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## English in English Language Teaching: Shifting Values and Assumptions in Changing Circumstances

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English in English Language Teaching: Shifting Values and Assumptions in Changing Circumstances

# English in English Language Teaching: Shifting Values and Assumptions in Changing Circumstances

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English Language Teaching (ELT) is a major international enterprise. This theoretical paper suggests that a number of ideological assumptions underpin some aspects of its curricular and pedagogic thinking. Specifically we will look at (a) the ways in which ownership and use of a language has been built around the idea of a homogeneous community or nation with shared and unchanging social values and language practices (leading to the notion of an idealized “native-speaker competence”), and (b) the conception of language (and what language learning comprises) in terms of the features of “standard” varieties. Drawing on the work in the fields of World Englishes and English as a lingua franca, this discussion will explore some of the issues that have emerged in contemporary conditions where neither native-speaker competence nor the norms of standard varieties are central to using English for communication. We argue that a more empirically grounded view of English would begin to enable us to enrich our description and analysis for curriculum and pedagogic purposes.

## Changing Circumstances

In this paper we focus on how English is currently conceptualized in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Given the continuing spread of English around the world, ELT is a major international “industry.” We examine the changing circumstances in which the English language is learned and used, especially as brought about as a result of globalization; we also reflect on what implications these changes have in relation to the existing values and assumptions of language pedagogic practices. In particular, we provide an account of recent developments in the fields of World Englishes and English as a lingua franca (ELF), and consider these in light of the challenges they represent to the conventionally established notion of English in ELT.

Hall and Eggington (2000), in the introduction to their edited volume *The Sociopolitics of English Language Teaching*, comment that for the most part public

debate about the teaching of English had tended, up to that point at least, to focus primarily on the more practical (and “mundane”) classroom-based aspects of language pedagogy, such as developments in methods, materials, classroom management, and so on. They point out that there is a dearth of interest in the more “macro aspects of English language teaching” (p. 1), including the many wider social, political, cultural concerns surrounding the teaching of English, which they argue should constitute central aspects of language teacher expertise. Since the publication of Hall and Eggington’s text, debate surrounding the conceptualization and norms of English has grown exponentially. There has been considerable empirical and theoretical investigation into the linguistic nature, social standing, as well as attitudinal responses towards the many diverse manifestations of English in the world. This has in turn given rise to a substantial body of discussion addressing the pedagogical impact of the diversification of English (see, *inter alia*, Canagarajah, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer 2004).

What scholars in World Englishes (e.g., Kachru, Kachru & Nelson, 2006) and in ELF (e.g., Mauranen & Ranta, 2009) have so substantially demonstrated is that “English” cannot in any meaningful way be regarded as a unitary entity. Although we may well be accustomed to thinking of languages as bounded linguistic phenomena (e.g., the claim that the English language has a single well-defined lexis and syntax), as soon as we take a close-up look at language in use, its complex nature becomes apparent. In fact English, just like practically all natural languages, comprises a large number of social varieties and regional dialects (for a discussion, see Wardhaugh, 2006, chapter 2). This makes it very difficult to sustain the notion of language as a unified body beyond a very abstract level. In turn, this leads us to question the way in which different contexts of English language learning and use have until now been categorized. It is difficult to identify language boundaries, or to reliably and accurately describe what English at any given moment in fact is; it is equally difficult to prescriptively assign English to different categories (or maybe “classes”) of use in particular contexts. Given that English is so globally spread, and there is so much political, financial, emotional investment in its teaching and learning, it is essential that this issue be given careful consideration.

