

## **SVETIMŲJŲ KALBŲ STUDIJS / STUDIES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

### **Becoming an L2 User: Implications for Identity and Culture in the Language Classroom**

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**Abstract.** Increasingly the goal of both foreign and second language programs is to develop effective language users able to move comfortably between two or more languages and cultures and negotiate the linguistic and cultural differences frequently encountered in an ever more interdependent and multicultural world. While this is true of all language programs, the status of English as a global lingua franca means that this language is now used frequently in contexts where it is not the first or dominant language of any of the interactants. This paper reviews some of the literature exploring this emergence of English as an international lingua franca and discusses the implications for language teachers (and learners) of this change in status of English. The paper focuses in particular on how local uses of English are likely to influence the learners' sense of identity, while its use with other L2 users raises the need for learners to negotiate difference across a range of cultural boundaries rather than between their first culture(s) and those of the various English-speaking cultural communities. This expansion of the contexts in which English is used also has important implications with regard to the choice of appropriate models or standards thus challenging the traditional dominance in TESOL of native speaker norms.

#### **Introduction**

In the "inescapably multicultural world of the twenty-first century" (Lotherington 2004, p. 265), what do we seek to achieve with our language programs? Nayar (2002, p. 475) suggests that "the purpose as well as the goal of English learning in the world is assumed to be to communicate with and to integrate into the native English speaking community". But is "native speaker proficiency" the ultimate goal to which all language learners should aspire? Is it appropriate that

*"bilinguals, in and outside the school, are usually evaluated according to the 'monolingual' competence in their non-native languages" (Cenoz & Genesee 1998, p. 18).*

This seems to be the implication of much second language acquisition (SLA) research which uses the native speaker to provide baseline data against which to measure ultimate attainment (Pillar 2002) and as

*"the representative of correct language acts, authentic pragmatics, proper critical thinking, unassailable rules of elegant social behaviour in English..." (Nayar 2002, p. 466).*

From this perspective, variation from native speaker norms becomes a deficit, the sign of a 'defective communicator' (Firth & Wagner 1997). In the face of such a power dynamic, it is hardly surprising that "only a vanishing small percentage of students ever come close to the 'success' of duplicating native attainment" (Cook 2002b, p. 333).

The native speaker yardstick is, however, increasingly being challenged for its monolingual and monocultural bias (Pillar 2002; Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004), and its implication that one must abandon one social identity in order to acquire another (Byram 2003). In a global and cosmopolitan world,

monolingual purity is more and more difficult to find (Cook 2002a) and even deciding who is or is not a native speaker has become problematic (Rajagopalan 1997; Davies 2003). Wallace (2002, p. 105), for example, argues that the debate about what kind of English to teach has become 'quite arid' "because the kind of English we admire for its elegance and eloquence is frequently not produced by those whose first language it is". Kirkpatrick (2002, p. 220) furthermore argues that "the native speaker is a construct of monolingual societies and is not relevant in the context of multicultural societies... where multilingual people are the norm". In such contexts, it may be more effective to talk of language users (people "exploiting whatever linguistic resources they have for real-life purposes" (Cook 2002a, p. 2)). Cook distinguishes users from learners (who are acquiring a system for later use or for some other purpose such as to gain insight into other cultures or develop general learning skills) and yet increasingly classroom learners are also required to be users as they engage in tasks and interactive activities in real or virtual communities (Hoven & Crawford 2001) and seek to gain sufficient control of the language to find their own individuality in its employment (Eoyang 2003). Thus the expansion of English as a global language and changes in classroom practices are blurring the traditional distinction between foreign and second language contexts.

#### **The Changing Status of English / Englishes**

There are two key reasons for this blurring. Firstly, English has become an ever greater local presence even in contexts in which it is supposedly 'foreign' (i.e. has no formal or official status). Lo Bianco (2002, p. 21) suggests the language has already attained a distance from its original

native speakers. It has a cultural resonance in many parts of the world which make it a local as well as a global language. The result is “a vast array of indigenised, localised practices of communication in which local standards function alongside more international ones”. Hoffmann (2000, p. 14) makes a similar point when she argues that the learning of English in Europe

*“is different from learning any other foreign [sic] language because of the presence of English in [the] environment in the form of pop songs, the youth and drug cultures and, most importantly, television and the Internet”.*

A recent survey in Denmark suggested that 80% of adults hear or listen to English at least once a day (Preisler 1999). Such usage gives English a real presence and purpose in Danish culture.

