

# ACCOMMODATING WORLD ENGLISHES IN DEVELOPING EFL LEARNERS' ORAL COMMUNICATION

**Nur Mukminatien**

[nursunaryo@gmail.com](mailto:nursunaryo@gmail.com)

*Universitas Negeri Malang  
Jl. Semarang 05 Malang 65145, Indonesia*

**Abstract:** This article aims to discuss issues of World Englishes (WEs) and the implications in ELT. It explores the extent to which WEs are taken into account as emerging English varieties different from inner circle varieties, how WEs should be accommodated by English teachers, and which standard to adopt to accommodate learner's linguistic needs for international communication. It would help ELT practitioners adjust their current practices through the inclusion of varieties of WEs in developing learners' oral communication. This offers relevant pedagogical movement to argue that changes should be made about the way English is valued and taught.

**Key Words:** World Englishes, intelligibility, oral communication

The number of people around the world who use English has been remarkably increasing as more and more people whose native language is not English use the language for many different purposes. Now, English has become the language of international communication by people across nations and culture. These people are English users who are multilingual and who have learned and use English with other multilingual people. The reasons for learning and using English might be that it is a widely used language which is very useful as a means of communication among people of different countries for many different purposes, one of which is as a tool to get knowledge and to communicate in international forums. It is also used to share knowledge and as a tool to open the windows of the world for bringing them in the global community. The need to function effectively in

the global community has made learning English indispensable. English has also been recognized worldwide for its role as language for science and technology. This might be due to the facilitating features that the language has had, such as an ease to express modern concepts and accuracy or precision with which modern concepts are expressed (Gunarwan, 2000).

It is evident that access to higher education in many countries depends on knowledge/skills of English; thus, having a good command of English is crucial. Even though English may not be used as the medium of instruction in education, accessing information in a great variety of fields often depends on having reading ability in English. So, the purpose of learning English is to meet the learners' need to get knowledge and to communicate with anyone in the global community (Melshers & Shaw, 2003). In this case, English is used as a lingua franca (ELF), which refers to English used as a means of communication by people who do not speak the same first language. Thus, they learn English not merely as a foreign language (EFL) for personal development and cultural awareness but also for an urgent need to communicate in the global community.

The phenomenon indicates that English now has achieved its global status because it develops a special role that is recognized in almost all countries in the world (McKay, 2009). The special status can be in the form of a policy making English an official language of the country, requiring students to learn it as a foreign language, and requiring them to use English for communication in academic forums, and the like. This leads to the acknowledgement of other terms: English as an international language (EIL) and English as a Global Language (EGL). As an international language, McKay (2009:12) quotes Smith's idea (1976) concerning the definition of EIL and its elaboration of the discussion to show the relationship between EIL and culture for a number of assumptions. First, in learning EIL, learners do not need to internalize the cultural norms of the native speakers of that language. Second, the ownership of international language becomes 'denationalized.' (But in this case, McKay use the term 'renationalized'). Lastly, the educational goal of learning the language is to enable learners to communicate their ideas and culture to others. As a result, McKay asserts that users of EIL whether in a global or local sense do not need to internalize the cultural norms of the Inner Circle countries (USA, Britain, Australia, Canada, etc). As the case of ELT in Indonesia, learners learn English in their native culture, and they will likely use English in the context of EGL or ELF. So, the previously stated goal of learning for developing communicative skills with the native speakers of English needs to be reconsidered.

With regard to the distinction between global and local sense of using English, McKay (2009: 12) suggests revisions concerning EIL and culture as follows.

1. As an international language, English is used both in a global sense for international communication between countries, and in a local sense as a language of a wider communication within multilingual societies.
2. As an international language, the use of English is no longer connected to the culture of the Inner Circle countries.
3. In a local sense, English becomes embedded in the culture of the country in which it is learned and used.
4. In a global sense, one of its primary goals of learning and using English is to enable speakers to share with others their ideas and culture.

