ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE (EIL) AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

The nature of English as an International Language (EIL) has significant implications in the area of English Language Teaching (ELT). The current essay will review the implications of EIL in three different areas: research on attitudes towards varieties of English, research on methods of improving non-native speakers' intelligibility, English teaching curriculum and materials for teaching pronunciation. Despite the debate of appropriateness of native speakers' accent as models for teaching pronunciation, the findings from most of the research on attitudes towards varieties of English suggest the students' preferences towards native speakers' accent. In the mean time, the research on methods of improving non-native speakers' intelligibility indicate the necessity of giving more emphasis on teaching suprasegmental features such as intonation and stress to non-native speakers. At the curriculum level, although the experts have proposed some ideas of how EIL should be, the implementation of such curriculum might be difficult to realize in some countries. With regards to pronunciation teaching materials, many English practitioners recommend the use of authentic materials that incorporate students' local culture in the classroom.

Key words: *EIL, varieties of English, intelligibility, and non-native speaker.*

1. Introduction

English has achieved a prestigious place as an International language not only through voyages of expedition thousands of years ago but also because of the economic development in the twentieth centuries along with the power of media (Crystal, 2000: 24-25). With regards to English as International language (EIL) McKay points out:

International English is used by native speakers of English and bilingual users of English for cross-cultural communication.

International English can be used both in a local sense between speakers of diverse cultures and languages within one country and in a global sense between speakers from different countries. (in Seidlhofer 2003: 8)

In terms of ownership, no countries have the right to claim English as their language as it is an international language. As stated by Widdowson "The very fact that English is an International language means no nation can have custody over it" (in McKay 2000:7).

According to Seildhofer (2003:3) other terms that can be used interchangeably with EIL are English as a lingua franca, English as a global language, English as a world language, English as a medium of intercultural communication, and World English.

English as International Language (EIL) might be just a fancy term for almost everybody knows what it means. However, EIL indeed has a significant implication for the English teaching area. The fact that nowadays the number of non-native speakers outnumbers native speakers and in the international context interactions mostly take place between non-native speakers, means that, there is a need to reconsider adopting native speaker accent for the purpose of teaching English as International Language.

There are a number of reasons for not always relying on 'native speakers' norm'. According to Graddol the term "native speaker" has declined (in Graddol & Meinhof, 1999:1). First, the number of people who speak English as their first language is declining. Second, in the future, English will be mainly spoken as a second language in multilingual context and spoken among non-native speakers. Third, there has been a debate whether 'native speaker' had privileged access to an understanding of the language and more reliable informants and teachers. Similarly, Rajadurai (2002:366-387) points out that there are two disadvantages if we adopt 'native speaker' model, initially, native speaker is not always realistic or desirable. Other reason is that the native speaker is not always the best representative of what is intelligible. In addition, what have been accepted as standard models such as RP for British English and General American for American English are based on arbitrariness without official authority, and only spoken by a minority (Kachru, 1992:50-51).

Thus, the issue of 'native speakers' model' appropriateness in EIL teaching has become the concern of some researchers as well as English teaching practitioners. The following sections will review some studies related to the attitudes towards native speaker accents, research on methods of improving non-native speakers' intelligibility, English teaching curriculum and some recommendations for EIL teaching materials.

2. Research on Attitudes towards Varieties of English

If the 'native speaker model' is reconsidered to be used as medium of instruction, there is a need to investigate either the students' or the teachers' attitudes towards varieties of English before adopting the appropriate model for pronunciation teaching purpose. The followings are several studies focusing on this issue.

Timmis (2002: 240-249) investigates the teachers' and students' attitudes toward native-speaker norms. The data were collected by administering the questionnaires to 400 students from 14 countries and 180 teachers from 45 countries. The findings of this study show that students' expectancies are different from the teachers' view. While teachers tend to move away from native speaker norm, students still wish to conform to native speaker norm.

