POWER AND CHALLENGES IN A GLOBALISED SOCIETY: THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A VEHICLE

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ABSTRACT

Today, in and out, people, young and adult, are involved in the study of English. Indeed, this interest in the learning of English has increased to such an extent that English is now considered by many, if not all, the international language. Accordingly, the teaching and learning of an international language must be based on an entirely different set of assumptions than the teaching of any second or foreign language. The purpose of this paper is to clarify these assumptions that should be considered in the design of English as an international language (EIL) teaching methods and materials. The paper further reveals that while there is now greater recognition of the importance of language both for economic and educational development, as well as human rights, the forces of globalization are leading towards uniformity in the language use, in culture and even in education. However, given the great diversity of users of EIL, it is imperative to examine what goals and approaches in English language teaching (ELT) are appropriate for these various kinds of EIL users. Actually, if English is to be considered as an international language, it shouldn't be related to a specific one country or region; rather, it must belong to those who make use of it. Hence, recent findings demonstrate that though an international language can contribute to greater efficiency in the sharing of information, to economic development, and to cross-cultural communication, there are, still, significant dangers in this process. Thus, globalization still encompasses a variety of upheavals which the present paper does not highlight.

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KEYWORDS: ELT, EIL, cultural issue, attitudes toward EIL, globalization, appropriate

INTRODUCTION

There is a variety of factors that thoroughly examine the implications of the teaching and learning of English as an International language (EIL). These factors arise from three sources: the character of current users of EIL, the changes that have accompanied the spread of English and the relationship that exists between culture and an international language. For cross-cultural communications and for a variety of specific purposes, more and more users of EIL will be bilingual speakers of English in the coming decades. Some of these bilingual users will use English on a daily basis within their own country, at times for cross-cultural communication within their own borders. Others will have more restricted purposes in using English, often for accessing and sharing information. Still, there are current changes in the language. These changes may impede the teaching of EIL. Accordingly, the use of English as an international language has been brought about by the continuing spread of English. This spread has resulted in a variety of changes in English on grammatical, lexical and phonological levels. Though some contend that these changes will eventually lead to the varieties of English spoken today becoming mutually intelligible, these changes may affect intelligibility too.

Defining English as an International Language

For some, an international language is equated with a language that has a large number of native speakers. In this sense, Mandarin, English, Spanish, Hindi, and Arabic, the five most widely spoken mother tongues in the world today, might be considered international languages. However, unless such languages are spoken by a large number of native speakers of other languages, the language cannot serve as a language of wider communication. It is in this sense, as a language of wider communication, that English is the international language par excellence. And, in many instances, it is a language of wider communication both among individuals from different countries and between individuals from one country. In this way, English is an International language in both a global and a local sense. Crystal (1997) maintains that a language achieves global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country and that this special status can be achieved either by making it an official language of the country or by giving special priority to it by requiring its study as a foreign language. Today there are over seventy countries in which English has held or continues to hold special status, with many other countries giving English the special priority- referred to by Crystal- in which English is a required foreign language. Kashru (1989) maintains that the various roles English serves in different countries of the world are best conceived

of in terms of three concentric circles: (a) the Inner Circle, where English is the primary language of the Country such as in Australia, Canada, the United States; and the United Kingdom; (b) the Outer Circle, where English serves as a second language in a multilingual country such as in Singapore, India, and the Philippines; and (c) the Expanding Circle, where English is widely studied as a foreign language such as in China, Japan, and Korea. The drawback of this categorization is that today many countries in what Kachru terms the Expanding Circle (e.g. Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands) have many more English-speaking bilinguals than countries of the Outer Circle where English has an official status (e.g. the Gambia and Rwanda). Whereas the exact number of English users is difficult to determine, it is clear that the number of individuals who have some familiarity with the language today is vast and growing. It is in the Expanding Circle where there is the greatest potential for the continued spread of English.