### Categories and Labels in ELT

Conventionally, the distribution of English around the world is described in relation to three main groups of users: (1) those who speak English as a native language (ENL); (2) speakers of English as a second language (ESL); and (3) speakers of English as a foreign language (EFL). A further means of classification is Kachru’s well-known concentric circles model (e.g., Kachru, 1992), according to which countries are classified as “Inner Circle,” “Outer Circle,” or “Expanding Circle,” which largely correspond respectively to the ENL/ESL/EFL distinction. Kachru’s model in particular has been influential in terms of how the debate about English worldwide has been framed. However, it seems that such tripartite systems of categorization are progressively proving to be ill suited to the contemporary circumstances surrounding the use of English, and it is arguably becoming an outmoded way of looking at the language. Indeed, as Jenkins (2009) comments “the categories have become fuzzy at the edges... it is increas-

ingly difficult to classify speakers of English as belonging purely to one of the three" (p. 15) This has particular resonance in contexts customarily associated with EFL, contexts defined as those in which English serves neither as the first language of the majority population nor to fulfill official intranational functions.

A key assumption traditionally underlying the EFL label is the notion that English is "simply" a subject in the school curriculum, but usually not a medium of education. Richards, Platt and Platt (1992) even go as far as to say that English in EFL is not "a language of communication (e.g., in government, business, or industry) within the country" (p. 124). This has for the most part been received wisdom in ELT, and is largely seen on the face of it as wholly unproblematic, with the profession generally assuming that in "EFL" contexts there is very limited use of English outside the formal classroom setting. However, this overly simplified account of the situation regarding English in the supposedly EFL contexts such as Japan and Germany no longer fully reflects current sociolinguistic realities. In light of the fundamental demographic, sociopolitical and technological changes that have taken place in recent years, describing any context as one in which English is not "a language of communication" is entirely implausible.

As Jenkins (2009) comments, in many contexts that would conventionally be described as EFL, the role of English is shifting, with widespread growth in the number of domains in which the language is spoken, and an expansion in terms of intranational functions, especially in institutional settings such as higher education. As an illustration of these trends, Nunan (2003) observes that in the context of China political and economic reform has led to the introduction of English-medium teaching in many universities. In Thailand, Glass (2009) reports on research findings that reveal how Thai university students write in English more to other Thais than to people from different "linguacultural" backgrounds (a term we use to refer to the intersection of language and cultural phenomena, and to reflect the multilingual/multicultural nature of language contact situations). And finally, in the context of Europe, Berns (2007) observes how processes of globalization have led to significant development in the role of English in business, education, media, most notably for interpersonal communication, especially among youth populations. For instance, many German and Dutch universities have statutes that allow research degree theses to be written in English. Conversely, Michieka (2009) reports on the relative absence of English in non-urban contexts in Kenya, a country where English is an official language (or an Outer Circle country in Kachru's terms). The rural and urban divide in terms of the access to and use of English in Kenya has led to a situation in which "there is an Expanding Circle/EFL context within the larger Kenyan Outer Circle context" (Michielka, 2009, p. 363). New developments of this kind are easily overlooked if we continue to classify countries according to one or another of these categories, and thus treat them as if they were linguistically homogeneous entities. Clearly, there is a good deal of diversity within and across individual settings, and a good deal of mixing, with EFL and ESL speakers interacting together, shifting (with EFL settings becoming more ESL like), and embedding (with EFL contexts in Outer Circle countries, or ENL communities in Expanding Circle ones and so on). The situation is therefore a very complex one.

This three-way distinction of classifying the status and use of English, however, continues to proliferate discussions of English language pedagogy. The labels EFL and ESL continue to be widely used terms of reference to determine between