The second reason for the blurring of the second / foreign language distinction is that, with the worldwide demand for English as an instrument of cross-cultural communication, the desired outcome of many so-called foreign language programs, like their second language counterparts, is intercultural communicative competence (Brumfit 2003; Crystal 2001b). Kandiah (cited in Phillipson 2002, p. 21), for example, describes English as the “indispensable global medium”. The emphasis in more and more language programs is clearly on acquiring

*“a set of interactional skills for language in use; these skills include relating and accommodating to others, observing pragmatic protocol, being sensitive to context so as to access suitable linguistic units, performing in dialogue in appropriate ways and being able to relate the ongoing text (written or spoken) to the user’s own understanding of the world” (Davies 2003, p. 114, emphasis added).*

The global status of English has made intercultural communicative competence increasingly complex and means the task of language teachers is both “more daunting and more inviting” (Eoyang 2003, p. 14). They must deal with the reduction in shared world knowledge that is associated with all transcultural exchanges (Wallace 2002) and help their students accommodate to a whole range of cultural differences and perspectives, not only those from Inner Circle native speakers but also from English speakers from Outer Circle and Expanding Circle nations (Xu 2002; Matsuda 2002). The expansion of English, in other words, raises the question of what is situationally and socially acceptable and who decides this in the ever-expanding range of contexts in which English is being used as a global lingua franca.

Reactions to these developments are part of the ongoing debate between language conservators and language innovators (Butler 2002), those who argue for standardisation / homogenisation / universality as opposed to those who stress difference and variability within and between languages (Crystal 2001a; Wallace 2002). If English is to function as a global language, a certain level of standardisation is necessary in order to maintain intelligibility. This can come, however, at the cost of local varieties and underpins the pessimistic view of globalisation and the spread of English as causing “linguistic genocide” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000) and bringing about a “cultural Chernobyl” (Chiti-Batelli 2003, p. 140). This creates a dilemma for many learners. English may be

indispensable for pragmatic purposes, (Kandiah, cited in Phillipson 2002) but is not a culturally or ideologically neutral medium. If the language is taught uncritically, users run the

*“apparently unavoidable risk of co-option, of acquiescing in the negation of their own understanding or reality and in the accompanying denial or even subversion of their own interests” (Kandiah, cited in Phillipson 2002, p. 21).*

Roy (2003), for example, details how standardisation in a Canadian call centre has entailed a devaluation of the way Canadian francophones speak and use their language in their own community. At the same time, the push to define a bilingual as “someone who is able to speak two languages in a standard way” (Roy 2003, p. 278) has created a mismatch for students of French in Canada because many jobs actually need local varieties for interaction at the local service interface (Heller 2002). Notions of what is appropriate, in other words, are not self-evident or uncontested and must be understood with reference to relations of power between interlocutors in different contexts (Norton Pierce 1995). Language teachers have a key role in exploring such issues with their students and engaging in the ongoing debate about the place of English and other languages in their community.

At the same time, the pervasive spread of English as a lingua franca (ELF) (that is, English used in interactions between speakers for none of whom it is the mother tongue (Seidlhofer 2002)) may well undermine the ability of any native speaker version to become a world standard. Rajagopalan (2004, p. 115) describes World English (WE) as “a hotchpotch of dialects and accents at different stages of nativization”. Seidlhofer (2002) contends that, in Europe, ELF is already a potentially distinct variety with its own norms of usage which need to be investigated, described and taught. This has important implications for the TESOL industry and what teachers need to know to meet learner needs.

Linguists continue to debate the status of different varieties. Brumfit (2003, p. 116), for example, claims native speaker Englishes are already potentially “sub-dialects” because “statistically, native speakers are in a minority for language use, and thus in practice for language change, for language maintenance, and for the ideologies and beliefs associated with the language”. Crystal (2001b), on the other hand, suggests we have a written international standard (World Standard Print English) but not yet a spoken standard. Davies (2003) does not accept that what he calls International English is a separate variety but rather the product of the use of different standard Englishes. He does, however, suggest that we need to give diverse dialects greater local authority and validity. Kirkpatrick (2002), likewise, argues for greater diversity on the grounds that non-native speakers have a right to culturally appropriate varieties of English which reflect their own regional uses of the language. This, of course, represents a further development of English varieties and reduces the intrinsic advantages of native speakers (Cook 2002b). Indeed, “being a rigorously monolingual speaker of English may actually turn out to be a disadvantage when it comes to getting by in WE [World English]” (Rajagopalan 2004, p. 116).

These changes raise a number of issues for all language teachers, but particularly those teaching English. This

paper considers three of these: the question of identity, the negotiation of difference and the choice of an appropriate model or standard.

