To What Extent is it Socio-politically and Socio-linguistically Acceptable to Promote Native Speaker Language Norms in Expanding Circle Countries?

by

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Abstract

This paper investigates the question by first briefly offering an insight into the current situation of English usage in the world today. It defines the Expanding Circle by discussing the model from which the term derives and assesses its validity against the usage of English today. This paper argues against the goal of Native Speakers (NS) competence which is traditionally encouraged in Expanding Circle countries like Japan. Finally, this paper investigates the idea of EIL, proposing that this could be a more realistic goal for the so-called Expanding Circle users especially in light of recent research.

Key word: International English, Native speaker model, Non-native speaker models, Language goals

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1. Spread of English:
As Romaine states, ‘language has no existence apart from the social reality of its users (1994:221). Therefore, few people would argue against the fact that English has a special status as a language that may be used in a variety of situations on an ever-increasing global scale. The reality is that the number of English users has been increasing substantially in recent decades and it is likely to increase further in the future as the potential of English as a Lingua Franca is realised. However, a situation has evolved where there is now an unstable equilibrium; where the majority of English users are from countries where English is used as a foreign language. Problematically, native speakers (NS) seem reluctant to relinquish control of the norms of English. This causes some unrest and creates questions when we consider that about 80 per cent of verbal exchanges in English happen without any NS being present (Beneke 1991:54). Graddol (1997:10) concludes that although NS may feel that English belongs to them by birthright, but because of the above changes and number of users involved it will be speakers using English as a foreign or second language who will determine its world future.

2. Why Has English Prevailed?
Crystal (2003) suggests that English has prevailed and spread due to the power of its NS. The power being referred to being political, military and economic power. Long before the dominance of the United States in the 20th century, English had been travelling to various countries and continents from the British Isles since the 17th century. The continued growth of English in the late 20th century was a result of the economic dominance of the United States, more than the continued imperialistic spread of English. The economic zeal of the US led to the globalisation of the markets was ‘the most significant socio-economic process affecting the world in the late 20th century’ (Graddol 1997:33). The changes brought about in the world economy, politics and culture have also therefore also influenced education and language teaching. As Block and Cameron (2002) comment:

“People have always learned languages for economic reasons […] languages are treated more as economic commodities. This view displaces traditional ideologies in which languages were primarily symbols of ethnic or national identity…” (ibid 2002:5).

English has become the language of dominance in economic and global markets; and as such, it has therefore been natural for other language speakers to want a share in the spoils with the English speakers; therefore, non-native speakers (NNS) have adapted as necessary to participate in and interact with the dominant partners. As a result, English has developed into the pre-eminent language of wider communications, used as a library language, the medium of science, technology and international trade, and as a contact language between nations and parts of nations. This international spread of English has provoked various responses over the last decade or so, both positive and negative. For example, the British Council considers the successful spread of English as ‘Britain’s greatest asset’ (1998). Whereas, some would consider English to be a language killer (Aitchison 1991) and others still would claim that English may lead to structural or cultural inequalities (Pennycook 1994). Regardless of the stance taken towards the continued growth of English, whether positive or negative, there is no denying that the learning of the English can offer opportunities for a people, communities and countries for advancement, be it economic or otherwise. It is for this reason, NNSs wish, need or find themselves, choosing to learn; or in an environment which values and promotes the learning of English as it is increasingly used intranationally and internationally.

3. Kachru’s Model:
Fig 1.

- Expanding Circle (EC)
  (e.g. China, Japan, Germany: 100 -1000 million)
- Outer Circle (OC)
  (e.g. India, Singapore, the Philippines: 150 – 300 million)
- Inner Circle (IC)
  (e.g. USA, UK, Australia: 320 – 380 million)
The term Expanding Circle (EC) is derived from a model posited by Kachru (1985) Fig 1. The model of three concentric circles divides English speakers into three groups to show the perceived usage and power relationships of English at that time. The Inner Circle (IC) speakers use English as a native language (ENL), for example UK, USA, Canada, Australia are considered norm-providing. The Outer Circle (OC) speakers use English as a second or additional language (ESL). In such countries, English has become part of the chief institutions and has an important role in the multilingual society as a second language for both intranational and international purposes, for example India, Singapore, Malawi are considered norm-developing.