different types of English language contexts. This is not only an issue at a practical level, in that these labels seem not to provide a very reliable and adequate means of description, but it is also an issue on an ideological level. There are, for instance, several ways in which these terms are inappropriate when it comes to English. The word *foreign* in particular has largely negative connotations, strongly associated with concepts such as “alienness,” “unfamiliarity,” and “strangeness,” with an additional associative meaning of “not belonging.” This is problematic in a number of ways. Given that English is a principal and preferred medium of communication in increasingly multilateral collaborations in business, science, and cultural activities crossing language and national borders, it has become ever more difficult to retain the notions of “foreign speakers” and “native speakers” (the latter a problematic term itself of course). With regard to the associative meanings described above, determining in what contexts the language can be said to be unfamiliar, strange, or “not belonging” is a hugely problematic issue. English may in fact be as *foreign* to a speaker living in a cosmopolitan Inner Circle city like London as it is to people in any context conventionally classified as ESL or EFL settings, or as “native” to a speaker of English in Singapore as it is to speakers in any of the traditional ENL settings. English is now a common linguistic resource for communication for many more speakers than its “native speakers” (conventionally understood as comprising people from Anglophone countries). On a world scale English as a resource for meaning making has now been woven into the fabric of routine communication for people with diverse language backgrounds in all manners of cultural, economic, industrial, political, and scientific transactions.

In relation to this notion of belonging, it has long been argued (in the context of ELT see Widdowson 1994, 2003) that the unprecedented internationalization of English means that the language has long ceased to be the sole preserve of its traditional native speakers. In other words, laying claim to authority in terms of correctness and appropriateness of form and use is no longer the exclusive right of speakers from the conventional ENL countries. English is appropriated through all the countless localizations of the language as it becomes molded in ways that best suit the specific purposes for which it is used, and mostly in contexts that will be very remote from its putative “home” ENL settings. As English has migrated, it has not done so as an intact, bounded system, but rather it has diversified widely, with new linguacultural ties continually being established as a result of nativization processes. Language is not an impermeable system; any language (and especially English) is pervious, absorbing and incorporating local aspects of linguistic, cultural, and social practices in ways that transform it. Dewey (2007) for example reports on how the English article system can be manipulated in lingua franca talk in ways that give rise to innovative socio-pragmatic patterns of use (see also e.g., Cogo & Dewey, 2006 for a discussion of the transformative properties of ELF pragmatics and lexicogrammar; and Mauranen & Ranta, 2009 for recent empirical work on ELF linguistic forms).

In the process of becoming transformed, English (at least in one sense) belongs to whoever lays claim to it by taking possession of it through enacting the language resources for interactional purposes. It belongs wherever it is spoken, which makes the notion of foreignness quite meaningless in the case of English. This requires substantial rethinking at a conceptual level: essentially, we need to detach, or rather disentangle our notion of English from its supposed ancestry, if we are to understand its

contemporary socio-cultural relevance and corporeal developments (for further discussion of this matter see Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2006). Writing on language policy matters, Shohamy (2006) argues that English as a language can no longer be regulated by the “rules” of any one particular set of speakers:

“Who owns English?” is a question frequently asked about the language that has become the “world” language, the main means of communication, with no exclusive ownership of anybody. English is a free commodity ... it is free to be used, shaped and moulded by anybody in different ways, as is the case for its million users who construct and create endless types of “Englishes.” English does not belong to anybody specific, not to a nation, not to a group, it belongs only to those who want to own it. (p. 171)

### Language and Nation

A further issue that needs to be addressed is our understanding of what counts as “foreign.” When we describe something as foreign we generally understand this to mean that its origins lie in another country and/or community with different social and cultural (including linguistic) traditions and practices. This is evident in the way the word is usually defined in dictionaries, where “foreign” tends to be described variously as belonging to/located in/relating to a country other than one’s own. Although a relatively recent development, the way in which we perceive language is firmly tied up with the nation-state. The transformative impact of globalization notwithstanding (see especially the arguments presented in Dewey, 2007; Roseneau, 1997), in terms of our understanding of what a language is, and despite a general reduction in the influence of the nation-state as an entity, in terms of our understanding of what we mean by “language,” nations continue to have a fundamental defining role. This is hardly surprising given the role language has played in the emergence of nationhood, both throughout the rise of nationalism in nineteenth century Europe, and in the mid-twentieth century as new nation-states were formed during the post-colonial era (see May, 2001, chapter 2 for a discussion). In presenting these arguments we are not claiming that the nexus between language and nation does not in fact exist. There are obviously fundamentally important ways in which languages are conceptualized nationally, regionally and globally, especially in relation to independence from external rule, the establishment of autonomous identity at a national level, and in terms of government policy.

