

## **Non-native-speaker teachers and English as an International Language**

Enric Llurda *University of Lleida*

This article reviews the recent literature on English as an International Language (EIL), taking into consideration the main implications of such literature for English language teaching. Relevant research on non-native-speaker (NNS) teachers is discussed, together with their role in the context of the global need for English language teachers, specially in EFL countries. It is claimed that the confluence of recent research on EIL, together with the increasing appreciation of NNS teachers – both in ESL and EFL contexts – are creating the right conditions for the gradual acceptance of English as a Lingua Franca, with the consequence of a decrease in the role of native-speaker teachers in setting the principles and norms on which this lingua franca will be taught in the future.

### **English as an International Language**

Without any doubt, the way English is perceived all over the world has recently undergone a great deal of change. In arenas devoted to multilingualism and to the preservation of the wealth and variety of languages in the world, criticism is commonly made of the aggressive expansion of English at the cost of other languages, which has prompted some scholars to use the labels 'killer language' (Pakir 1991; Mühlhäusler 1996) and 'tyrannosaurus rex' (Swales 1997) to refer to it. In less politically charged domains, linguists are also paying attention to the current situation of English as a global language (Crystal 1997) and developing models that help us speculate about its future evolution (Graddol 1997, 2001). Likewise, language researchers and educators are increasingly embracing the fact that English is spoken by more people as an L2 than as a mother tongue, and, consequently, they are taking on board the notion that English is no longer exclusively owned by the native-speaking communities but that its ownership is also shared by newly arrived members of the English-speaking community (i.e. non-native speakers), who therefore have a right to be heard in matters affecting the language (Widdowson 1994).

The powerful consequences of such a groundbreaking idea are still to be seen in full, but many changes are starting to take place in the areas of language teaching and language testing, as is clear from a recent study by

Major et al. (2002), commissioned and funded by the ETS<sup>1</sup>. In that study, the authors compare results on the Test of Spoken English obtained by speakers of four different languages (English, Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish) on four different versions of the test: one in which the recorded passage was produced by native speakers of American English, and three more produced by speakers of each of the three other languages represented in the sample of test takers. Even though the results and the interpretations provided by the authors are far from conclusive, the potential implications of this study are profound. But even more significant is the fact that the study was commissioned in the first place, which indicates a growing acknowledgement of the existence of the huge number of non-native English speakers and the need to incorporate their voices into mainstream English language teaching and language testing.

Another indication of the increasing interest in the global expansion of English is the frequent use of the term World English in the literature, together with English as an International Language (EIL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), although with different degrees of consensus regarding the appropriateness of these terms (Eoyang 1999; Modiano 1999; Seidlhofer 2001). Eoyang, for instance, does not support the use of the term *lingua franca*, which he sees as being attached to the idea of an impure mixture of languages. As for the use of the term World English, Eoyang distinguishes among three different ways of being global: "through universality, widespread comprehensibility, and comprehensivity" (1999: 26). He comments further on this distinction and finally claims that "English is far from being a universal language" (*ibid.*), nor is it considered to be particularly widely comprehensible; therefore Eoyang concludes that it is the size of the language – that is, its comprehensivity – that earns it the right to be called World English. His claim is, however, marred by a discussion of the positive economic effects of the liberal approach which has traditionally been taken by English speakers (and more recently by Japanese speakers) to the incorporation of new vocabulary items from other languages. To such a claim, Edwards (2001: 11) responds by stating that "[I]anguages of 'wider communication' have no special linguistic capabilities to recommend them; they are simply the varieties of those who have power and prestige". Seidlhofer (2001), in contrast, shows a greater enthusiasm for the labeling of English as a *lingua franca*, and Modiano (1999) concentrates on the idea of EIL.

Brutt-Griffler (2002) has recently made an important contribution to understanding the development of World English, seeing it as the consequence of a process of macroacquisition by several speech communities in the world. Her view contradicts Phillipson's (1992) seminal work on linguistic imperialism, which blamed the colonial powers for extending the use of English worldwide. Brutt-Griffler looks at the spread of English from the point of view of the main characters in that process, which she refuses to consider as passive recipients of a colonial language but rather as active agents of appropriation of the language. Her interpretation of the reasons English became the

preferred language at international levels is rooted in the desire by whole speech communities across the world to acquire the language as part of their struggle to be freed from their colonial burden. As great a paradox as it may appear, she quite reasonably argues that colonized people have used the colonizers' language as a fundamental tool in their quest for freedom. Brutt-Griffler's arguments are strongly based on Kachru's (1983, 1990) research on indigenized varieties of English, but she integrates Kachru's ideas into her comprehensive framework of language change as an expression of common language acquisition by whole speech communities – that is, macroacquisition – which does not lead to language extinction but to bilingualism.