The EC uses English as a foreign language (EFL). These countries have no history of colonisation (by English speakers), nor have they afforded English any special administrative position; but they recognise the importance and value of English as an International Language, and are therefore norm-dependant; for example Japan, China, Poland, Holland (Crystal 2003:59, Jenkins 2003:15).

4a. Challenging the Native Speaker:

Despite the fact that Kachru’s model is useful and influential, scholars increasingly argue that it is not accurate because it does not take into account several of the recent changes in the use of English.

Firstly, due to the increasing number of people who are learning and using English as their first language in OC countries, the boundary between the IC and the OC is becoming increasingly ambiguous. For example, in Singapore many young people tend to speak only English and do consider themselves as NSs (Yano 2001). This also brings into question definitions regarding NS status. This may eventually be changed to something more suitable in line with current trends towards EIL, hence realising that monolingualism is not the norm and that a person may be a NS not only by birth, also by competency, use or indeed language loyalty.

In an effort to empower NNSs, several scholars have posited new terms which are hoped will remove the negative connotations associated with the old NS and NNS terms. For example, Rampton (1990) suggests that the labels be substituted for the term Expert or Non-Expert, to describe any accomplished users. This would eliminate the distinction made between biological and social users of English; thus not making unfair distinctions between competent users who use language as a means of communication opposed to a symbol of social identification. Jenkins (2000, 2003) also suggests new titles for speakers of English. Her Bilingual English Speaker (BES) would apply to both NS and NNS who can speak English, plus one other language proficiently. Non-Bilingual English Speaker would apply to L2 speakers of reasonable competence; and Monolingual English Speaker is self-explanatory. McKay (2003) also offers some suggestions. However, regardless of what the new term represents, it seems that getting rid of the old terms and replacing them with new ones does not solve any of the problems nor change old attitudes; it only obscures the problem further.

4b. Shift in Non-Native Speaker Use:

Many countries from the EC have been gradually shifting from using English as a foreign language to using it as a second language, for example, Belgium, Sweden, Argentina (Graddol 1997:11). Similar to the OC situation, English is increasingly being used in intranational and international communications, especially in educational circles and some professional fields. The above shifts make the boundary between OC and EC unclear.

Because Kachru’s model is ‘based on geography and genetics rather than the way speakers identify and use English, it tends to view the situation of each circle as ‘uniform’ rather than looking at the ‘linguistic diversity’ found in some countries (Jenkins 2003:17). This problem is easily observed if we consider the increased usage of English within the European Union. Many European users are highly competent communicators and are not worthy of the title NNS based solely on their accent or variation in usage. Crystal (2003)
estimates that some 85% of international organisations and as many as 99% of European organisations now cite English as the working language (or one of the languages) of their business showing the increased successful usage of these NNSs.

4c. Challenging Native Speaker Competence:
Lastly, Kachru’s model is surely biased towards an IC orientated point of view; in other words, the central position afforded to the NSs, puts them as guardians of language proficiency and ‘the source of models of correctness (Graddol 1997:10). Modiano (1999:24) points out, a large number of NSs living in regions with firmly established varieties of English, do not speak in ways as to be easily internationally intelligible; therefore, ‘these speakers are not worthy of the central position when compared to other speakers.’ He also brings into question the fact that the IC definition suggests the notion that the language is the property of specific groups and that any competency achievable is dependant upon following that model.

5. Socio-linguistic and Socio-political Arguments Against Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL):

5a. Redefining Teaching Goals:
The traditional teaching model within EC countries has always been EFL orientated. This is where the learners’ goals are to study the language as a foreign language, aiming for native-like linguistic competency in preparation for NNS to NS communication. The IC-NS Standard English being the yardstick which all use of L2 English is measured against. The EFL goal is indeed questionable, when we consider the socio-political facts about current English usage in the world. The number of users of English from the OC and EC now far exceeds the number of users from the IC (fig 2). With this in mind, the goal and reality of EIL/ELF is more attractive, realistic and viable as these users are more likely to use English in NNS-NNS communication where English is the contact language across cultures McKay 2002:Ch.2).

5b. What is Standard English?:
If we are to accept, that native status allows linguistic freedom and rights: and this is achieved by using English grammatically, fluently and in an appropriate manner, then we must also examine what Standard English is considered to be. This will allow us a better understanding of the source of NS objections to NNS innovation and how NNS may vary in their output.