In a similar vein, Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenbök, and Smit (1995:1) evaluate the attitudes of 132 EFL Austrian students' attitudes towards five varieties of English—Austrian British English, Austrian American English, British English (neutral BrE), American English and British English—one of British English speakers is set as a distracter and to introduce a distance between native and non-native voices. The participants in this study are asked to evaluate emotive aspects and cognitive aspect of the speakers in the recordings. The findings illustrate the consistent pattern of attitude. The native speakers are preferred to non-native ones. The neutral BrE is rated best, Austrian British speaker last and the other three in-between.

In Chilean context, McKay (2003: 31-

47) conducts a survey by distributing a questionnaire, interviewing in-service and pre-service teachers and gathering widely-used textbooks to examine the role of culture in Chilean ELT materials, the prevalent methodology used in ELT, and attitudes toward native and non-native English-speaking teachers. Later, she argues that Chilean teachers recognize the strengths as bilingualism and familiarity with local cultural context. The implication of her study is that in the teaching EIL, there is no need to base the content of teaching materials, the choice of teaching methodology, or the ideal teacher on native-speaker model.

On the other hand, other studies intensively investigate the factors that influence students' attitudes toward specific varieties of English. Focused on Arabic subjects studying at Michigan State University U.S.A, Al-Kahtany (1995: 165-180) examines whether the factors—such as motivation, proficiency, age, major academic status, and marital status— influence the attitude of the subjects towards three varieties of English: Standard American English (SAE), Black English (BE), and Indian English (IE). The instruments used in this study are questionnaire and interviews. The results of the study show that there is a hierarchy of preference toward the three varieties of English: SAE as the most favoured, BE occupied second place, and IE as the least favoured. Furthermore, this is due to the exposure of SAE in ESL subjects training courses through teacher presentation and test materials. The findings also suggest that science majors tend to make little favourable/unfavourable distinction between SAE and BE as compared to humanities majors. Interestingly, there tend to be a negative linguistic attitude with regard to IE. A further investigation is needed to find out whether the negative attitude toward IE is because the low status position of Indians working in Saudi Arabia. Also, with regard to BE, there should be an investigation to determine whether ESL training and university education in the USA are promoting linguistic stereotyping based on the race.

A hierarchy of preference is also attained in a study conducted by Shimizu (1995: 1). He investigates whether Japanese college-level learners of English have a ranking order with regard to International English accents. The recordings from five core and three periphery English speaking areas are assessed by 94 Japanese college students. The accents from the core areas are Standard North American, RP, Scottish, Australian, African-American urban, while the periphery areas are Indian, West African, and Philippine. Direct measurement of attitudinal variables via a questionnaire is conducted and then followed by two evaluation sessions. In the first session, the participants are not told the accents' origins but in the second evaluation they are. This is done to see whether the labeling affects the participants' attitude. The findings from the questionnaire suggest half of the participants have a desire to acquire the teachers' accent. On the other hand, the results from the evaluation sessions indicate the rank order among the target group.

Other studies, Ladegard (1998:251-274) finds out the stereotyped reactions to English accents—American, British and Australian—and cultures in Denmark. His findings suggest that American accents received the most favourable evaluation only in the sense of humor. On the other hand, RP speaker is seen as the most favourable on all status and competence-dimensions. In addition, RP speaker is considered more fluent, beautiful, efficient and correct accent of English. Meanwhile Scottish and Australian speakers are generally received the most positive ratings on solidarity-dimensions.

By employing an adaptation of matched-guise techniques, a questionnaire, and interviews, Birnie (1998: 1) investigates the attitudes of Bavarian business people towards American and British English and the effects these attitudes have on the preferred variety

as a learner model. The findings reveal that the subjects in this study prefer British English (RP) as their learner goal because it is associated with "High English", a standard educated variety; American English, on the other hand, is associated with non-standard dialect, less prestigious variety and slang. Furthermore, the attitudes of Bavarian English towards British English might be the impact of loyalty to Britain as a European fellow of Germany. Thus, British English might serve solidarity function.

