Impacting TESOL: The Continuing Evolution and New, “Flexible” Standardization of World Englishes

**Topic Statement**

The many different varieties of the English language known as World Englishes that emerged in the 20th century will continue to evolve pragmatically and realistically in a natural, organic manner – with consistent pluralism and inclusivity, as well as new, flexible standardization – and consequently impact the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) – including through communicative language teaching (CLT) outgrowths, like language learner-centered task-based language learning (TBLL), which focus on and elevate meaning over mere form and bolster self-learning, accountability and confidence of learners of English.

**Thesis**

World Englishes (WE) is a phrase referring to the emergence of distinct, localized or indigenized varieties of the English language that have developed in diverse contexts throughout the world since the mid to late 20th century. These varieties are also known as “global Englishes,” “international Englishes” and “new Englishes,” among other names (Bolton, 2005).

WE is not the same as “world English,” however. That latter phrase signifies use of English as an international language or *lingua franca* (i.e., a working or bridge language) in business, diplomacy, trade and other activities (Modiano, 2009; Crystal, 2007). Nevertheless, whether as WE or world English, no other language approaches the dominance of English as a worldwide, international, intercultural, linguistic phenomenon (Young and Walsh, 2010).

WE has been the described or modeled in a number of ways. Arguably the most effective and influential description/model is Braj Kachru’s “Three Circles of English.” These circles are concentric. They are labeled the: (1) Inner Circle; (2) Outer Circle; and (3) Expanding Circle.

The Inner Circle refers to the spread, or first diaspora, of the English language by its speakers from England to other parts of the world (North America, Australia, New Zealand, etc). It represents the traditional historical and sociolinguistic bases of English, where it is currently used as a primary language and where it is the mother tongue of most people, i.e., native speakers (NS). The Outer Circle means the second diaspora of English via British and American colonization or influence
in Asia and Africa. English is not the native tongue in these locations, which include such countries as Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines and Tanzania. Yet it serves valuably as a lingua franca and in higher education, law, etc. The Expanding Circle takes in countries where English has no historical/governmental role but where, still, it is widely used as a lingua franca/for other purposes. This encompasses most of the rest of the world’s population, including in China, Egypt, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Russia and the continent of Europe (Kachru, 1992).

Although there are no exact statistics as to how many people use English worldwide, rough estimates posit 1-2 billion persons. Perhaps 400-500 million of them are NS. The rest – 600 million to as many as 1.5 billion – are non-native speakers (NNS) using English as an International Language (EIL), or English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Accordingly, there are many different Englishes spoken by many different people around the globe – with mostly NNS conversing between/among themselves in English (Tanaka, 2006). The numbers of these NNS – and their influence on and responsibility for norms and usage in the English language – will only continue to grow with the spread and functions of WE, while the influence of and development by NS will be less and less (Kachru and Smith, 2009). In fact, the variety of English(es) taught/learned lies at the very heart of the “what” of TESOL (Young and Walsh, 2010).

WE will continue to evolve in a natural, organic manner controlled by ecological dictates (Anchimbe, 2009; Sakai and D’Angelo, 2005) – pragmatically and realistically – with consistent, flexible pluralism and inclusivity and “key,” humanistic “attitudes” (Bolton, 2005). These characteristics of WE can, moreover, arguably be realized in teaching certain approaches (i.e., theoretical positions and beliefs about the nature of language, the nature of language learning and the applicability of both to pedagogical settings) and methods (i.e., generalized sets of classroom specifications for accomplishing linguistic objectives). One prominent approach/method, arising as an outgrowth of communicative language teaching (CLT), is task-based language learning (TBLL).

TBLL focuses on/elevates meaning over mere form and bolsters language learner self-learning, accountability and confidence (Willis and Willis, 2001); it can also be assessed conveniently, fairly and reasonably by testing learners before and after implementation (Morrison and White, 2005). Indeed, as TBLL veryvaluably incorporates flexible/“natural” and motivational
aspects, it can keep virtually any level of TESOL students consistently engaged and productive in the classroom. TBLL lesson plans may also be readily designed in ways that – to a great extent – preserve student freedom yet make up for the possible disadvantage of fossilized/stagnated “classroom English” by addressing/focusing on accuracy within task-based methodology and reinforcing “standard,” foundational, English-language forms within the task-based cycle (Willis and Willis, 2001). Extensive, repetitive listening with accompanying, supportive texts will arguably be needed by English language learners in TESOL for increased exposure to and understanding of the many and increasing varieties of WE and – in accord with approaches/methods like TBLL – to raise the learners’ confidence/comfort levels. The means for such listening can include not just audio but also video and the Internet, such as George Mason University’s “Speech Accent Archive” <http://accent.gmu.edu> for valuable comparison and analysis of the accents of different English speakers (Morrison and White, 2005).

The many geographic and other “post-geographic,” activity-dependent contexts based on goal/genre (James, 2008) and the creative “blending” plus innovation (Kachru and Smith, 2009) in the “here and now,” “living” contexts of WE – with their continued multicultural/multilingual/diverse thread of development (such as has always actually occurred in the historical development of the English language anyway) – will require constant balancing through TBLL and other approaches/methods to counter so-called centrifugal/centripetal tendencies of English.

Overall, it will still be necessary to “work at” acquiring English (Davis, 2010). Plus the newly arisen and thriving Englishes – all of which can be considered equally valid/legitimate (Mesthrie, 2006; Tanaka, 2006) – will need to refer to “standards.” Thus, “standard English(es)” will continue to develop, exist and be used by the educated and, therefore, be necessary to use in situations of TESOL (Davies, 1999). Perhaps most significantly, continued belief in standard forms will remain important because both English language learners and their TESOL teachers constitute the core of any “context” (Young and Walsh, 2010).
Bibliography