Based on the previously discussed perspective of WEs, Pakir (2000) uses the term English as a Glocal (Global + local) language, that is, having an international status in its global spread but at the same time having local identities in several countries. In other words, it is global, and yet, rooted in the local contexts of its new users. As the case of Indonesian learners learning English in school, they learn English in their native culture. Therefore, they speak English within the context of Indonesian culture where pragmatically speaking, the speech act might not be acceptable in English culture. Since English is used across national and cultural boundaries, it adds to the existing list of the varieties of English, or, as one of the world Englishes (WEs). WEs refer to “new Englishes” used by nonnative speakers (NNS) since WEs belong to everyone who speaks it but it is nobody’s mother tongue (Rajagopalan, 2004).

In response to the emerging issues of WEs, this article aims to discuss the concepts of world Englishes and its implications in ELT. It explores the extent to which WEs are taken into account as emerging varieties of English which are different from inner circle varieties such as British and American English based on which English teachers have taught. It also describes how WEs should be accommodated by EFL teachers. However, a question is raised as, “Which standard should be adopted in response to learner’s linguistic needs for international communication?” This article would also provide new perspectives to ELT practitioners to help them adjust their current practices through the inclusion of varieties of WEs and the implications for assessment of oral communication. Hence, current EFL practices which have been based almost exclusively on American and/or British varieties, such as those in Indonesian schools,

should be reconsidered. The discussion offers relevant pedagogical movement to argue that changes should be made about the way English is valued and taught to accommodate the sociolinguistic reality of the spread of English.

## **WORLD ENGLISHES AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

Discussion on WEs starts with the spread of English that has been grouped into three concentric circles: Inner Circle, Outer circle, and Expanding Circle (Kachru, 2005). The Inner Circle includes USA, UK, Canada, Australia, Newzealand (ENL). The Outer Circle covers Bangladesh, India Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Zambia (ESL). The Expanding Circle are China, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Russia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Caribbean Islands.

In line with the concentric circle, Kirkpatrick (2007) classifies different varieties of English in language teaching into three terms: English as a native language (ENL), English as a second language (ESL), and English as a foreign language (EFL). ENL is spoken in countries where English is the primary language of the great majority of the population in the country, usually those of the Inner Circle in which English is spoken and used as a native language. ESL, in contrast, is spoken in countries where English is an important and usually official language, but not the main language of the country. These countries are typically ex-colonies of the United Kingdom or the United States (Nigeria, India, the Philippines, Malaysia are examples of the countries in which English is spoken and used as a second language). EFL refers to English learned in schools as a subject in the curriculum where the language is not actually used or spoken in daily life. In such a context, students have little opportunity to use English outside the classroom. It refers to English in the Expanding Circle such as that in Indonesia, China, Japan and many other expanding circle countries. Sarwar (2002) adds that the Expanding Circle is becoming larger, submerging in the Outer Circle because of the communicative, educational, and professional demands made in English.

The spread of English has shown that such classification suggests that there are many varieties or models, and therefore, there are many Englishes to choose. We, ELT practitioners, are faced with many models and norms, all of which are characterized by internal variations. According to Kirkpatrick (2007: 115), in the context of ASEAN, now containing 10 countries, (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the

Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), the role of English is de-facto lingua franca. De-facto lingua franca means that the people of ASEAN countries use English for communication because they do not share the same L1. This is true because English is the only language they can use to communicate to people of different mother tongue. According to him, in ASEAN context, learners need an English language teaching curriculum that teaches them about cultures of the people they are most likely to be using English with, and how to compare, relate and present their own culture to others. So, it can be concluded that the teaching of English in ASEAN countries should be emphasized on the varieties that are mostly used by the people in the ASEAN countries. In short, it implies that emphasis on the Inner Circle varieties is no longer relevant to some extent.

So far, however, English language teaching in Indonesian schools has been oriented to the American and British. English text-books and other spoken models are mostly American and some British and Australian varieties. The majority of the characters in the dialogs are mostly among native speakers (NSs-NSs) of English and little, if any, between Non Native Speaker (NNS) and NS. Dialogs between NNS are rare. In conclusion, the standard of competence in ELT has been oriented to the ultimate goal of achieving the competence close to native speaker's proficiency.