The concept of a national language has been exceptionally important in times of nation building (and re-building), during which the notion of a national language can have considerable symbolic power. What we are highlighting here is that both the corpus of the language and its socio-pragmatic uses cannot be held to be constant. In language planning and policy, the identification of official state languages is firmly connected with a sense of national identity and political unity (for a current example on Welsh see Williams, 2000, 2008). This requires that we regard language as a single entity, as if it were at all times constant. In the World Englishes paradigm, for example, linguistic description has been undertaken in relation to national varieties, such as in the case of Indian English, Nigerian English,

Singaporean English, and so on. Identifying and analyzing national versions of English in the Outer Circle has also been of considerable symbolic importance; it is the description of these varieties at the national level that has enabled Outer Circle scholars to substantiate their claims of legitimate ownership over the language.

In these contexts, the language usually has some degree of official status, serving largely as a means of communication at an institutional level, where it is used widely in domains such as law, politics, higher education. The use of the language in these situations is most commonly described as “English as a second language” (ESL).<sup>1</sup> There has been considerable empirical work undertaken in this field (see especially Kachru, Kachru & Nelson, 2006), with a growing tradition of codification of *nativized* varieties, also variously described as “New Englishes,” “indigenized varieties,” or “Postcolonial Englishes,” this latter term making explicit the historical connection of the Outer Circle countries with British and American colonialism. Schneider (2003) proposes a “dynamic model” as a framework for elaborating and making sense of the common processes involved in the evolution of these new varieties. In this model, Schneider proposes that these New Englishes have developed as a result of a universal process, which he describes as a cycle of five characteristic stages: (1) *foundation*; (2) *exonormative stabilization*; (3) *nativization*; (4) *endonormative stabilization*; and (5) *differentiation*. Schneider argues that the most important of these is *nativization*, the process by which indigenous linguacultural patterns lead to language change, substantially modifying English primarily in terms of its lexicogrammar.

This is then followed by the subsequent and equally essential phase of *endonormative stabilization*, which Schneider defines as being characterized by “the gradual adoption and acceptance of an indigenous linguistic norm, supported by a new, locally rooted linguistic self-confidence” (2003, p. 249). It is this process of standardization that ultimately gives legitimacy to the Outer Circle varieties. However what is fundamental to this model is that this cycle of evolution does not end with the adoption of indigenized norms. At the final stage of differentiation and once national identification with the language has solidified and external national stability is assured, more internal diversification can occur. The elaboration of identity thus becomes more specifically focused, shifting from the national to the more immediate community, leading to regional and social dialectal differences.

Ultimately then, in terms of developments of the language there is wide-ranging diversity (as in any setting), and in none of the Outer Circle contexts is a given variety uniform or constant. While the pluralisation in “World Englishes” serves to reflect the diversity involved across different Outer Circle countries, its focus on language at the national level can to some extent mask the high degree of variability that the localization of the language brings about. It is therefore essential that we make a clear distinction between public and policy-driven projections of the language, which are abstracted, norm-oriented and closely tied to efforts of standardization, and the more local level realizations of English as these occur in speakers’ everyday communication practices. There is ongoing tension between these two very different dimensions of language. A good deal of the public policy discourse on English in places such as the UK has been normatively concerned with the promotion of “standard” varieties, which has shaped the

assumptions and views of the ELT profession. What we are most interested in here is what a shift in focus towards the less idealized, more empirically oriented interpretation of language means for the conceptualization of English in language pedagogy.

