Global English as a Trend in English Teaching

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Abstract: Global English has become a trend in the teaching of English. Native speaker English is not regarded as the model for learners. Emphasis has been placed on features that may cause intelligibility problems, and a set of these features are suggested by Jenkins (2000). This paper examines this trend and proposes that the traditional native speaker English be used as the target of learning, with the proviso that the learners need not pursue the native-like pronunciation, so long as the speech is intelligible to the interlocutor. Some forms which have the potential to cause misunderstanding should be avoided in international communication situations. And the general communication approach to language learning is needed in the language learning curriculum, where linguistic forms may be aided by cultural and interpersonal information for understanding.

Keywords: Global English, English as an International Language, Lingua Franca Core, communicative approach

1. Global English

In recent years, the concept of Global English has come in fashion. It assumes several names besides Global English: English as an International Language (EIL), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), among some others. These terms are used to refer to English used in international communication. In discussing Global English people often refer to Kachru's (1992) division of the use of English into three concentric circles: the inner circle, the outer circle, and the expanding circle. The inner circle refers to the countries where English is used as the first language, including the Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and various islands in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean. The outer circle refers to the countries where English is used extensively and sometimes has official status, including countries of the Commonwealth of Nations, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Tanzania, Kenya. The expanding circle refers to those countries where English has no official role, but has important functions in some areas such as business or education. Some notable examples of expanding circle are Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands.

The use of the terms is contrasted with the traditional term of "Standard English". The variety of the language that we call "Standard English" did not emerge until the Middle Ages when London became the political and commercial center of the country in the latter part of the 14th century. Today we witness the use of such terms as "Standard British English" and "Standard American English" only to find that these varieties are used by a small group of people (Crystal, 1995, p. 110). In the wake of globalization, however, the term Standard

English refers to the kind of English language used in the inner circle as the first language.[1] It is to the latter usage the term refers in this paper.

The desire for people to cross the language barrier has long existed. The Tower of Babel in biblical mythology has represented people's yearning for a common language. There have been many attempts to promote a common language used by all people so that universal communication becomes possible. The most notable success has been Esperanto which boasts close to 2 million speakers in about 115 countries in the world. Despite such success, there do not seem to be many people who take this enterprise seriously (although UNESCO recommends the language to its member states). Most people turn to English when there is a need for cross-language communication.

English thus serves the purpose of global communication. A global language, as defined by Crystal (2003) is a language that has developed "a special role that is recognized in every country" (p. 3). According to Crystal (2003), there are two main ways the recognition is achieved: either by being designated the official language, or by being made a primary foreign language to be taught in schools. The countries in the other circle obviously belong to the first situation, and those in the expanding circle belong to the second.

The notion of Global English arises with the recognition that there are more occasions for a nonnative speaker of English to communicate in English with another nonnative speaker than with a native speaker. This is evident from the number of people speaking English as a second language in the outer circle (about 150-300 million) and as a foreign language in the expanding circle (about 100-1000 million), as opposed to the number of native speakers in the inner circle (about 320-380 million). We should also realize that the people in the outer circle and the expanding circle speak English with a purpose, i.e., in commercial or educational situations, which are the arenas of global communication, whereas a proportion of the people in the inner circle do not use the language for this purpose.

Faced with this situation, there arises the question of "language ownership". Traditionally, the English language is considered to be "owned" by the native speakers, that is, people in the inner circle. The native speakers have the sole right to decide the "norm" of the language: they are the "norm providers". However, with the rise of globalization, scholars begin to consider the right of nonnative speakers to contribute to the "norm" of the language. The issue then becomes what should a language teacher teach when faced with a group of nonnative speakers of English: should the teacher teach the norm as it was set up by the native speakers, or should he/she teach the norm considering the nonnative speaker situations?

2. Lingua Franca Core

In this regard, Jenkins (2000) proposes the notion of Lingua Franca Core in which she prioritizes the learning of English pronunciation features in terms of whether they will hinder

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[1] Trudgill and Hannah (1994, p. 1) define Standard English as "the variety of the English language which is normally employed in writing and normally spoken by "educated" speakers of the language." Although they do not seem to view the use of the term from Global English vantage point, the sense of the term is nonetheless appropriate for our purpose.

intelligibility. She summarizes several main pronunciation features of the Lingua Franca Core (Jenkins, 2002, p. 96):