Graddol (1997) points out that English is the most popular modern language studied in these countries, and cites the example of the Russian Federation, where 60 per cent of secondary school children study English as one of their foreign languages. Other features need to be taken into account as well. Smith (1976) was one of the first to define the term international language, noting that an international language is one which is used by people of different nations to communicate with one another. Elaborating on this definition, Smith makes several important assertions; hence, regarding the relationship of an international language and culture, these assumptions are that:
(a) Its learners do not need to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers of that language
(b) The ownership of an international language becomes 'de-nationalized',
(c) The educational goal of learning it is to enable learners to communicate their ideas and culture to others.

Brutt-Griffler (2002) contends that four central features accompany the development of a world or international language. First, it is the product of the development of a world econo-cultural system, which includes the development of world market and business community, as well as the development of a global scientific, cultural, and intellectual life. Second, it tends to establish itself alongside local languages in multilingual contexts composed of bilingual speakers. Third, unlike an elite lingua franca, it is not confined to the socio-economic elite but is learned by various levels of that language migrating to other areas but rather by many individuals acquiring the language.

Today English exemplifies most of these features of an international language. To begin, few would question that presently it dominates a variety of economic and cultural arenas. In other words, more and more products and trends from a variety of countries are reaching global markets. English facilitates this process and fuels its spread. Further evidence of the domination of English in several important arenas includes international relations, the mass media, international travel, international safety, education, and communication. Thus, Graddol (1999) uses demographic projections to show that the balance between native and non-native speakers of English will shift significantly in the next 50 years. He concludes that, based solely on expected population changes, the number of people using English as their second language will grow from 235 million to around 462 million during the next 50 years. This indicates that the balance between L1 and L2 speakers will critically change, with L2 speakers eventually overtaking L1 speakers. (Graddol, 1999: 62).

Reasons for the Spread of English
According *to Crystal* (1997), several geographical and historical factors as well as sociocultural ones led to the initial spread of English. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries both British and American colonialism and the migration of English-speaking individuals to other areas were of central importance. In addition, by the beginning of the nineteenth century Britain had become the world's leading industrial and trading nation. Most of the innovations of the Industrial Revolution were of British origin, resulting in new terminology for technological and scientific advances. Hence, those who wanted to learn more about these innovations needed English both to understand the new terminology and to talk to English-speaking inventors and manufacturers. Similar developments were taking place in the United States which had overtaken Britain as the fastest growing economy, producing many new inventions. Crystal summarizes the role of English during the nineteenth and early twentieth century as follows:

"The story of English throughout this period is one of rapid expansion and diversification, with innovation after innovation coming to use the language as a primary or sole means of expression. It is not possible to identify cause and effect. So many developments were taking place at the same time that we can only point to the emergence, by the end of the 19th century, of a climate of largely unspoken opinion which made English the natural choice of progress." (Crystal1997:75)

Colonialism, speaker migration, and new technology developed in English-speaking countries were important in the initial spread of English, but what are the factors that are fueling its current spread and the macro-acquisition of the language within existing

speech communities? In order to answer this question, it is useful to consider the current uses of English in various intellectual, economic, and cultural arenas. The following is a summary of some of these as noted by Crystal (1997):

-International organization: of 12,500 international organizations listed in the 1995-1996 Union of International Associations' Yearbook, approximately 85 per cent make official use of English.

-Motion pictures: in the mid-1990s, the United States controlled about 85 per cent of the world film market.

-Popular music: of the pop groups listed in *The Penguin Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, 99 per cent of the groups work entirely or predominantly in English.

-International travel: the United States is the leader in tourism earning and spending.

-Publications: more books are published in English than in any other language.

-Communications: about 80 per cent of the world's electronically stored information is in English.

-Education: in many countries English plays a significant role in higher education.

The widespread use of English in a variety of political and intellectual areas makes it imperative for any country wishing to access the global community for economic development to have access to it. While English is not the cause of the spread of global culture, the fact that so much of popular mass video and music are in English makes the language enticing to many young people, often motivating them to study it. Travel and tourism also fuel the current spread of English. Besides, International airports around the world have essential information available in English and major international hotels have English-speaking staff available. Moreover, the significant role that English plays today in the storage and dissemination of information is another key factor in continued spread. Graddol (1997) further notes that today over 84 per cent of the Internet servers are English medium. These figures clearly demonstrate that one needs to know English today in order to access and contribute to both printed and electronic information. Finally, access to higher education in many countries is dependent on knowledge of English. Although it may not be the medium of instruction, accessing key information in a great variety of fields is often dependent on having reading ability in English. Furthermore, in many countries the sheer cost of higher education is encouraging universities to accept international students as a method of increasing revenues and in such circumstances English is frequently the medium of instruction. In sum, one of the primary reasons for the spread of English today is because it has such a variety of specific purposes.