However, Standard English is by no means an easy language variety to define (Jenkins 2003). Trudgill and Hannah (1994) suggest that Standard English is a variety of English language employed in writing and usually spoken by educated speakers of the language; however, it is not accent associated, nor geographically bound. As Brutt-Griffer (1998:389, cited in McKay 2002:50) state:

‘Most, if not all, Inner Circle English speakers appear willing to meet on a most common linguistic plane, accept the diversity of their Englishes, and do not require 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…”

In light of the socio-political and linguistic changes in the use of English in the world today, it would seem more appropriate for all users of English to adopt an attitude which supports peoples’ efforts to learn a language and see it as a positive / additive process.

Disturbingly, certain L2 learners (and teachers for that matter) feel more secure considering and labelling themselves as learners and inferior users of English, which amounts to linguistic insecurity (Seidlhofer and Jenkins: 2003). This is a worrying problem which also
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needs to be addressed if EIL is to gain support away from the meta-level where it exists now and be used as an alternative to EFL. Nevertheless, it is for the language learners to decide what model to follow, whether it is an EFL or EIL model, teachers must guard against imposing their beliefs upon learners.

6. English as an International Language and Developments in Language:

The recognition and validation of OC English varieties and the increasing number of English users in the EC, now outnumbering NSs in the world, illustrates that English is the lingua franca of choice being used for international communications mostly by NNSs. With this in mind, it seems that educators will be fighting against the odds if they persist in only supporting NS output and accent goals. With so many people using the language for any number of different valid reasons, there are bound to be differences. Difference we should learn to accept, and not deem a deficit.

When English is used in an EIL sense in the EC (or any circle), it transcends all national and cultural boundaries. There should be no native or non native speakers… only speakers and users. English, now being used as an International Language, simply as an utilitarian communication language tool allowing all users to retain to the greatest degree possible, their distinctive English varieties and cultural identities.

Phonological Developments

Jenkins (2000, 2003) argues very convincingly that because the focus of learning English has shifted from native-like competency to international intelligibility, the need for EFL/ENL has gone. However, concerns regarding that too many English varieties may spring up with the possible result of mutual unintelligibility due to too many differences, has led to research to find a common core among users. The searching for alternatives to native like models and targets will enable NNS in EIL contexts to have their own optional models, targets and guidelines to aim for.

In terms of phonological usage in EIL/ELF, Jenkins Lingua Franca Core (LFC) (1998, 2000) has identified which pronunciation errors cause intelligibility problems in NNS-NNS communications. This allows us to know what phonological items to focus on in the classroom, those being the items most likely to cause a breakdown in communication. The proposed core scales down the phonological task that learners usually face when aiming for the EFL/ENL goal and focuses on the pedagogical items essential for intelligible pronunciation. The LFC prioritises the features more relevant and realistic for EIL speakers. A brief summary of the key elements being:

1. The majority of consonants with the exclusion of /th- voiced and unvoiced/ and the ‘dark l’ allophone, the inclusion of the rhotic /r/ rather than non-rhotic /r/.
2. Consonant cluster simplification -but not initial clusters.
3. Vowel sounds – vowel length contract, i.e. “long & short distinction”.
4. Nuclear stress – that is the correct placement of stress in an utterance.

It is not the intention of this paper to discuss the LFC in any detail. However, the value of the LFC can not be underestimated since it focuses on what learners can do, not what they cannot. Keys and Walker (2002) discuss the importance of the LFC and suggest that it is an indication of the minimum requirements for international intelligibility and furthermore, should not be seen as an end point, rather it offers a solid foundation to work from. Adopting elements of the LFC would seem a logical and correct step forward for EC language professional and learners, to deal with phonological issues by listening to accent varieties that learners are most likely to come into contact with, and focus on making their own output as internationally intelligible as possible; without the need for speech pathology which is what aiming for NS accent output amounts to.

With the LFC, learners can if ‘they’ chose, pursue NS pronunciation and models later, since EIL does not exclude NS naturally. It just removes them from the central position. However to be realistic, Jenkins (ibid)
also suggests that learners would need to train their ears to not only listening to predominantly NNS communication and varieties of English, but also NSs too, as EIL does not exclude NNS – NS communication. Matsuda (2003) also supports Jenkins position in that an EIL approach should respects all varieties of World Englishes and does not remove NS varieties by replacing them with others; instead, the NNS varieties can be added to the current repertoire thereby enriching the curriculum in phonology and other areas; thereby allowing students appropriate choices for their needs.