Similar practice of teaching Inner Circle English only is also evident in Japan (Matsuda, 2003). She highlights the problems of using Inner Circle English only. According to her, Inner Circle orientation to ELT may be appropriate for ESL program because the program prepares learners to function in the Inner Circle country. For EIL orientation, Inner Circle English variety is not suitable because EIL learners will use English mostly among themselves rather than to NS of American or British. In short, an investigation on the existing text-books used in the NNS countries shows strong Inner Circle orientation.

Considering that adopting Inner Circle only is inadequate, the emerging WEs make us, ELT practitioners, reconsider approaches in developing students' communicative competence. So, it can be suggested that the most crucial factor in oral communication is not "near native proficiency" anymore but intelligibility among speakers or users of English. Kirkpatrick (2005) gives an inspiring example of intelligibility in ASEAN Englishes. He asserts that ASEAN provides settings where intelligibility is crucial when English functions as lingua franca. So, I am of the opinion that teaching English in Indonesia should also concern more with intelligibility among speakers than native speaker's proficiency as its ultimate goal. For that purpose, Matsuda (2003) highlights that it is neces-

sary to accept multiple varieties of English, and therefore, ELT should be matched with pedagogical approaches.

### **ORAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

Referring to the emerging WEs, the argument of developing communicative competence centers on which standard to adopt and what criteria are used to assess communicative competence.

#### **Which Standard?**

As has been discussed earlier, teaching English using a native speaker model only is not adequate. This is because adopting Inner-Circle linguistic and pragmatic norms and inner circle cultures is not appropriate since many learners of English live and study English in non Inner Circle countries (Kirkpatrick, 2005, 2007). When asked which standard to adopt, the answer is “it depends.” The answer deals with the purpose of the ELT Program. If the ELT program is designed for learners who wish to continue their study in one of the Inner Circle countries, the appropriate model is the target Inner Circle model such as American and/or British. The standard would be of the ENL and this program uses examination where NS norms are used. However, if the ELT program is a subject in schools in the expanding circle, ELF or EGL are adopted in which English competence is measured for intelligibility among speakers whose native language is not English. What norms are used is also in question. Is there any good and suitable model of ELF and EGL? After all, accommodating the existing ELF and EGL means accepting variations which are not for “native-like proficiency” but intelligibility. In short, if we acknowledge and accept WEs, we need to think the entire approach to ELT. Therefore, ELT practices need to be reviewed to accommodate WEs by not merely using Inner-circle model but other models as well.

Concerning the purpose of ELT, Melchers and Shaw (2003:191) give three questions: (a) what exposure do we give the learners, (2) what production model should we choose, and (3) what production target should we aim for. The exposure means the English learners listen to or read; usually learners are exposed to predominantly American and British English through the media both print (newspaper, magazines, brochures, advertisements) and non print (TV series, movies, video, web-based texts). The model is the teacher’s usage, the spoken and written materials of selected models, while the production target means the aim for learners to learn. They also state that in the expanding circle, learners will need English to

communicate with any one in the global community. Seeing that in this context the aim is learning English as an international language, learners should be able to understand as many accents and varieties as possible. In communicating with other speakers, either NS or NNS, they should avoid culturally specific and pragmatic behaviors. The language they produce should be comprehensible to speakers of different varieties. In my opinion, when a problem of understanding arises due to pronunciation varieties, Inner-Circle model would help. The speakers should adjust their oral production a bit closer to the shared, adopted model and standard. For example, when a Singaporean speaking informal English (Singlish) and realizes that the interlocutor does not understand her/him, she/he can repair it by switching to a more formal English, known as SSE (Standard Singapore English). Evidence shows that it works as shown, for example, in communication among participants in RELC International Seminar. When speakers and their interlocutors show communication problems, they usually repair their production for effective communication.