Language Standards and English as an International Language

In the issue of standards of primary concern in the study of EIL, speakers of English are using the language on a daily basis alongside one or more others and frequently their use of English is influenced by these other languages. Hence, they are developing new lexical items, new grammatical standards, and their pronunciation is also being influenced by their other languages. These changes lead some people to worry that English will vary to such an extent that it will no longer serve the main purpose of an international language, namely to provide a link across cultures and languages. Thus, it is critical that we examine what is meant by standards, in other terms: What factors are needed to determine whether or not an innovation has been accepted as a standard?

The issue of standards exists in all languages. With the spread of English and the resulting variation in the language, some people believe that the need to uphold common standards has increased in importance. In this sense, Brutt-Griffler (1998) argues that such tolerance must be extended and he explains this in what follows:

Most, if not all, Inner Circle English speakers appear willing to meet on a common linguistic plane, accept the diversity of their English's, and do not require of one another to prove competence in English, despite the considerable differences in the varieties of English they speak and the cross-communication problems entailed thereby…this situation must be extended to all English-using communities. (Brutt-Griffler 1998: 389)

The debate over standards is a major topic where Quirk argued for the need to uphold standards in the use of English in both Inner Circle countries and those outside the Inner Circle. In other words, for Quirk, a common standard of use is warranted in all contexts of English language use. Kachru (1985), on the other hand brought with it a need to re-examine traditional notions of standardization and models as they relate to Outer Circle users. Kachru argued for recognition of norms based on the manner in which English is used within particular speech communities, both native-speaking communities and those in the Outer Circle. He maintained that allowing for a variety of norms would not lead to a lack of intelligibility among varieties of English; rather, what would emerge from this situation would be an educated variety that would be intelligible across the others.

Defining Standard English

In his discussion of Standard English, Strevens (1983) defines Standard English as:

"A particular dialect of English, being the only non-localized dialect, of global currency without significant variation, universally accepted as the appropriate educational target in teaching English; which may be spoken with an unrestricted choice of accent". (Strevens 1983: 88)

What is significant in this definition is that for Strevens there is no standardized accent associated with Standard English. Quirk (1990), for example, maintains that Standard English is what might be termed the 'unmarked' variety; it is not unusual or different in any way and is typically associated with written English. The *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* (1985) defines Standard English as:

"The variety of a language which has the highest status in a community or nation and which is usually based on the speech and writing of educated speakers of the *language*. A standard variety is generally

a- *Used in the news media and in literature*
b- *Described in dictionaries and grammars*
c- *Taught in schools and taught to non-native speakers when they learn the language as a foreign language*". (ibid: 271).

The problem, however, is determining exactly when an innovation can be considered a standard or norm. Bamgbose (1998) delineates five factors that can be used to determine whether or not an innovation is a norm. They are:

- *Demographic (How many people use the innovation?)*
- *Geographical (How widely is the innovation used within the country?)*
- *Authoritative (Who uses the innovation?)*
- *Codification (Where is the usage sanctioned?)*
- *Acceptability (What is the attitude of users and non-users toward the innovation?)*

Bamgbose contends that the most important factors in determining if an innovation can be considered a norm is whether or not the innovation is codified in such things as dictionaries, course books, or other manuals, and whether or not it is widely accepted. However, if different norms develop in different varieties of EIL, will this ultimately lead to a lack of mutual intelligibility among them? To answer such a question, one must clarify the notion of 'Intelligibility'. It is: recognizing an expression's comprehensibility (knowing the meaning of the expression), and interpretability (knowing what the expression signifies in a particular socio-cultural context). What is referred to as interpretability causes the greatest problems in the use of EIL for cross-cultural communication since interpretability entails question of culture and context.