Within this context, EIL is becoming established as the appropriate term to refer to most of the current uses of English worldwide, especially in those situations involving non-native speakers interacting in English both with native speakers and other non-native speakers. Although EIL as such is still far from being a coherent, concise language variety, some attempts are being made to establish what the basic traits of this variety are. Jenkins (2000) has taken up the ambitious task of describing the phonology of such an international variety of the language, and although her proposals do not enjoy the consensus of the entire linguistics community, they offer rich ideas that will stir debate and consequently further the establishment of EIL as a recognized variety. Another researcher who is also intensely devoted to the promotion of EIL is Seidlhofer, who is currently working on a corpus of English used as a lingua franca, the Vienna–Oxford ELF Corpus (Seidlhofer 2001), which should provide a basis for describing English as it is used by non-native speakers from different language backgrounds in international settings.

If we look more closely at the European Union, proposals are being made on the progressive establishment of a common lingua franca variety which some have already labeled Euro-English (James 2000; Jenkins et al. 2001). This variety would be used specifically in situations of international communication within the EU and would as such be different from English as it is spoken in the UK or in any other English-speaking country. This variety is emerging in spite of the lack of any official language planning or policy by EU institutions and regardless of the efforts by different EU members to promote and protect their own national languages (Ammon 1994). In fact, this lack of a policy is giving way to a *de facto* establishment of English as the working language and most commonly used lingua franca within the EU (Ammon 1994; Ammon and McConnell 2002; Phillipson 2003).

### **Effects of EIL on language teaching**

The transformation of English from being the language of a few powerful countries (i.e. the UK, USA) to becoming the international language it is today has brought with it many changes in the language teaching profession, which is trying to adapt to the new EIL environment and the new demands of its

learners. Proposals are currently being made to move beyond the native speaker as the model in language teaching (Cook 1999, *in press*) since, in the context of EIL, native speakers are only a part of the much larger group of speakers of the language. In fact, as Modiano (1999) argues, proficiency in speaking English is no longer determined by birth but by the capacity to use the language properly, a capacity that is shared by some – but not all – speakers, be they native or non-native.

Proposals aimed at incorporating new formulations of EIL into language teaching especially emphasise the need to draw on the previous knowledge of the language learner through exploiting their knowledge of their own language and culture. McKay (2000, 2003) proposes devoting time and attention in class to the learners' own culture as a means of empowering them and giving them the opportunity to share their own culture with other speakers of English. Likewise, Dendrinis (2001) claims that English lessons in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts must endow students with the capacity to move freely from their L1 to the L2 and vice versa. She claims that learners of EIL will not be monolingual users of the newly acquired language, as they will have to act as interpreters or simply report in one language on information they will have processed in the other. Therefore, language classrooms must necessarily provide the conditions for them to practice these skills, rather than focussing on an artificially monolingual communicative setting. This is in line with the recent appreciation of L1 use and code-switching as a valuable pedagogical tool in the classroom (Auerbach 1993; Baiget et al. 1998; Cook 2001), and with Widdowson's claims that language authenticity goes beyond mere reproduction of native-speaker usage, as "the language that is authentic for native speaker users cannot possibly be authentic for learners" (1998: 711).

According to Kachru (1992: 362), "what is needed is a shift of two types: a paradigm shift in research and teaching, and an understanding of the sociolinguistic reality of the uses and users of English". Even the traditional notion of communicative competence has been called into question in the new environment of EIL (Alptekin 2002). Researchers on language teaching have moved from an emphasis on teaching learners the cultural aspects associated with the L2 as well as the pragmatic and discourse particularities of the native-speaker community (such as politeness in the UK or informality in American business English) to asking for a change in the formulation of communicative competence. In Alptekin's words:

Only by producing instructional materials that emphasize diversity both within and across cultures can one perhaps avoid presenting English meanings in fragmented and trivialized ways, where communicative functions are conceived as simple speech acts realized through specific structures, and where situational content generally portrays an idealized image of the English-speaking culture. It is perhaps time to rid the ELT field of its educational vision and practices based on a utopian notion of

communicative competence involving idealized native speaker norms in both language and culture. (Alptekin 2002: 60)

### **The role of non-native-speaker teachers in EIL teaching**

The role of non-native speakers in language education has been appraised in such initiatives as the 1991 Statement on Non-Native Speakers of English and Hiring Practices and the constitution of The Non-Native English Speakers in TESOL (NNEST) Caucus in 1998.