The empirical enterprise of the World Englishes paradigm has shown indisputably that speech patterns serve as markers of identity and group membership just as much in the Outer Circle as in Inner Circle contexts. Nativized Englishes all display distinctive characteristics, with their own patterns of discourse, lexis, grammar, and phonology. But they also share a common history of exploiting English as a means of furthering the reaffirmation of identity in the postcolonial era. As the struggle for political independence gained momentum throughout Africa and Asia, English was generally retained for the purpose of functioning as a relatively "neutral" lingua franca especially in complex multilingual settings. This is particularly the case in contexts where elevating an indigenous language to official status could lead to inter-communal political tension and endanger the stability of the emerging state. No language is ever entirely neutral least of all English in the Outer Circle, but if it is to function as a national lingua franca, it has to be properly detached from its colonial roots. In other words, English has had to be (re)appropriated in the postcolonial contexts, becoming modified in ways that would fit specific local demands. Nativization is often the label attached to this process.

The extent to which this process of nativization has occurred, as well as its significance in terms of identity construction, represents a serious challenge to the practice of referring to English in these contexts as a "second" language. The common assumption is that if someone speaks a second language, then they are a non-native speaker of that language. However, World Englishes make it essential that we rethink our notion of nativeness (see Singh, 1998). As English is re-rooted and re-indigenized the issue of determining who counts as a native speaker of the language becomes a more complex one. Schneider (2003), for example, comments on what the development of Outer Circle varieties means for the notion of language competence. He observes that competence in these varieties is tied not simply to linguistic inheritance but to the extent to which the language is in constant use. In other words, it is not only native speakers, as traditionally defined in a very narrow sense, who have competence in the language. In a growing number of countries we find both indigenous native speakers of English in the conventional sense (such as minority populations in India who grow up speaking English), as well as speakers who, after first acquiring an indigenous mother tongue, later shift to using predominantly or exclusively English in a wide range of domains. To classify these speakers as "second language" speakers simply does not reflect the sociolinguistic circumstances of their use of and orientation towards English.

Furthermore, the transformative nature of globalization means that we need to rethink yet again how we conceive English in a variety of institutional, educational, work, and other settings. Growing numbers of English users in postcolonial settings speak it as a first language where it is increasingly spoken in everyday domains and not exclusively for institutional pur-

poses (Dewey & Jenkins, 2010 refer to both Inner and Outer Circle users as native speakers). In this respect though the terms “first” and “second” are both problematic, primarily because they reflect the assumptions and values of a society, which largely sees monolingualism as the norm. In all contexts traditionally classified as ESL/Outer Circle, English is one language among many, functioning for most speakers within a multilingual repertoire.

For speakers in many contexts (particularly in Outer Circle countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore), their communicative environments and practices require numerous switches from one code to another, resulting in many instances in a creative mix in the use of linguistic resources, often leading to a good deal of language hybridity. Furthermore, because the first language(s) a speaker acquires may not be his or her preferred language in all domains, describing English as a “first” or “second” language is entirely inadequate when it comes to accounting for a speaker’s level of competence or identification in English. The assumption that we can easily assign an ordinal number to a language is largely dependent on the notion that monolingualism is the norm; in other words, it depends on a rather fanciful idea that we can straightforwardly ascertain which single language is the appropriate one for a given context. In short, designating speakers of English as either a “first” or “second” language users requires a substantial amount of idealization and homogenization, which thus disguises the sociolinguistic complexity of multilingual societies.

### **English as Lingua Franca and World Englishes**

In recent years, the term ELF has emerged to refer to the use of English in contexts where it functions as a contact language among speakers of different linguistic backgrounds. In the years since Seidlhofer (2001), called for detailed, systematic, and corpus-based investigation into the use of English in lingua franca settings, ELF has continued to gain momentum emerging as a distinct research paradigm. As with the study of Outer Circle varieties in the World Englishes field, the focus in ELF research has been, at least initially, on the identification of the characteristic linguistic features. The major point of departure for work of this kind is Jenkins (2000), a seminal exploration of the nature of phonology and intelligibility in lingua franca communication. Following Jenkins’ early lead in investigating ELF forms in their own right, there have now been countless treatments of various aspects of lingua franca interaction (see Mauranen & Ranta, 2009 for a recent collection of research findings).