  1) The usual consonantal inventory of English with the following provisos:
   – substitutions of "th" sounds are permissible
   – rhotic "r" rather than non-rhotic "r" is permissible
   – intervocalic [t] rather than "flap" is preferred
   – allophonic variation within phonemes is permissible as long as no confusions will arise.
  2) Phonetic requirements:
   – aspiration following word-initial voiceless stops
   – shortening of vowels before voiceless consonants
  3) Consonant clusters:
   – initial clusters should not be simplified
   – omission in middle and final clusters is permissible if English syllable structure rules are observed
   – intervocalic /nt/ sequence should not be simplified as /n/
   – vowel insertions between consonants are preferred to omissions.
  4) Vowel sounds:
   – maintenance of vowel length contrasts
   – L2 regional qualities are permissible if consistent
  5) Production and placement nuclear stress
   – Appropriate use of contrastive stress to signal meaning

She also specifies some non-core features, which may vary among speaker:

  1) the interdental "th" sounds and the post-vocalic dark "l"
  2) variations in vowel quality, as long as they are used consistently
  3) full vowels in weak syllables need not be reduced to schwa as they tend to help rather than hinder intelligibility
  4) features of connected speech
  5) directions of pitch movement
  6) placement of word stress
  7) stress-timed rhythm

She argues that nonnative speakers using English to communicate should not be bound by the non-core features. When they use the non-core features influenced by their native language accent they should not be considered to have made pronunciation errors. According to Jenkins, these core and non-core features are set up "to scale down the phonological task for the majority of learners" (Jenkins, 2000, p. 123).

3. Problems of Lingua Franca Core

In this paper we would express our reservations for this proposal while we agree with the general intention of approach. We understand that communication is the primary objective for language, and that language forms should be a facilitating factor rather than a deterrent to communication. However, the suggestion for Lingua Franca Core is not likely to be successful, judged from the failure of Basic English proposed by Ogden (1930). The failure of Basic English results from its emphasis on linguistic forms. Ogden suggests that these simplified forms are enough for basic communication. Lingua Franca Core repeats the idea, although Jenkins claims that "The Lingua Franca Core is neither a pronunciation model nor a restricted, simplified core in the style of Quirk's Nuclear English" (Jenkins, 2000, p. 158). Notwithstanding its recognition of the use of non-core features which are not respected in Basic English, the Lingua Franca Core still focuses on linguistic forms. If linguistic forms become the center of attention, core or non-core, they would be pursued by the learners. We are not likely to be able to convince the learners that an accented form of English is OK and respectable. Learners of English will regard these nonnative features as something to take note of, something that need to be improved, rather than something that forms a particular kind of English we may call "Asian English" or "Taiwan English" that is regarded as a variety of English. That is, these features are still going to be considered as "bad English".

Instead of these Lingua Franca Core features, another aspect of Jenkins' (2000) proposal is more noteworthy: that of intelligibility and communication. Of course Lingua Franca Core is proposed to respond to the need of intelligibility while facilitating the learning procedure. But we need to keep in mind that linguistic forms are but a factor in successful communication, albeit an important one. There is no guarantee for a successful communication even if the correct linguistic forms are given. Therefore a reasonable move is to take the learners' attention away from linguistic forms and pay more attention to these nonlinguistic factors which affect communication.

Successful communication involves, besides linguistic forms, respect for and understanding of each other's culture, mutual negotiations in the interaction, and the ability to interpret the intentions of the interlocutor. We believe that these latter abilities must be incorporated in a curriculum/program where English is expected to be taught in a globalization environment.

When the emphasis of English teaching has shifted from linguistic forms to meaning negotiation and accommodation, the linguistic norms need not be a major concern of Global English. The norms that are followed in current curriculum, e.g. British or American "Standard English", need not be modified, and no Lingua Franca Core needs to be established for teaching purposes. There is no need to tell the students not to worry about the pronunciation of *th* because it is a non-core feature. The students still need to be instructed on the pronunciation of the sound, whether they can master it or not. When they hear *think* pronounced, they still need to know that *think* instead of *sink* is said, even though they may (mis)pronounce *think* as *sink*. The important thing is that the students are not prevented from saying *sink* for *think*, knowing that the accented pronunciation is off the target but is still respectable. They may want to improve their pronunciation, but before they can do that, there is no reason not to use the (defect) pronunciation. The hearer will have ample information besides pronunciation to interpret the

word as *think*: the hearer will judge from syntax, from semantics, from pragmatics, and from many other kinds of situational information that *think* instead of *sink* is intended.