Lexico-Grammar Developments

While advancements in EIL are being made in terms of a phonological core, the same is also true in identification of the lexico-grammatical features of EIL; although not as far advanced as the work done by Jenkins. Led by Barbara Seidlhofer, the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) is a corpus of spoken EIL English. The corpus focuses on unscripted, predominantly face-to-face communication among fairly fluent speakers from a wide range of first language backgrounds. The speech events being recorded include private and public dialogues, private and public group discussions and casual conversations, and one-to-one interviews. The first stage of the corpus is aiming at approximately half a million words, transcribed and annotated in a number of ways.

It is hoped that examples gathered from this corpus will make it possible to take stock of how the EIL speakers providing the data actually communicate. Scholars are attempting to identify how the speakers are using, or rather co-constructing English in EIL contexts. Such work will help researchers explore the possibility of a codification of EIL with the ultimate objective of making it a fully feasible, acceptable and respected alternative to EFL/ENL. Such issues of codification are also at the center of Bamgbos’s (1998) discussion of "the ambivalence between recognition and acceptance of non-native norm.

Findings have so far shown similar result to Jenkins LFC in that there are certain features, considered as typical of NS competency and models that are not being used by NNS and furthermore, this deviant use (in the eyes of the NS), away from NS standards, does not seem to hinder intelligibility. As Seidlhofer and Jenkins comment ‘…no major disruptions in communication happened when speakers committed one or more of the following deadly "grammatical sins”'(2003) for example:

- Treating "who" and "which" as interchangeable relative pronouns, as in:
  "the picture who. . . "or "a person which…".
- Not putting a definite or indefinite article in front of nouns, as in:
  "our countries have signed agreement about this"
- Using just the verb stem in constructions such as:
  "I look forward to see you tomorrow"
- Using the same form for all present tense verbs, as in:
  'you look very sad' and 'he look very sad'

When we consider the time, energy and effort spent on such features as the ‘third person –s’, the use of ‘articles’ or the ‘gerund’ is often considerable, nevertheless many learners still fail to use them ‘correctly’ in natural speech (by NS standards) after years of exposure and instruction in EFL. It therefore begs the question as to, why persist in teaching such forms.

Perhaps the real answer lies in being able to record and codify the phonology and lexico-grammar being used in NNS – NNS (and NNS – NS) communications. Syllabuses and materials could be created from it, more suited to the needs of the learners rather than insist on teaching forms that are not being acquired and seem not to be needed in NNS - NNS contexts as they are loaded with irrelevant IC standards.

However, EIL is still really at a meta-level far removed from most language professionals, schools, and learners. Publishers seem reluctant to break the status-quo from the money-spinning and successful EFL / ESL cash-cows. This statement, harsh as it may seem is easily justifiable when we consider that nothing has yet been done with Jenkin’s LFC despite being accepted and applauded by many scholars and teaching
professionals all over the world.

The large dominant and controlling publishers will eventually be forced to produce suitable materials to meet the needs of EIL learners. Especially as smaller publisher recognize the potential for publishing such materials, therefore, the big-guns will not want to lose any market share. However, the re-education of stakeholders in the EC is the catalyst that is needed for the success of EIL. They need to be made aware of the changing face of the language and also of their place as a user of that language in the world. As Matsuda (2003) states, ‘it will take more than just opening a book for EIL to be successful’. Users have got to want EIL in their hearts and minds and after so many years of suppression from NS norms, this will most likely be a slow and hesitant step.

Conclusions:
To conclude in a rather unorthodox fashion, I offer the following five points relating to EIL for NNSs, which suggests some of the strengths of adopting an EIL approach in language use and teaching, which hopefully the reader can see would be of benefit considering the previous mentioned socio-political and linguistic conditions of English in the world today:

1. EIL is non artificial as all users and varieties have legitimate claims with no NS or NNS distinction being made.
2. EIL is functional and descriptive. It focuses on function and intelligibility over form and therefore models should reflect the users varieties.
3. EIL is unpredictable in that communication can happen with any other EIL speaker. English is the lingua franca used by the world for communications therefore it is beyond the control of any users.
4. EIL goals are cross and multi cultural communications and users recognize that both linguistic variation and different cultural behavior are factors to consider and respect.
5. Perhaps most importantly EIL involves both NS and NNS. As Jenkins (2000) suggests, perhaps it is also time for NS to also move their own ‘receptive goal-posts’ and learn how to become better communicators.

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