### Language and Identity

Huelsen (1992) distinguishes between languages for communication and languages of identification and argues that English is the former in ELF contexts but potentially the latter when native speakers are involved. Many contend that use of an international language does not necessarily entail acceptance of the values of the society from which it originates (Cook 2001).

*"Being proficient in English does not mean that one has to be bicultural: a superficial knowledge of Anglo-Saxon culture is sufficient, there is no need to develop feelings of dual identity and shared loyalties" (Hoffmann 2000, p. 20).*

Such distinctions between language and culture, however, may be misleading. Kramsch (cited in Lo Bianco 2003, p. 23), for example, claims that language is the central vehicle of culture, which she defines as "linguistically mediated membership [in] a discourse community that is both real and imagined". Learning a language even simply as a means of communication involves opting for a relationship with some kind of language-using community (Brumfit 2003) and thus involves a two-way process with the language both a bearer and a mediator of that community's socio-cultural attitudes, values and beliefs. Just as identity prompts communication, so communication creates and alters identity (Abrams et al. 2002). It may be inappropriate, therefore, to see English as a 'neutral lingua franca' (Phillipson 2002) as its use gives access to additional discourse communities in which the speaker has to negotiate a voice.

Kirkpatrick (2002) also raises the issue of access and challenges the over-emphasis on native-speaker communities. Users of ELF will not just (or perhaps at all) relate with such communities. They will, however, need to negotiate accepted sociocultural conventions in a variety of ELF communities if they are to communicate successfully and identify with such communities (Kramsch & Thorne 2002). Block (2003, p. 64) likewise argues that communication is never just referential but is also interactional / relational / interpersonal "at the service of the social construction of self-identity, group membership, solidarity, support, trust and so on". As an increasingly local language in many contexts, English has a status of its own. Preisler (1999), for example, found that the major British and American varieties of English have symbolic value in Denmark as intracultural markers of class-related or subcultural style. Kirkpatrick (2002) has looked at the regional value of English in Asia where, he contends, the vast majority of people learn the language with the express purpose of being able to communicate with fellow non-native speakers in the region and beyond. He suggests, therefore, that curricula should focus more on local varieties in order to negotiate the cultures and pragmatic norms relevant in the region rather than those associated with so-called native speakers.

Such a regional focus to learning a second language will still potentially add to the learners' repertoire of possible identities. It may, for example, complicate and destabilise previous awareness (Brumfit 2003) or call into question

"the values acquired as part of socialisation into a national identity" (Byram 2001, p. 93). One of the major impacts of globalisation has been its challenge to the naturalness and inevitability of a unilingual world view (Lo Bianco 2000) and the increasing need for people to engage in the crafting of multilingual, multicultural identities (Kramsch 2002). Speakers of additional languages are "by definition members (central or marginal) of multiple language communities" (Kanno 2000, p. 3) and need to negotiate their identity (or identities) across diverse languages and the diverse contexts in which they are used.

Language classes that are acquisition-oriented and involve cross-cultural encounters therefore also involve identity negotiation. They are "sites where identities are produced and changed" and these identities are "multiple and shifting and tied to language and learning" (Pennycook 2000, p. 99). Such classes become "global contact zones" in which people with disparate historical trajectories and cultural identities "meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (Pratt, cited in Singh & Doherty 2004, p. 11). If, as Cook (2001, p. 179) argues, the goal of language programs is to "equip people to use two languages, without losing their own identity" or becoming "ersatz native speakers", teachers and students need to acknowledge such multicultural differences and explore the role of English in their own lives rather than just focusing on the target culture.

### Negotiation of Difference

The increasing cultural hybridity of many societies has changed many of the contexts of use of English and, therefore, also changed the possible discourse communities with which learners might engage. This has resulted in

*"a shift... towards a notion of a communicative competence where the communication is defined by the capacity of individuals of different cultures to interact" (Brumfit 2003, p. 120, emphasis added).*

Such intercultural or transcultural interaction is a complex dialogic process (Carr 1999) and can only be achieved by using language to explore differences so that other people's ways of doing things become "senseful" (Gee 1993). This requires being able and willing to "reconstruct the context of the foreign, take the others' perspective and see things through their eyes". This does not mean becoming like them but does imply being "able to distance ourselves from our own categories, values and interests" (Bredella 2003, p. 29) so that these do not distort our ability to negotiate meaning both in terms of self expression and understanding interlocutors.

Interaction of this kind will almost inevitably involve language change as well as identity change. Ramly et al. (2002), for example, describe developments in Asia where the presence of English as a regional lingua franca has resulted in both 'nativisation' of English and 'Englishisation' of local languages. Cameron (2002) likewise warns that the ubiquity of English means that any push for 'a uniform way of talking' in the global community may result in Englishisation, even when the English language itself is not being used. While largely unavoidable, such developments can be viewed

as either negative or positive. As Milroy (2001, p. 550) argues, “there are no objective (non-ideological) criteria for distinguishing between ‘corruptions’ and ‘changes’”.