#### **Assessment of Oral Communication**

Regarding the shift of the perspective of ELT practices, assessment of oral communication success also should be modified. As a consequence of accommodating WEs, and with the advance of English as world language, the whole idea of 'native speaker' as the standard criteria for successful communication has been somewhat blurred (Rajagopalan, 2004). Previously, in fact, theories about language learning placed "native speakers" as the ultimate state at which EFL learners may arrive; and native-like proficiency was the ultimate goal in language pedagogy. Therefore, assessment of oral communication used "native-like" proficiency as one of the components for successful communication (Mukminatien, 2005). Also, a theoretical model of communicative competence (linguistic competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence) introduced by Canale and Swain (1980) and Savignon (1977) was adopted. As a consequence, the native speaker was the yardstick to measure the adequacy of learners' proficiency. This comes from the assumption of the past practices reflecting the "old" belief that someone who wants to learn English as a Foreign Language does so in order to be able to communicate with the native speakers of English. In fact, however, as WEs exist, now the native is no longer the only model.

Applied linguists suggest that native speaker English could be used as a norm rather than as a model. Learners are not expected to mimic the

native speaker model precisely but to produce sounds and utterances that do not stray too far from the norms of a native speaker. Hence, learners' success in communication lies on their intelligibility of their production. Thus, concerning components of oral assessment "native-like" proficiency should be replaced by "intelligibility." Thus, it is necessary to reconstruct rubrics for assessment for oral communication success.

As a consequence, students need to be taught the communication strategies that aid successful cross-cultural communication. These strategies include accommodation of different linguistic and sociolinguistic norms and range of repair strategies which can be used in the case of misunderstanding. An extreme example of repair strategies in the context of Indonesian schools are strategies to cope with communication breakdowns in the form of code mixing and code switching into and from their mother tongue (Hudson, 2007; Hoffmann, 1993). This is possible because the bilingual speakers share the same first language. Pakir (2000) states that a creative bilingual uses code switching as an additional communicative strategy. In the global context, language teaching should shift its perspective that is designed to teach and learn English in ways that would allow for effective communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The focus of the classroom moves from the acquisition of the norms associated with a standard model of NS to a focus on learning linguistic features, cultural information and communicative strategies that will facilitate communication (Kirkpatrick 2007: 194).

However, accommodating WEs in oral assessment might bring problems. Jenkins (2006) states that one of the most pressing problems will be to find a way of incorporating a WEs-ELF perspective into testing. It deals with the fact that difference between learner errors and local variety is not clear. Communication and literacy in today's world indicates that a single dialect of English "fails" to equip our students for real-world needs" (Canagarajah 2005b in Jenkins, 2006). He states that until the examination board acknowledges the importance of these new competencies, teachers and curriculum planners will not do so as it might jeopardise their students' examination prospects. He asserts that related to the testing issue, it is important to consider the need to abandon the native speaker as the yardstick and to establish empirically some other means of defining *expert and less expert* speaker of English, regardless of whether they happen to be a native or non-native speaker.



## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The issue of WEs, as evidence of the complexity of sociolinguistic reality of English has led ELT practitioners to reconsider their practices. It affects which model to adopt, which standard to use as a norm, and which production target to achieve. In other words, WEs should be accommodated by English teachers to respond to learners' linguistic needs for international communication. Teachers should adjust their current practices through the inclusion of varieties of WEs in developing learners' oral communication. This offers relevant pedagogical movement to argue that changes should be made about the way English is valued and taught.

In terms of materials, designed for developing students' communicative competence, models for exposure should be extended to cover not only those between native speakers (NS-NS models), but also NS-NNS, and NNS-NNS as well. Concerning oral communication assessment, the components of speaking skills, especially the native-like pronunciation/ accent should be revised. This is because the success of oral communication is not measured against a native speaker of the Inner Circle since the most important thing is intelligibility among speakers of any first language background. In other words, their production should be comprehensible among speakers of different varieties because English is the language spoken around the world by people of different mother tongues.

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