to master a native -speaker accent, most English-language users are unlikely to be able to speak English without an accent that is influenced by the pronunciation features of their first language, one that is referred to colloquially as a “foreign accent.”

In countries where English is widely used as part of the local linguistic landscape, a focus on external norms as the standard for spoken English has been replaced by an *endonormative* orientation as noted above with the example of local Englishes used as models in inner circle contexts, which Mozaheb & Monafared following (Kirkpatrick, [2007](#); Schneider, [2011](#)) characterize as:

“An endonormative model ... is one where “a localised version of the language has become socially acceptable” In this model, a codified endonormative model based on the acrolect of the local variety (i.e. spoken by local educated speakers) could be used in local ELT classrooms. In this model, the multilingualism of teachers is considered an asset because the teachers provide a model of English that seems attainable by the learners and the teachers are more familiar with social norms.”

Instructional materials in these cases (e.g. as in India, Malaysia, the Philippines) might provide examples of people speaking with a variety of accents (e.g. British, Australian, Indian, Mexican, American), but exercises which provide models for spoken practice will be in the local standard variety of English, i.e. the acrolect. However research on teachers and students attitudes towards different varieties of English often report mixed results and in many cases teachers and learners are generally oriented towards inner circle norms as targets for pronunciation (Derwing, [2003](#); Uresin & Karakas, [2019](#); Ahn, [2014](#); Murphy, [2014](#); Sifakis & Sougari,

[2005](#)), presumably reflecting the emphasis on native-speaker norms in their textbooks and learning resources.

STANDARDS FOR WRITTEN ENGLISH

The different Englishes above such as American, Australian, Indian or Nigerian are largely identifiable by features of spoken English rather than written English. Is it through the spoken language that people realize their national and cultural identity, as either British, Irish, South African, Australian, Ghanaian or Jamaican. What we can refer to as standard written English (the variety used in writing for academia, international commerce, publishing, and the media etc.) apart from minor differences in spelling, vocabulary and sometimes grammar is usually the same, whether a text was written in Norway, China, Hungary or Russia. Good writers in English particularly when writing for an international readership generally aim to write in a neutral, internationally accepted style, and not in a way that highlights the part of the world in which they live or work. This standard for writing is sometimes referred to as "written international English" (MacArthur) which is the standard for written English used in professional, educational, institutional, scientific and academic contexts. This is the model presented in numerous handbooks and guides for both native and international English writers, such as Weiss ([2005](#)).

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL: BIG C AND SMALL C CULTURES

Many of the world's languages are restricted in their use to a particular region or location. These include Asian languages such as Korean, Japanese, Thai and Khmer and European languages such as Polish, Finnish, Czech or Basque. Other languages such as Chinese, German, and Spanish are spoken in several different countries but none of these languages are used in the diversity of contexts in which English is used. Learners learning any of these languages will normally aim to learn to use them in the way they used by native speakers of the language, and textbooks and resources will provide models of native-speaker usage. If you wish to learn Japanese, Thai or Finnish your aim will usually be to learn how to use it in the way it is spoken by native speakers in Japan, Thailand, or Finland. If you wish to learn Spanish you will need to decide which variety of Spanish you want to master: Spanish as spoken by native speakers of Spanish in Spain, Mexico, or Chile for example.

When a language is limited in its use to a particular country or territory, it is also assumed that language learning also includes understanding how the language reflects the world view or "culture" of its speakers. For example, prior to the spread of English as a global language, the teaching of English often included a literature component since it was assumed that a language could not be understood unless it was understood in relation to the culture in which it was embedded, typically the national culture of an Anglophone country. A course in American Culture or British Culture was often a part of the curriculum for language learners learning American English or British English. This understanding of culture is

sometimes referred to as *Big C culture*, which is linked to the concept of a nation state: “Speech communities were seen as grounded in the nation - the national context in which a national language was spoken by a homogeneous national citizenry” (Kramsch, [2013](#)). Achievements in art, architecture, music, and literature were highlighted to indicate the prestige and uniqueness of the nation. In the case of English, textbooks included information on the social customs and practices of people in English-speaking countries, particularly those of the middle class, whose social practices were presented in terms of home life, leisure activities, customary practices associated with events such as meals, weddings, interpersonal relations, as well as words for culturally specific practices such as local words for eating, *barbecue* (Australia), *hangi* (NZ), *high tea* (UK), *pot luck* (US), *hot pot* (Singapore). For this reason, native speaker teachers were often preferred since they were assumed to have an understanding of the cultural contexts of Anglophone cultures. Seargeant ([2009](#)) describes the consequence in Japan of prioritizing the role of culture in English language teaching, rather than mastery of spoken English:

“The language becomes not so much a tool for international communication, but a living artifact belonging to a foreign culture. Likewise, native-speaker teachers become specimens of that foreign culture, their role as instructors of specialized knowledge overshadowed by their status as foreign nationals, so it is the emblematic presence of a foreign culture in the classroom that is the defining factor of their appointment in schools, their status as language informants being overshadowed by their status as foreign nationals.”

However, when English has the status of a global language, it has no necessary link with any particular national Big C culture. Furthermore, the Anglophone countries themselves are today increasingly multicultural and to focus on the cultural achievements of the white middle class is seen as both racist and unrepresentative of the nature of contemporary Anglophone societies.

As a consequence of the issues raised by the idea of Big C culture in language teaching, two alternative notions emerged within applied linguistics, the concept of *Small c culture*, the culture of social interaction through language (Kramsch, [1993](#)), and the notion of intercultural competence ([Bok, 2009](#)).

Intercultural Competence

All uses of English as an international language are inevitably cross-cultural encounters and involve people from different cultures and backgrounds. The participants may have different understandings about how exchanges and interactions between people typically take place and differences in conventions for language use can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. For example, American professors may feel comfortable if students address them by their first name, whereas in many Asian cultures this would be considered disrespectful. The ability to interact and communicate appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds is known as *intercultural competence*. Learning to use English as an international language involves not only reflecting on how your own

language may reflect culturally specific conventions but also learning how to manage interactions among people from cultures that use language in ways that may be different from the norms you are familiar with in your own culture. This involves learning how speech acts such as requests, apologies, complements, greetings, invitations, complaints and refusals are realized in cross-cultural communication and how transfer of speech-act conventions from one language to another can lead to misunderstanding.

An important feature of many speech acts is how they express relations between participants. Some speech acts can be thought of as involving an imposition on the other person (e.g. requests, invitations), and some can involve a potential loss of face (e.g. criticisms, refusals, complaints). In this case, they may be performed indirectly, rather than directly, depending on how well the participants know each other. In the case of speech acts that involve impositions or threats to face, indirect expression of speech acts are a form of politeness. Whether a speech act is performed directly or indirectly depends on the relationship between the two persons and reflects factors such as social distance, age, gender and power but also depends on the conventions of a specific culture. What may be considered appropriate for a direct realization of a speech act (e.g. an opinion) in one culture may be considered suitable for indirect expression of an opinion in another, i.e. considered more polite.

Another area where differences often occur is whether the favoured style for interpersonal communication is one in which speakers reveal very little of themselves (their beliefs, wishes, opinions, likes, dislikes and things which may not be shared with others), or one in which there is generally a willingness to reveal details of one's inner self in interacting with others. Thus, if we compare two cultures, we may find that what is regarded as part of the private self in one may be part of the public self in another (LoCastro, 2012). Some topics such as one's religious beliefs, political beliefs, marital status or income may be considered private in one culture and hence are not considered suitable topics for discussion in public, but this may not be the same in another culture. Cultures may also be different in the degree that topics are expected to be developed in conversation, rather than merely touched upon. Liddicoat & Crozet (2001) report that Australians and French speakers often handle such a simple exchange as a question about the weekend (*Did you have a pleasant weekend?*) quite differently. In Australian English, the question is part of a ritualistic exchange and is not intended to lead to a real discussion about the weekend.

Implications for Teaching English as an International Language.

There are several dimensions involved in developing intercultural competence in EIL:

- *Awareness*: Developing awareness that what seems normal in one culture may not be true of other cultures.
- *Curiosity*: Willingness to learning about the diverse ways in which interaction occurs in different cultures.
- *Tolerance*: Accepting that cross cultural communication may sometimes result in unintended misunderstandings.
- *Flexibility*: Willingness to adjust and adapt one's use of English to

maintain open channels of communication.

- *Risk-taking*: Willingness to tolerate uncertainty and to use negotiation and communication strategies to achieve successful communication.