“ELF” has emerged in recent years as the preferred term among researchers working in the field to the extent that ELF has been founded as a new empirical and theoretical paradigm, with the first international conference devoted to the subject (Helsinki, 2008) having now become established as an annual event, with the University of Southampton (UK) hosting the second (2009), with subsequent conferences scheduled in Vienna (2010) and Hong Kong (2011). The themes currently of central concern include the sociolinguistics of ELF, its descriptive methodology, and the implications of ELF for language policy and language education.

Despite the many similarities, there are some essential differences between ELF and World Englishes at the conceptual level. The main point of differentia-

tion is that ELF research tends to focus on interactions that characteristically occur in highly variable, dynamic, often temporary and unstable interactional settings, typically involving speakers from a range of linguacultural backgrounds. For example, the research findings reported in Cogo and Dewey (2006) are drawn from a corpus of naturally occurring ELF talk involving speakers from 17 different “first” language backgrounds. The speech events described in this study typically occur in quite transitory linguistic settings, with speakers from multiple linguistic and cultural backgrounds involved in any given interaction. Cogo and Dewey find that, partly as a result of this especially varied linguacultural context, the pragmatic and lexicogrammatical patterns of use in ELF interaction are often highly variable (see Mauranen & Ranta, 2009 for a collection of similar studies). By contrast, the World Englishes research tradition had been primarily concerned with more clearly definable speech communities. The sociolinguistic realities of ELF are a particularly contemporary phenomenon; the transnational and trans-communal nature of many communicative events through digital technologies means that networks of speakers engaged in lingua franca communication are often especially transient in nature. As a result, the contexts in which English is used do not always fit very easily into conventional categories of analysis.

This requires some fairly substantial rethinking of the relationship between language and society. Heller (2008), for example, highlights recent ideological shifts in terms of sociolinguistic theory and practice. Especially relevant here are the limitations she describes of attempting to apply conventionally fixed conceptualizations of phenomena such as social position, linguistic form and community, whereby linguistic variables are traditionally seen simply as a reflection of a speaker’s membership of one or other social category. This chimes well with some of the arguments put forward in recent discussions about the conceptual issues surrounding ELF, particularly in relation to the dynamic, ever evolving nature of lingua franca environments (see especially Dewey, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2006).

Whereas the World Englishes paradigm is concerned with Outer Circle Englishes, the focus of ELF research is not simply on the use of English in the Expanding Circle. In other words, World Englishes research situates the study of English geographically, while ELF research has begun to untie linguistic description from conventional notions of distinct groups of speakers (traditionally classified according to class, gender, geographic region, and so on). There have been several recent attempts to reconceptualize notions such as “community,” “variety,” and other conventional analytical categories. Seidlhofer (2006) questions a number of existing conceptual frameworks, arguing that in many cases recent socio-political developments have meant that these need some updating. Furthermore, as a consequence of increasing use of digital communication technologies, our notion of community has started to shift, especially in the past decade or so. This concept now has less to do with local proximity, or group cohesion (traditional defining features), and far more to do with more virtual interactional networks, which often operate remotely and entirely independently of physical setting. Where such digitally mediated communication is conducted through English, it is well-recognized that native speakers of English may not be involved.

With regard to English in educational contexts, the principal arguments put forward by researchers in ELF, as well as others participating in the debate about the global presence of English, represent fundamental challenges to

mainstream assumptions about nature of English language learning and teaching. As has by now long been argued in ELF, we can no longer assume that the purpose of learning English is to communicate with its “genetic” native speakers (Kachru, 1997). In which case, we can also no longer assume that the linguistic and sociopragmatic norms of Inner Circle speakers will be relevant to learners of English in most settings.