The Role of Culture in Language Teaching

We explore the role of culture in EIL teaching in terms of the cultural content of teaching materials and in reference to the use of EIL in specific discourse communities. The use of cultural content in EIL teaching is problematic in light of the assumptions that were made earlier regarding the characteristics of an international language. In the case of English, these are that:

-*As it is an international language, the use of English is no longer connected to the culture of Inner Circle countries.*
-*One of the primary functions of English, as is the case with any international language, is to enable speakers to share their ideas and cultures.*

One of the primary reasons for dealing with cultural content in EIL teaching is because the use of EIL involves crossing borders, both literally and figuratively, as individuals interact in cross-cultural encounters. Culture learning is a social process where various rationales for the inclusion of culture learning in the language classroom, maintain the idea of culture as motivating content. We examine the benefits and disadvantages that arise from using cultural content from the local culture, target culture, or a more general international culture.

Culture in language teaching has traditionally involved providing cultural information. The aesthetic sense in which the literature, film, and music of a target language country are examined; the sociological sense in which the customs and institutions of this country are explained; the semantic sense in which how a culture's conceptual system is embodied in a language is investigated; and the pragmatic sense in which how cultural norms influence what language is appropriate for which contexts is examined. Two major problems exist with this approach to culture in relation to the teaching of EIL: First, it cannot be assumed that the culture of any one particular country, especially an Inner Circle country, should provide the basis for cultural content when teaching EIL. Second, if one of the goals of using culture in EIL teaching is to help individuals interact in cross-cultural encounters, then merely knowing about a culture will not be sufficient to gain insight into how to interact in these encounters. But how can this kind of reflection be encouraged in an EIL classroom? In order to answer this question, it is helpful to consider how cultural information is acquired outside of a classroom and how this type of cultural learning might be encouraged within it. Spradley (1980), maintains that culture involves three fundamental aspects of human experience: what people do (cultural behavior), what people know (cultural knowledge), and what things people make and use (cultural artifacts). Accordingly, two goals discussed by Kramsh (1993) regarding culture in language teaching are particularly relevant here:

1-Establishing a 'sphere of interculturality': this line of thought promotes the idea that the learning of culture is more than just the transfer of information between cultures. Rather, learning about a culture requires that an individual considers his or her own culture in relation to another. Hence, the process of learning about another culture entails a reflection on one's own culture as well as the target culture.

2-Teaching culture as difference: this notion of culture highlights the fact that national identities are not monolithic. Within each culture there exists a variety of national characteristics that are related to age, gender, regional origin, ethnic background, and social class.

In using EIL in cross-cultural encounters students need to be encouraged not to adopt this view but rather to recognize the diversity that exists within all cultures, particularly, in the modern era of travel and migration where cultures are in constant contact. Learning about another culture does not necessarily mean that one must accept that culture. Kramsch (1993), for example, argues that knowledge of a culture (gaining cultural competence) does not mean that one has an obligation to behave in accordance with its conventions. Byram (1998) distinguishes what he terms 'biculturalism' and 'inter-culturalism'. For him, biculturalism assumes that an individual identifies with and accepts the beliefs, values and practices of a particular culture. Inter-culturalism, on the other hand, assumes a knowledge of rather than acceptance of another culture.

A Reflective Approach to Cultural Content
Given the role of language learning, it is extremely important to recognize the great diversity that exists within any culture. Nevertheless, some cultural information contained in the text might present points of conflict. The question is: what approach might a teacher take to these materials? One possibility, of course, is to simply omit the lesson, i.e. omit what is considered to be culturally inappropriate materials. Hyde (1994), on the other hand, argues strongly against the idea of censorship. He maintains that a better alternative would be to take an analytic path in which the cultural content is explicitly dealt with, drawing students' attention to their own history and culture, as well as to those of the target culture, in order to explain and contrast the difference. He also maintains that it is especially important to deal explicitly with cultural content in the case of the teaching of English since English is situated at the interface of foreign and native cultural values to a greater extent than any other language because of its greater use around the world. How might the cultural elements in a lesson then be dealt with explicitly so as to establish a sphere of interculturality and develop cross-cultural awareness?