Similarly, there is no reason why the pronunciation problem which Jenkins lists as "core feature" cannot be resolved in the same fashion. The vowel length contrast in *pitch* vs. *peach* can be resolved in most cases with pragmatic considerations, notwithstanding the existence of the contrived sentences such as *Jimmy threw a pitch and then ran* and *Jimmy threw a peach and then ran*.[2] Even in cases of possible confusion, such as when *loan word* is misheard as *long word* even though the phrase is properly pronounced, it is not the hearer's sole responsibility to sharpen the ears. The speaker should be concerned whether the communication is successful. If the speaker sees that the communication fails because *loan word* is misheard as *long word*, he/she should find a way to let the hearer understand, perhaps by replacing it with *borrowed word*.

On the other hand, if a nonnative speaker is not able to pronounce *loan word* properly, he/she should have the realization that the pronunciation may cause a misunderstanding. He/She may thus choose to use *borrowed word* instead. If the nonnative speaker lacks this realization, then the hearer should judge from the context whether *loan word* or *long word* is intended.[3]

Of course there may be some specific suggestions where Global English usages may be different from Standard English usages. For example, sentences such as *All that glitters is not gold* or *Everything is not lost* may be (mis)understood as "If you see something glitter, it cannot be gold" and "Nothing is lost", rather than "Not all the things that glitter are gold" and "Some things are lost, not all are lost". Speakers of English, whether native or nonnative, need to be aware of the kind of confusion some sentence structures may cause in the EIL (English as an International Language) situations, and be equipped with means to avoid using them.

An English learner facing a pronunciation feature will try to master it, core or noncore. Jenkins' division into core features and non-core features is one which might or might not cause intelligibility problems. Presumably this division is to advise for teachers to concentrate on the core features and not to mind the students' errors in non-core features. Teachers themselves should also feel comfortable with their own accents if they are not native speakers of English. We believe that to be comfortable with the speakers' own accent, whether teachers or students, is positive and healthy, as it helps the speakers' active attitudes in communication. But this does not mean that they can be satisfied with the kind of English they use. They, as teachers and learners, should still try to improve their English abilities so that they can use a better form when possible. And we can be sure that most learners will try to improve their English when they can. They will say *think* if they are able to master the *th* pronunciation, even if they know that this is a non-core feature. They will not be satisfied with themselves unless they have achieved a certain level of proficiency. What we as English teachers need to imbue in them is the positive and healthy attitude of their using English, that is to be comfortable with their accent and use English actively.

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[2] Examples from *Drills and Exercises in English Pronunciation: Consonants and Vowels* (English Language Services, 1966), p. 36.

[3] For the same reason, we doubt whether the use of *alight* in the subway announcement "Mind the platform gap when alighting" in Taiwan is appropriate, even though this may be the way the phrase is used in inner circle countries. *Alight* is a less familiar word than *get off*, and is an unnecessary complication in EIL situations.

4. Communicative Approach to Language Teaching

This attitude is actually not foreign to language teaching. In the communicative approach to language teaching, communicative competence rather than correct linguistic form is emphasized. Richards (2006, p. 3) summarizes the communicative competence as including the following aspects of language knowledge:

  1) knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions
  2) knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g. knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)
  3) knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g. narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)
  4) knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g. through using different kinds of communication strategies)

The communicative approach is concerned more with "proper" linguistic forms than with "correct" linguistic forms. As Savignon (1991) argues,

> The interest of communication lies . . . in the moves and strategies of the participants. The terms that best represent the collaborative nature of what goes on are *interpretation*, *expression*, and *negotiation* of meaning. The communicative competence needed for participation includes not only grammatical competence, but pragmatic competence. 〔Italics in the original〕 (p. 262).

In the interest of Global English, the pragmatic competence includes the speaker's ability to understand and respect the interlocutor's culture and accent, and no less importantly, to be confident in the speaker's own culture and accent.

It is quite clear that these principles of communicative approach are in accord with the Global English concept. What we need is only to raise the language users' awareness of these principles and be comfortable and confident with the forms of language they use.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that:

  1) The purpose of language is for communication. In teaching English we should not lose sight of the purpose.
  2) Linguistic forms are not the only means we can and should depend on in international communication.
  3) In international communication, we should foster in us the understanding and respect of the interlocutors' cultures.
  4) In teaching English, the norms of Standard English can be followed, with the

understanding that accents and first language interferences should be respected and accepted in communication.

5) Communicative competence, more than linguistic competence, needs to be developed in language classes. Communicative competence includes the ability to interpret, to express, and to negotiate for meaning.

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