Books such as Medgyes' (1994) and Braine's (1999) have greatly contributed to the interest in non-native speakers' positive role in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language. With the increasing establishment of English as the world lingua franca, non-native speakers will be in optimal positions to lead their students into the realm of EIL. Teachers of EIL should incorporate instructional materials and activities rooted in local as well as international contexts that are familiar and relevant to language learners' lives (Alptekin 2002). In addition – paraphrasing Kramsch (1997) – non-native-speaker teachers are endowed with the privilege of bilingualism, as their experience of switching back and forth from their own language to the target one enhances their understanding of the demands of the learning situation. Non-native speakers have lived through the process of becoming bilingual and expressing themselves in different languages. English learners will become speakers of EIL, through which they will express their own selves in a multilingual world that uses English as the means of expression and as the instrument for interaction among people from disparate cultures. Non-native-speaker teachers are the ones who are inherently endowed with better expertise in guiding this process.<sup>2</sup>

Some critical voices have denounced the inequality derived from the dominance of English worldwide (e.g. Phillipson 1992) and have implicitly blamed language teachers (among whom non-native speakers are also included) for such an unfair promotion of one language at the expense of the others. However, as Rajagopalan (1999) quite rightly points out, ELT professionals in general, and non-native-speaker teachers in particular, should not feel ashamed of doing their job. Instead, they should make sure that a multicultural, critical perspective is maintained in the process of teaching and learning English. The issue is complex, as teachers may become unwitting instruments of dominant interests. It is true that power can be exercised both through coercion and through consent, and teachers may be consenting in maintaining the power inequality among languages simply by accepting established practices without question (Fairclough 1989).

Non-native-speaker teachers have been reported to have several advantages over native speakers, especially over those who are monolingual speakers of English. As Kramsch (1999: 34) puts it, "it is the teaching of ESL within an assimilationist ideology that has canonized (or beatified) the

native speaker around the world”, but an alternative is clearly possible. Most non-native-speaker teachers, in both ESL and EFL contexts, have an adequate level of language proficiency to perform their task. However, if we pause to reflect on the options that lie ahead of them in the new framework of EIL, rather than ESL or EFL, we will see that many teachers in EFL settings (particularly non-native speakers) do not seem to be very sensitive to the new perspectives that are opening up in front of them, and are still anchored in the old native-speaker dominated framework in which British or American norms have to be followed and native speakers are considered the ideal teachers.

In a study conducted with over 100 non-native EFL teachers working in primary and secondary schools in a mid-size city in Catalonia (Llurda and Huguet 2003), it was found that Catalan teachers still give greater value to the knowledge of the culture of Britain than to their own culture or that of other European countries. This is probably related to the fact that university departments in Spain (and most likely in many other European countries) are still devoting greater attention to traditional native-speaker cultures and literatures (i.e. British and American) than to those of other countries where English is also used (Llurda in press a). It may be argued that an English language class in a European country need not focus on the learners’ culture, but as McKay (2000) convincingly argues, students may have to use English in order to explain their culture to foreigners, and therefore they need to be trained to do so. On the other hand, TESOL programs in North America tend to offer limited discussion space to issues directly affecting non-native speakers, and little attention is paid to the teaching of English in EFL contexts (Govardhan et al. 1999), even though about one third of students in their programs are non-native speakers, many of whom are probably going to go back to their countries of origin (Polio 1994; Liu 1999; Llurda in press b).

Until fairly recently, it was common in the literature to read the expression ‘ambassador’ to refer to the role of English language teachers. Teachers had to be the ambassadors of the ‘English culture’ in the classroom; that is, they had to teach the language and, side by side, introduce the social conventions, ideologies, and cultural expectations of the English-speaking community. Not much thought was given in such accounts to what the ‘English-speaking community’ was, or whether such a homogeneous community had ever existed. In Europe, the focus was on an idealized form of British culture, values, and society, heavily based on older stereotypes from Britain’s imperial days. In other parts of the world, idealized visions of the ‘English-speaking community’ were either the same as in Europe or followed an equally idealized description of American culture and values. Thus, the language teacher had to be an ambassador of either British or American stereotypical values. Fortunately, this way of thinking is changing rapidly as language teaching theory gradually incorporates the consequences of accepting the globalness of English, and language teachers are no longer called on to act as ambassadors of the foreign culture. At best, they are