Corruption or change will also occur as ELF speakers coin expressions or use genres which may not be conventional in ‘native speaker’ contexts. Genres are potentially mediators between the local and the global and therefore can be a major source of misunderstanding.

*“Without a knowledge and understanding of [...] genres, no ‘understanding of each other’s lives’ and no reconfiguration of one’s own is possible” (Kramsch & Thorne 2002, p. 100).*

Key issues become whose genres will prevail and how L2 users (and native speakers when they are involved) can negotiate local uses across cultural boundaries. Genuine communication between different people requires an agreement to recognise alternative conceptual frameworks and cultural assumptions (Brumfit 2003). Language programs must develop the critical skills necessary for this, including the ability to deal with culturally variable genres, so that English can be used to construct discourses of solidarity which “promote negotiation and collaboration among [all] participants” rather than discourses of power which “promote authority and confrontation and pursue goals of some participants at the expense of others” (de Beaugrande 1997, p. 2).

The dilemma for speakers of English as a global language becomes how to achieve intelligibility without losing their sense of local identity (Crystal (2001b).

This is not easy to achieve. Kubota (2002) suggests globalisation in Japan has led to both diversity through tourism, travel and migration and homogenisation through Americanisation and even nationalism. While English in Japan is the foreign language, it is often taught as a means to foster national identity and present Japanese uniqueness to the rest of the world rather than necessarily to acknowledge the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of the local society let alone of the wider world.

*“While the discourse of kokusaika [internationalisation] promotes Anglicization, it also reinforces cultural nationalism through constructing a rigid cultural boundary between Us and Them” (Kubota 2002, p. 23).*

In neither case does this reflect the multicultural complexity of the 21st century and the need for citizens to communicate effectively using the global lingua franca. In an increasingly interdependent and yet divided world it is not enough to be aware of difference, we also badly need to be able to negotiate some sort of understanding across such difference.

### Appropriate Models

If our goal is to develop interculturally competent users of English as a lingua franca, we may need to rethink the models of language provided to achieve this end. Cook (2001, p. 179), for example, suggests “the model for language teaching should be the fluent L2 user, not the native speaker”. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. 632) likewise argues that teachers must be L2 users: “A monolingual teacher teaching students who are to become bilingual or multilingual is by definition an incompetent teacher”. Kirkpatrick (2002, p.

222) is also in favour of local multilingual teachers because of their socio-cultural understanding and their ability to provide “an appropriate and attainable model of the language”. If non-native speakers have rights to culturally appropriate varieties of English, fashioned by the non-native speakers themselves and in which local people have a voice and are portrayed using English with fellow non-native speakers in real settings, then “the regional vernacular or variety should become the taught variety and [...] should provide the models and the materials” (Kirkpatrick 2002, p. 222). Learners may be introduced to external cultures and varieties of English – indeed will need to develop receptive competence in many Englishes (Phillipson 2002) – but these do not need to serve as models for their own use.

Day (2003) challenges what he calls the ‘cult of authenticity’ in materials production. The demand for authentic materials was a response to both our understanding that language is responsive to the context in which it is being used and the cultural purposes of its users and evidence that textbook language is often contrived (Gilmore 2004). While authentic materials, as instances of language in use, include a full range of discourse features, it is important that materials reflect the diversity of contexts in which the language is learnt and used (McKay 2003). Day suggests that we should aim for appropriateness rather than authenticity and consider which variety / varieties of English is / are most appropriate for a given group of students. This fits with Hudson & Bruckman’s (2002, p. 116) more general and situated definition of authenticity in terms of four dimensions: Personally-meaningful learning (corresponding to the desires and goals of individual learners); ‘Real-world’ activities (which can be clearly tied back to other aspects of the learners’ lives); Discipline-oriented behaviour (learning is a matter of becoming a member of some sort of community); and Non-artificial assessment (i.e. related to the activities and skills learned). Such a framework clearly reduces the learner / user distinction and challenges definitions of authenticity as materials produced for and by native speakers for non-teaching purposes. This broader view of authenticity also requires that teachers create an appropriate L2 user environment which reflects the local contexts in which learners will use their second language.

Growing awareness of the importance of local context and regional varieties is evident in a recent project designed to improve the proficiency of teachers in ASEAN countries (Poedjosoedarmo 2003). While initially the project used American and British accents only, the range was finally expanded to include Indian, Filipino, Singaporean and Indonesian speakers as models for the teachers.