In ELT, research in this field has gradually begun to have repercussions for current practice, if only for now at the policy level. In 2008, Cambridge ESOL, the main providers of teaching awards for English language teachers in the UK, substantially updated the existing DELTA (Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults) scheme, introducing a new modular-based syllabus. Among the many new inclusions introduced into the revised curriculum are the following subject areas: World Englishes, Global English, and English as a lingua franca. Teachers are now expected to develop an understanding of these topics, though it remains to be seen how this will be assessed, and what direct impact these changes will have on classroom practice. In terms of the long-term consequences of these changes, this will require substantial empirical attention (see Dewey, forthcoming for a discussion of initial findings). What is clear, however, is that the main tenets of an ELF perspective on language in education have at least now made some inroads into public ELT discourse, which ultimately will begin to filter through to individual language teachers and their current beliefs and practices.

### Models of English in Education

World Englishes and ELF clearly have major implications for language learning and teaching. Canagarajah (2005) argues that it is essential for the teaching profession to become aware and realize the importance of the concept of World Englishes, and to consider this in relation to current pedagogic practices. Canagarajah discusses the importance of adopting a multi-norm approach to language teaching, where language norms and teacher knowledge are locally defined, and the flow of information is multilateral. He presents a revised framework for language teaching, where traditional concepts such as “nativeness” and “authenticity” are replaced by qualities associated with “expertise,” “local practices,” and “relevance” (for earlier related discussions see Rampton, 1990; Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 1997). This enables the discussion of pedagogic models to be untied from their attachment to Inner Circle contexts. This less “hierarchical,” more “levelled” approach makes it possible for teaching methods to be determined in relation to the specific needs of any given learning/teaching setting. “Repertoire” thus becomes a more important concept than “target language,” with correctness giving way to negotiated, collaborative use of linguistic resources, and application of grammatical rules becomes less important than developing language learners’ “metalinguistic awareness” (Canagarajah, 2005, p. xxv).

In mainstream ELT discourse, a well-rehearsed argument against adopting an ELF/World Englishes perspective is that this will have a detrimental effect on mutual intelligibility. If language learners are presented with multiple normative models and a central standardized variety is not selected as the target for learning—so the argument goes—the fear is they will no longer be able to communicate suc-

cessfully. However, research has clearly shown that effective communication tends to have little to do with adherence to a set of (native speaker) language norms (e.g., Cogo, 2009; Hülmbauer, 2009; Kaur, 2009; Klimpfinger, 2009). Recent empirical work in ELF, for example, has been undertaken from the premise that what is appropriate and effective in language use is very context sensitive at the level of individual interactional events. Research studies in this field have begun to show how flexibility in the use of linguistic resources can enhance effectiveness and efficiency of communication (e.g., Cogo & Dewey, 2006). Intelligibility in lingua franca settings has more to do with awareness of linguistic and cultural difference, and a speaker's ability to accommodate towards an interlocutor than knowledge of a single set of linguistic and pragmatic norms. Being adaptive is an essential aspect of the interactional skills of accomplished speakers, especially in language contact or lingua franca situations (for a wider discussion, see Hall, Cheng, & Carlson, 2006; Kramsch, 2006; Lee, 2006). This represents a key challenge to the way we have so far tended to conceptualize language in education. We need to think about how teachers can be encouraged and enabled to disentangle current beliefs about competence from association with a definitive set of language forms.

In a good deal of ELT practice it is still widely assumed that, regardless of social setting, there is no alternative to basing the classroom model on "Standard English." However, apart from the adoption of external norms (mostly hailing from Anglophone communities) being somewhat ideologically questionable, if not subservient, the term "standard" is itself problematic. In ELT it tends to be a rather ambiguous, indeterminate notion. Howatt (2004), for example, describes the classroom model as "the standard English used by educated people in all English-speaking countries" (p. 320). Such attempts to define Standard English tend to gloss over the intrinsic complexities of language. Howatt, for example, fails to distinguish between written and spoken usage, and neglects to consider the context in which language is spoken/written, between what users, and for what purposes. In addition, and especially in light of the World Englishes paradigm, we need to rethink what we regard as an English-speaking country, rethink what kind of criteria we use to determine whether a context may be described as English-speaking, as well as consider which of the multiple Standard Englishes might be most appropriate.