identified as 'mediators' between the learners' source and target culture, a term that suggests the existence of a conflict. And, in fact, all language learning situations entail such a conflict. As Schumann (1978) pointed out, language learning is closely connected to the process of acculturation. The implication of this is that learning a new language means embracing a new culture, and such a process cannot happen without a certain amount of conflict. No matter how covert this conflict may be, the acquisition of a new language poses a threat to the existing linguistic status quo of the learners, and therefore to the very foundations of their own identity. Teachers are responsible for presenting the multifaceted reality in which the new language is used and for helping the learner express their own identity through this newly acquired voice. In this context, the way that code-switching is handled in the classroom will be of paramount importance, as it will greatly contribute to the learners becoming multicompetent speakers (Cook 1992).

### Final remarks

Non-native speakers of English currently outnumber native speakers, so we can argue that there are more speakers of EIL than speakers of English as a native language. It's true that many different levels of proficiency may exist among those non-native speakers, and no serious counting has been undertaken to date regarding the actual number of proficient non-native English speakers. However, the vast majority of the many millions of non-native speakers of English are not conscious of being speakers of EIL. Rather, they perceive themselves as speakers – with a higher or lower degree of success, or 'corruption' – of a native variety of the language. I contend that the day non-native speakers of English become aware of their status as speakers of EIL, native-speaker control of the language will disappear, and non-native speakers will feel entitled to the authoritative use of a variety of the language that belongs to them. When that happens, native speakers will need to learn the conventions of EIL in order to communicate successfully with the larger community of English language speakers.

A somewhat different – but still valid – example can be found in what happened in Europe fifteen centuries ago when the Roman empire collapsed and the different communities all over Europe that had embraced the use of Latin continued to do so without paying respect to the original source of the language (i.e. Rome). Although their own varieties of Latin evolved, they managed to keep using Latin as a lingua franca for almost 1000 years. The parallel with EIL is that these countries did not mimic the evolution and changes that Latin was experiencing on the Italian peninsula. Instead, they kept to the international form of the language, which the people of the former heartland of the Roman empire also had to learn in order to communicate with their European neighbors. My point is that English has reached such a level of internationalization that local changes in the heartland should not be

transferred to the international use of the language, and changes caused by the international nature of the language should be learned by members of the native-speaking communities. In other words, EIL must become a stabilized variety. The conditions for this are already in place. The political and military decline experienced by the Roman empire in the fifth century finds no match in the current situation of absolute control of the global political and military scene by the USA. Still, the linguistic situation is fairly comparable and may provide a good reference point for what would be a natural further step in the development of English as a world lingua franca.

Critics of the generalised use of English as a lingua franca in Europe are concerned about the loss of identity of the different peoples and cultures which characterise Europe and fear the permeation of American values into European life-styles. This is, of course, a highly political stance, as it attaches a negative value to Americanisation, or Macdonaldisation as some authors call it (Ritzer 1996). However, what opponents of the spread of English as a lingua franca in Europe fail to see is the fact that a language can be used separately from its original culture and ideology. In other words, accepting the language does not necessarily mean having to accept the dominant ideology of the country/ies the language comes from. An example of the possibility of detaching language and ideology can be found in the case of Basque nationalist groups. Even some radical supporters of an independent Basque nation frequently use Spanish as their language of communication. Quite often they simply lack the proficiency to use Basque comfortably. However, their ideology is as far away from the dominant Spanish ideology as it could be. The use of Spanish does not affect the outcome of their political discourse. Similarly, English can be used as a tool for linguistic unity without compromising cultural, historical, or ideological diversity. By doing so, minority cultures will find it easier to have their voice heard on the international stage. Otherwise, they will probably be condemned to cultural obscurity.

## Notes

1. ETS is the agency responsible for the elaboration and implementation of – among others – the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign language) and the Test of Spoken English, which are required by most North American universities before accepting any non-native speaker into their programs.
2. In EFL contexts, this is also true of native speakers who have been long established in the local community and have learned its language.

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Enric Llurda  
 Departament d'Anglès i Lingüística  
 Universitat de Lleida  
 P. Víctor Siurana 1  
 25003 Lleida  
 Catalonia – Spain  
 e-mail: ellurda@dal.udl.es

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