It is important to approach all cultural content in EIL materials reflectively. One way this can be done is to consider the following questions in reference to specific cultural content:
* Why is this topic being written about?
* How is this topic being written about?
* What other ways of writing about the topic are there? (Kress 1985: 7 as cited in Wallace 1992: 123)

In order to establish a sphere of interculturality, so critical to the use of EIL, it is essential that the cultural information presented in a text be processed reflectively so that learners can explore cultural differences and gain greater insight into their own culture. Not only is the choice of the cultural content of teaching materials important in EIL, but also the way in which texts are developed and used in various domains.

Teaching Methods for EIL
The teaching of EIL, today, takes place in a wide variety of contexts. It takes place in Outer and Expanding Circle countries, in private and public institutions, with young children and adults, with monolingual and bilingual teachers, etc. Although there is great diversity among these contexts, all of them share the goal of developing proficiency in the learning of an international language. Bilingual users of English need no longer look to Inner Circle countries to provide target models of use, educators need no longer look to Inner Circle countries for target models in pedagogy. Rather, local educators need to take ownership of the teaching of EIL and design pedagogies that are appropriate to the local culture of learning. The view of a culture of learning needs to be replaced with one that recognizes that individual classrooms within one culture can vary greatly in terms of the expected role of the teachers and students. In the same line of thought, Li (1998) argues that it is essential for any country outside the Inner Circle to look within its own context for approaches to teaching English rather than depending on western expertise. He insists on what follows**:**

Rather than relying on expertise, methodology and materials controlled and dispensed by Western ESL countries, EFL countries should strive to establish their own research contingents and encourage method specialists and classroom teachers to develop language teaching methods that take into account the political, economic, social and cultural factors and, most important for all, the EFL situations in the countries. (Li, 1998: 698)

Towards an Appropriate Methodology for EIL
Just as the use of English today is embedded in a variety of local contexts, so too is the teaching of EIL. Every EIL classroom is influenced by various contextual factors. This include the political and social contexts (e.g. official language policy, the role

of English in the society, economic resources appropriated to ELT, and linguistic and cultural attitudes toward EIL); the educational institution itself (e.g. its English teaching objectives, material resources, philosophy of learning, and class size); the teachers' background (e.g. their English training and philosophy of teaching); and the students' background (e.g. their age, previous exposure to English, and learning goals). However, each classroom is unique in the particular dynamics that exists among the participants in the lesson. Because of this, as Prabhu (1990) points out, there is no one best method, and no one method that is best for a particular context. Even though attempts have been made to specify the many variables that affect a particular classroom and in order to specify the appropriate method, such procedures obscure the moment by moment decisions teachers make to encourage language learning. Hence, in kike manner Prabhu (1990) suggests that perhaps there is a factor more basic than the choice between methods, namely, teachers 'subjective understanding of the teaching they do.

Indeed, since EIL educators are involved in teaching an international language that no longer belongs to any one nation or culture, then it is reasonable that the way in which this language is taught should not be linked to a particular culturally influenced methodology; rather the language should be taught in a manner consistent with local cultural expectations. In short, an appropriate EIL methodology presupposes sensitivity to the local cultural context in which local educators determine what happens in the classroom. As Kramsch and Sullivan put it,

"Appropriate pedagogy must also be pedagogy of appropriation. The English language will enable students of English to do business with native and non-native speakers of English in the global world market and for that they need to master the grammar and vocabulary of Standard English. But, they also need to retain control of its use". (Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996:211)

For Kramsch and Sullivan, such a view of an appropriate pedagogy is in keeping with the political motto, '*think globally, act locally*', which, in language teaching terms, might be translated as '*global thinking, local teaching*'. This motto is particularly important for the teaching of EIL. The individual classroom teacher, after all, is the one who knows the needs of the students, and must take the moment-by-moment decisions of classroom content and interaction to meet these. From another perspective, however, the classroom teacher needs support from the larger educational context to develop an appropriate pedagogy. Hence, one might argue that because a Ministry of Education has the resources to assess local English learning needs, to design appropriate materials, and to co-ordinate in-service teacher education programmes, it is in the best position to determine what an appropriate pedagogy might be and to encourage this programme among in-service and pre-service teachers.