Using English as an international language

English for inner circle and outer circle users

While the term “English as an international language” refers to a geographic or territorial account of the use of English as the world’s global second language, it also refers to how English can be used in ways that enables it to serve as an international language, one that is not defined by the norms and practices of particular local contexts but which functions as a flexible and dynamic resource that is shaped by the people and circumstances of its use. This means when inner and outer circle speakers (e.g. native speakers of British, Australian, Indian, Nigerian English) use English as an international language, they need to use it in ways that may be different from the way they use it in predominantly local contexts, i.e. within their own speech community. “Local” or “insider” uses of English are characterized by the participants’ shared expectations as to the functions of interactions and how they typically proceed. The participants have shared linguistic, cultural and schematic knowledge and familiarity with local social and discourse conventions. Citing Wray & Grace (2007) Mackenzie (p.38) argues that “languages that are used predominantly for esoterica or intra-group communication generally have features that are semantically and grammatically complex: ‘much of what needs to be said can be said elliptically and formulaically, with huge reliance on shared knowledge, pragmatics, and common practice’ (op cit p 38). A great deal is understood and need not be expressed verbally and many interactions may be conducted in an informal and colloquial speech style reflecting empathy and rapport.

When English is used as an international language, however, speakers need to adjust their speech to make it less reflective of local knowledge and discourse practices. They will need to use high-frequency vocabulary, to avoid colloquialisms, vague language, obscure syntax or a marked regional accent or dialect, particularly when communicating with people who have limited proficiency in English. Some have termed this use of English *Globish* (Nerriere, 2004), a concept that is not without its critics. In Europe, meetings of the European Union are increasingly carried on in English, since it is argued that English is the language that excludes the fewest people present. However, this comes at a cost, since many native speakers of English are notoriously hard for colleagues in Brussels to understand, and it is often observed that they talk too quickly and use obscure idioms. Consequently, some language schools in the UK are now offering courses in “offshore English” to help business people CEOs develop a more comprehensible way of using English when working abroad. Offshore English is said to consist of 1,500 or so of the most common English words and a syntax that is stripped of unnecessary complexity and vagueness. In classes in offshore English, native speakers are taught to speak ‘core English’, to avoid idioms (e.g. to say *make every effort* instead of *pull out all the stops*), to use Latin-based words like *obtain* instead of those with

Germanic roots such as *get*, to avoid colloquial usage and strong regional accents, and to use a slower rate of speaking. This reflects the ideas advocated by a movement known as *Plain Language*, which seeks to encourage people to use clear, straightforward and accessible language in official documents.

Plain language is defined as follows: “A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.” ([Plain Language Association International \(PLAIN\)](#))

In written English, features of plain language texts in English include:

- Using concise sentences (15-20 words maximum).
- Positive (not negative) clauses.
- Active, not passive voice ("if you break the law" not "if the law is broken").
- Verbs rather than complex nouns ("identify" not "identification").
- Common words rather than jargon.

English for expanding circle users

The comments above refer to interactions in which one or more speakers has a native-speaker command of English (e.g. from an inner or outer circle country) and other interlocutors draw on whatever communicative skills they may have acquired from formal instruction or from other contexts. However, English as an international language also refers to situations where English serves as a lingua franca and where none of the participants are native-speakers of English (Mackenzie, [2014](#)). In these situations, the speakers' primary goals may not be to mimic American, British or some other variety of English but rather to develop the ability to use both spoken and written English as a communicative resource which will serve their purposes. For example:

- Using English to communicate in situations where it is the only language the participants have in common (e.g. between Chinese and Japanese or between Norwegians and Brazilians).
- Using English on-line with international contacts from the expanding circle, for example in chat rooms, video games, in social media.
- Using English for transactional purposes with other speakers of EIL, such as purchasing items on-line, making travel arrangements by phone.
- Using English with others who may have limited proficiency in English, for example while travelling in countries where many local people may not be fluent in English.

The functions and the circumstances for which English might be needed as in the examples above, are often unpredictable, dynamic, and multidimensional, involving both linguistic and paralinguistic means of communication, both making use of language as well as gestures, eye movement, body movement and reflect a great deal of linguistic variability. And since participants “are bi-or multilingual, ... interactions are likely to include borrowing, code switching, and other types of crosslinguistic interaction” (Mackenzie, p.4). The nature of today's world means that occasions for the use of English in this way are becoming increasingly

common. Young people in particular are very mobile and the workforce in many occupations is increasingly multicultural and multilingual. In circumstances such as these, as Breeze & Guinda comment (2022):

“When it comes to spoken English, there is a consensus that what matters most is comprehensibility and good communication skills, and that pronunciation should be clear, but the issue of accent is now regarded as having only secondary importance.”

