



Globalization of English Language and Culture: Let's Change English Language Instruction

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Abstract

The globalization of English language use has led to new recognition of the diversity among both language use and language users. This diversity necessitates a disconnection of English language from its traditional sole association with native English speakers and their national cultures. All English users are legitimate users, and their diverse cultural backgrounds represent the cultures of English language use. There remains a need for broader representation of these changes in English language teaching.

Although there are other languages that are spoken on an international level, English is now dispersed in more international locations and used among a wider diversity of people and in a wider range of contexts. Other languages may have more first language users, such as Chinese Mandarin, but the distinction here is that these tend to be first language users.

English Language and Culture in Context

English, however, has many more people who use it as a contact language in intercultural communication. Indeed, there are estimations that 80 percent of global communication involving English takes place among nonnative English users, a figure considered an underestimation by some researchers. Given this globality of use, it is surprising that the native speaker is still used as the baseline for learning, with standard language practices and Anglophone, particularly US, cultures serving as the basis for learning. Following this perspective, English learning should be focused on preparing learners to approximate native speakers and take on a cultural stance consistent with the (perceived) norms of Anglophone societies.

This perspective is problematic since the notion that English-speaking nations are monolithic in terms of their language and culture is inaccurate. This is especially true in multicultural societies, which can be highly diverse and multilingual environments. Despite this, the concept persists in language education around the world of a need to

use English like (imagined) native speakers from Anglophone settings, and adopt a sociocultural perspective in perceived compliance with (imagined) fixed cultures.

With the variety of contexts and multitude of users among nonnative speakers who outnumber native speakers, Anglophone standards and (national) cultures have to be replaced in English language education to help students recognize their own backgrounds and ways of using English as legitimate. This call for change is hardly new, but the absence of broad impact on teaching and learning practices suggests that it is worthwhile to raise these issues again. This will hopefully lead to some reflection among teachers elsewhere on their own educational practices, and the practices in the institutions where they work.

Conventional Education

Although there is a need for some regulations and norms, particularly in the early stages of language learning, it is essential to direct students' attention to the diversity of English use outside of the boundaries of fixed English language. While some textbooks represent broader conceptualizations of language use, the "native speaker" so often continues to be the primary focus. This focus is on standard norms of codified uses informed by language authorities, including textbooks, grammar guides, and assessment frameworks. In particular, influential international testing systems (e.g., TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC) continue to shape many language policies and educational practices. Moreover, this focus is evident in many teachers' perspectives. In addition, the cultural elements featured in most mainstream textbooks are usually confined to a few nations and are overrepresented by Anglophone cultures. While studying culture and learning cultural knowledge can be an interesting aspect of language education, when it comes to intercultural communication involving English, it is essential to go beyond target language and target culture given the diversity in its use and among its users. Otherwise, learners may not develop the resources or confidence that they themselves are legitimate users of English, and that they, like all users, represent the cultures of English language use.

Global Englishes

Due to the variability and complexity of English usage, it is impossible to prepare students beforehand for all the cultural knowledge and linguistic variation that they may encounter. Therefore, it is necessary to provide some form of education to equip them for such eventualities. Diversity in English language use is recognized in Global Englishes, an umbrella term to encapsulate World Englishes and English as a lingua franca (ELF). World Englishes is an established area of study looking at distinctive and codifiable varieties of uses in different locations in the world. Its focus is on standardizations and regularities, often in corpora of recorded uses in different localities. ELF differs from World Englishes in its focus on interactions involving English. It reflects the diverse ways in which language is used for communication, with the diversity and variability being too unpredictable to be reflected in patterns found in language data in corpora. ELF focus is on how individuals use their individual multilingual and other resources to communicate where English can be used as a contact language (though may not be selected). The basis of communication is on adaptation, flexibility, and accommodation in the negotiation of meaning, instead of adhering to the stringent and traditional expectations of (assumed) native English speakers.

In recent years, ELF has become a major area of study. As language teachers, we should be adapting our own practices to reflect these realities. We should be exposing students to the global nature of English and encouraging them to think of themselves as intercultural citizens, i.e., as connected to different cultures and communities. This would involve going beyond the focus on Anglophone standard norms and developing among students the skills to be able to draw on different linguistic (and nonlinguistic) resources in their multilingual communication involving English. It would also mean delinking English from the national cultures of Anglophone countries and helping students to perceive themselves as legitimate users of English, irrespective of cultural background. Disconnecting the English language from Anglophone cultures in teaching is important to allow all English speakers to learn and use the language in a way that is more relevant and applicable to their own lives and contexts.

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These are realistic goals. There is an increasing interest in Global Englishes instruction and increasing endorsement of its meaning for English language education. However, it seems that this is mostly in research. The effect of Global Englishes on actual educational change is still limited, and it seems unlikely that great progress will be made based on conventional language perspectives in language policies and language management within institutions. It is essential that English language education becomes widely aware of issues around Global Englishes and addresses these points in educational practices. ▲