Challenges and Dangers to EIL

In spite of all the aforementioned reasons for the spread of English at a worldwide level, we should note that there are factors that may impede the spread of EIL. One of the major reasons English will not spread widely is because of the low contact ratio between second and foreign language learners of English. Another factor that may slow the spread of English is that it may lose its status as a required foreign language; an important condition to assure its continued spread in Expanding Circle countries. In this sense, Graddol (1997) lists several other factors that may result in English not being a required foreign language. First, there may be competition from other languages, particularly on economic grounds. Current predictions, to the year 2010, suggest that the most popular foreign language studied will be English, followed by Mandarin, Spanish, and Indonesian, all languages representing large potential markets. Second, in some countries the educational system, for internal political reasons, will need to cater for the needs of language minority groups within the country, thus requiring one of these languages to be taught rather than English. And finally, there may be political pressure to study the language of an adjacent country rather than English or a local *lingua franca*

It is also possible that technological factors could lead to a decline in the use of English as the creation of new technologies make translation more efficient and language compatibility on the internet possible. Once again, Graddol maintains that the internet will increasingly serve local, cultural and commercial needs and that will result in the use of more languages on the Web. He adds that whereas today 80 per cent of the stored information on the World Wide Web is in English, as the use of computers spreads, it is predicted that English content may fall to 40 per cent of the total material. The final and perhaps most significant factor is resistance to the spread of English arising from negative societal attitudes toward English and English-speaking countries. Such serious prediction points to the fact that the spread of English may be seriously impeded by the belief that a nation's culture and sense of community may be compromised by it.

The main negative effects of the spread of English involve the threat to existing languages, the influence on cultural identity, and the association of the language with economic elite. It has been argued that the spread of English reduces the role of existing languages, in some cases leading to their eventual extinction. In support of this claim, Swerdlow (1999),

for example, points out that whereas today more than 6,000 languages exist, some linguist's project that by the year 2100 the number of languages could drop to 3,000.

As suggested above, the replacement of local languages by English raises important issues regarding the relationship between language and cultural identity. It has been argued that the spread of English has led to local traditions being replaced by a largely western-influenced global culture. Again, however, it is not the language itself that is the culprit. Rather, it is global communication, western-dominated mass media, the economic benefits that various celebrations bring through the marketing of greeting cards and gifts, and a desire among many young people around the world to be part of a global culture that has brought about these developments.

CONCLUSION

EIL is being taught today in a wide diversity of contexts. So, clearly, any sound pedagogy must be informed by a theory of language learning and teaching that is sufficiently complex to account for this diversity. As Prabhu (1990) points out,

"If the theories of language teaching ….that we have at present fail to account sufficiently for the diversity in teaching contexts, we ought to try to develop a more general or comprehensive (and probably more abstract) theory to account for more of the diversity". (Prabhu 1990: 166)

Three major assumptions should inform a comprehensive theory of the teaching and learning of EIL. These are related to language use in multilingual contexts, the promotion of native speaker models, and language variation. The spread of English has been caused both by speaker migration and by the macroacquisition of English by existing speech communities. This growing number of bilingual users suggests that a productive theory of EIL teaching and learning must recognize the various ways in which English is used within multilingual communities. The second major assumption that should inform the teaching of EIL is that many bilingual users of English do not need or want to acquire native like competence. Current theories of second language acquisition and pedagogy frequently posit that the goal of most learners of English is to develop native speaker grammatical standards, phonological patterns, and discourse competence. Finally, a theory of EIL teaching and learning must be informed by accounts of language variation based on linguistic rather than attitudinal factors. Thus, the learning of relevant varieties of English, along with an understanding of their appropriate use, should be encouraged. A theory of EIL teaching and learning that fully recognizes the use of the language in multilingual contexts, that acknowledges the equality of speakers, and also the varieties of English they use, suggests certain pedagogical goals. One goal of EIL teaching needs to ensure intelligibility among the speakers of English.

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