The notion of standard norms, however, especially as understood conceptually in terms of a national variety (e.g., American English or British English) has exerted a restraining force on the concept of language in ELT, with only the linguistic creativity of sanctioned users ("educated" speakers of ENL varieties) being accepted, while all other language users' forms are classified as "deviations." As a result, it has mostly been held as self-evident that the objectives of language learning can only be defined in relation to an idealized set of target norms. In ELT there is a long custom of perceiving language as an object, an autonomous system conceptualized as being external to its speakers. As Holborow (1999) observes, we continue to be quite strongly influenced in our thinking by a structuralist vision of language, in which language is seen primarily as an abstract, socially disconnected entity. In this way of thinking, the role of language users is reduced to conforming to predefined rules, with the performance element of language being entirely downplayed. In education, this reification of language as system is deep rooted and pervasive, with lan-

guage categorically being defined and related to in terms of established rules of usage (see Dewey, 2009 for further discussion). As a consequence, conventional assumptions and values of ELT perception about language tend to be characterized by a strong focus on lexical and grammatical competence.

In this thinking, the full repertoire of language abilities is not well accounted for, despite a near-universal claim by the ELT industry in the past thirty years that it is concerned with communicative competence. Leung (2005) suggests that communicative competence, a concept originally developed for ethnographic research (see Hymes, 1972<sup>2</sup>, 1977), has tended to be interpreted in ELT in a very narrow pedagogic manner. Research-oriented ethnographic sensibilities concerned with finding out the ways in which language is used by speakers in particular situations within specific speech communities have tended to be transformed into rules of correctness and use as specified (and sometimes imagined) by native-speaking experts from Anglophone backgrounds (often the ELT teachers themselves). In a sense this orientation to “norm-of-allegiance,” as Silverstein (1998) might call it, has to do with a concern for preserving the language code of a “language community” (in this case, an abstracted and idealized English language community). The Hymesian concerns for the actual ways in which language is used in a speech community (which allows for possible variable communicative practices and instabilities of language forms) have, arguably, only been embraced by ELT in a superficial way. This has led to a culture of thinking about language and communication in which English is “fixed” as a set of norms, where the grammar of a standard variety is regarded as the primary prerequisite for communication, and intelligibility is seen as norm dependent. For the most part, ELT thus remains firmly attached to “correct,” standard usage. There have been several notable attempts recently to directly question these assumptions. Jenkins (2006), for example, disputes the viability of continuing to administer external norms, describing in detail the major implications of ELF/World Englishes research for ELT practitioners. What is most important here is the need to promote awareness among the teaching profession of the inherent variability of human language. This lack of awareness represents a substantial challenge to orthodox opinion in language education. An important initial consequence of this is the need in teacher education to raise awareness amongst teachers of English of the fluidity of language, of the complex relationship between the rather abstract level of language models and the more immediate level of language as enacted in communication. Recognizing this pluralistic and complex nature of language in use would be an important first step towards fundamentally reconsidering current beliefs and practices in language pedagogy. It would pave the way for more ethnographically-minded description and analysis of English in different domains of use in diverse circumstances, which can then be fed into curriculum development and teaching materials development.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>A further use of the term ESL is made in reference to the teaching and learning of English to immigrant populations in countries traditionally defined as English-speaking. In the UK, the acronym ES (English for speakers of other languages) has now become established as the preferred term, largely replacing this secondary use of ESL. In mainstream education in the UK, the term EAL (English as an additional language) is used to refer to children in the school system who do not speak English as a mother tongue.

<sup>2</sup>This book chapter first appeared in 1966 as a conference paper.

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