Such decisions, however, run counter to the standard language ideology (Milroy 2001) and the associated problem accentedness can cause in the exclusion of foreigners from qualified employment (Boyd 2003). The job market (McKay 2003) and current teaching resources (Xu 2002) frequently privilege a native variety standard. Xu (2002), for example, surveyed 40 college texts in China and found 80% by American authors or taken from American sources while 17.5% were by British authors / sources. Only one was unsourced but probably British. Xu (2002, p. 233) concludes that this emphasis on target culture texts means there is “no

space for authors from the outer or expanding circles” and no opportunity to work with local varieties of English or with texts reflecting local culture. Matsuda (2002) found similar results in her analysis of the language varieties, users and uses of English in seven EFL textbooks in Japan. All seven almost exclusively represented American English. In terms of language users, the majority were either from Japan or the Inner Circle, with the latter assigned “bigger roles” and involved in almost all the international uses and the majority of intranational uses. Speakers from the Outer or Expanding Circle were largely absent. Again, the assumption seems to be that learners will use their second language to interact with native speakers rather than with other L2 users. Such materials also perpetuate the standard language ideology and fail to prepare learners for the multicultural reality of language use in many contexts.

## Conclusion

Language teachers live in interesting times where there is ongoing debate about the place of English in many countries. As the demand for proficiency in the global lingua franca increases, teachers need to consider the broader ramifications of their programs. The expansion of English is both changing local languages and challenging the hold of native speaker varieties in language education. Teachers need to ensure learners explore the local uses of their L2 as well as broader international uses. This requires the use of much more multicultural materials and an approach that critically explores cultural differences in a range of discourse communities. If teachers do not acknowledge the increasing diversity of English users they risk failing to meet the language needs of different groups in different contexts. Likewise, they cannot ignore the sociocultural implications of the choices they and their students make and need to become advocates for both greater intercultural understanding and ongoing linguistic diversity.

Language programs should aim to develop proficient L2 users who can cross cultural borders and appropriate their L2 to their own ends. This will require considerable discussion of what standards are appropriate in different contexts and programs will need to focus on developing intercultural competence which allows learners to negotiate meaning with the diverse range of L2 users they are likely to encounter both locally and in broader contexts. Such interaction will have an impact on the speakers’ sense of identity and will be either additive or subtractive. To ensure it is the former, the learners’ bilingual status needs to be acknowledged for what it is – a skill which allows them to use two languages and so do and say things beyond the scope of the monolingual native speaker (Cook 2002b). Such a use of language will only be achieved if we challenge the myth of the native speaker as the sole arbiter of language norms and engage learners in discourses that acknowledge the place of all their languages and help them achieve understandings across cultural boundaries both locally and internationally.

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### Kaip tapti antrosios kalbos vartotoju: tapatumo ir kultūros reikšmė kalbos mokymui

Santrauka

Tiek užsienio, tiek antrosios kalbos programose vis dažniau keliamas tikslas išugdyti tokius kalbos vartotojus, kurie galėtų laisvai naudoti dvi ar daugiau kalbas, gerai pažinotų jų kultūrą ir sugebėtų įveikti lingvistinius ir kultūrinius skirtumus, su kuriais dažnai yra susiduriama vis labiau tarpusavyje susieta me skirtingų kultūrų pasaulyje. Kadangi tai tinka visoms kalbų programoms, anglų kalba, kaip pasaulinis kalbos mišinys, reiškia, kad ši kalba dabar yra dažnai naudojama kontekstuose, kur ji jau nėra pirmoji ar dominuojanti bet kurio bendravimo kalba. Šiame straipsnyje yra apžvelgta literatūra, nagrinėjanti anglų kalbos, kaip kalbos mišinio, atsiradimą ir aptariamą kalbos mokytojų (ir studentų) dalyvavimą anglų kalbos statuso pasikeitimu. Ypatingas dėmesys straipsnyje yra skiriamas tam, kaip vietiniai gyventojai, vartojantys anglų kalbą, įtakoja besimokančiojo tapatumą, kai tuo tarpu jos vartojimas su kitais L2 vartotojais sąlygoja besimokančiųjų norą įveikti kultūrų įvairovės skirtumus, priešingai nei tarp jų pirmos kultūros ir skirtingų angliška

kalbančių kultūrinių bendruomenių. Kontekstų, kur naudojama anglų kalba, plitimas taip pat yra labai reikšmingas atitinkamų modelių ar standartų pasirinkimo požiūriu, nes tuo būdu yra metamas iššūkis tradicinių gimtosios kalbos normų dominavimui mokant anglų kalbos.

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