Participants in these settings are no longer viewed as second language learners but as *multicompetence language users* (Zacharias, 2010), rather than being considered “as eternal ‘learners’ on an interminable journey towards perfection in a target language. Speakers may opt out of the role of learner at any stage, and take on the identity of language users, who successfully manage demanding discourses despite imperfections in the code” (Mauranen, 2006). They make use of their skills in using English as an “international” or somewhat hybrid variety of English (sometimes referred to as *cosmopolitan English*) which draws on many sources, including school-based learning, words, idioms and expressions that they may have observed in movies or television, first language patterns and ways of expressing meaning, as well as creative ways of using English that they have arrived at through practice. While both fluent and intelligible it would not necessarily contain the same phonological distinctions that are found in native-speaker Englishes such as British English received pronunciation (Jenkins, 2000; Derwing & Munro, 2005, 2015; Monfared, 2020) nor have the same grammatical resources employed by native speakers in inner and outer circle contexts. Unlike English used in inner and outer circle contexts, English as a lingua franca has no native-speakers. It does not draw on a core of stable features but varies according to the contexts of its use. Its speakers come from diverse language backgrounds and the extent of mutual comprehensibility found in EIL contexts will vary from situation to situation. As Mackenzie (2014) comments “Unlike nativized World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca will almost certainly never become, a stable variety, because of the range of participants in the international uses of English.”

Mosaheb and Monfared comment:

“... the goal of teaching English today from an EIL perspective is to prepare the learners to use English to become part of the globalised world, which is linguistically and culturally various, and thus both teachers and EIL courses should prepare learners for such diversity and to represent English as a pluralistic and dynamic component rather than a monolithic and static one.”

Communicating in EIL may be more demanding for interlocutors than communicating in their L1, since as Mauranen (2012) observes: “The cognitive load in EFL is usually heavy on account of the variety and unpredictability of language parameters: interlocutors’ accents, transfer features and proficiency levels.”

Hence Mackenzie (2014) cautions against overly-positive accounts of EIL interactions, noting that reports of such interactions are generally based on what he calls an “angelic” (i.e. idealized) interpretations from a very limited and selective data base and that many such interactions may sometime be problematic. Interlocutors may not be successful in trying to

express what they want to say due to limitations in proficiency, i.e. of vocabulary, conversational routines, fixed expressions and grammar, resulting at times in inarticulate or incomprehensible attempts at communication with participants needing to make use of code switching, requests for assistance, clarification requests, simplifications of form and meaning, prompting, paraphrasing, repetition, self-or other repair, silence, topic change or topic abandonment, and a variety of communication and pragmatic strategies that may or may not always lead to successful understanding. Although many participants in using English as a lingua franca may indeed be users of English, they may still be learning how to use English for communicative purposes.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Recognition of the status and functions of English as an international language has implications for teachers of English, for learners, and for those involved in developing materials and resources for the teaching of English in international contexts. Understanding the nature of English as an international language, one that is owned by its users rather than only by those in the Anglosphere, the inner and outer circle in Kachru's term, requires a rethinking of the "idea" of English, a change in mind-set for both teachers and learners. It requires moving beyond the traditional idea of English that links it to the language and cultures of the Anglosphere and recognizing that there are many different Englishes, each with their own validity and a part of the identities of both native speakers as well as people who use English alongside other languages in their linguistic repertoire. The English language curriculum should expand students' knowledge of the complex, varied, and fascinating roles English fulfils as an international language.

Learning a language involves arriving at a stage where the learner is no longer a *language learner* but is now a *user of English*. Reaching this threshold marks a milestone in the learning trajectories of successful language learners. The ability to count to 50 in a language, to recite the names of the days of the week and to turn a sentence from the present tense to the past tense may be examples of language learning but they are not examples of knowing how to use English for communication, which is the essential nature of English as an international language. Once a learner is able to use English as a communicative resource no matter what its limitations may initially be, this ability should be celebrated as an accomplishment and a sign that English is or is now becoming an aspect of his or her communicative competence and language repertoire.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Nicola Galloway for comments on this paper.

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