In spite of the rejection of native speakers' accent in EIL teaching, the previous studies concerning with attitudes towards varieties of English show that many students still favored native speakers' accent. However, there is a tendency that one native speakers' accent is considered better than the other native speakers' accent, this is shown by the hierarchy of accent preference that exists in native speakers' varieties.

3. Research on improving non-native speakers' intelligibility

Before the 1980s the goal of teaching English pronunciation was 'to achieve native speaker accent'. However, with the position of EIL, this aim is no longer 'realistic'. Therefore, from the early 1980s it has been accepted that intelligibility is the primary goal of teaching pronunciation (Hammer, 2001: 184). According to Richards and Schmidt (2002: 263) intelligibility is "the degree to which a message can be understood". The following sections will discuss some studies conducted to improve non-native speakers' intelligibility.

Munro and Derwing (1997: 73-97) investigate the relationships among intelligibility, perceived comprehensibility, and foreign accent in the speech of 10 Mandarin L2 learners. Two types of assessment are used in this study. First, 18 native English speakers are asked to listen and to transcribe sentences pronounced by 10 non-native speakers. Second, they are asked to measure the comprehensibility of 10 Mandarin L2 speakers based on a 9-point Likert scale. In their findings, although the strength of foreign accent is correlated with comprehensibility and intelligibility, a strong foreign accent does not necessarily cause L2 speech to be low in comprehensibility or intelligibility.

Later, Munro, Derwing, and Wiebe (1998: 393-410) compare the degree of improvement in the pronunciation of individual ESL learners that resulted from three different types of pronunciation instruction. In their research, they record samples of the ESL learner's speech before and after three types of training—one focusing on segmental features of pronunciation, one on global features and the other with no specific focus. These samples are then played to native English-speaking listeners. They find that the first two groups show significant progress in comprehensibility and accentedness on the sentences; however, only the group instructed with a global focus show improvement in comprehensibility and fluency in narratives.

Another study by Nagamine (2002: 1) asserts that the teaching and learning of the intonational aspect can be step towards the teaching of intelligible pronunciation. In his research 15 Japanese students and four native speakers of English participate. Initially, Japanese students who had not prior English pronunciation training are asked to read diagnostic passage, then their spoken materials are recorded. After attending an intensive pronunciation training—one ninety-minute session a week for one thirteen-week semester—Japanese students are asked to read the same passage as in the pre-training. Later, the recording of the spoken materials before and after the pronunciation program are played to four native English speakers in order to determine the progress of 15 Japanese students. This study reveals that all Japanese students show dramatic progress in an F0 and a target F0 contour (fundamental frequency and list-reading intonation pattern respectively).

Another interesting work has been carried out by Jenkins. Her study aims to find out which features of British/American English pronunciation are essential for intelligibility in EIL interaction and which are not. Initially, Jenkins (2002: 83-103) introduces the features of the "Lingua Franca Core" which are very significant in communication among non-native speakers. These are:

1) All consonants are important except for 'th' sounds as in 'thin' and 'this'

2) Consonants clusters are important at the beginning and in the middle of words. For example the cluster in the word string cannot be simplified to 'sting' or 'tring' and remain intelligible.

3) The contrast between long and short vowels is important. For example, the difference between vowels /j/ and /ɜ:/ as in 'sit' and 'seat'.

4) Nuclear or (tonic) stress is also essential. This is the stress on the most important word (syllable) in a group of words. For example, there is difference in meaning between 'My son uses a COMputer' which is a neutral statement of fact and 'My SON has a computer", where there is an added meaning (such as that another person known to the speaker and listener does not use a computer).

On the other hand, she also lists other features that are important in non-native speakers' interaction with native speakers but not essential for intelligibility in EIL interactions. These are:

1) The 'th' sounds (as in 'thin' and 'this')

2) Vowel quality, that is, the difference between vowel sounds where length is not involved.

3) Weak form such as the word 'to', 'of' and 'from' whose vowels are often pronounced as schwa instead of their full quality

4) Other features of connected speech such as assimilation

5) Word stress

6) Pitch movement

The previous studies show that in EIL the teaching of suprasegmental features such as intonation and stress is more important than segmental features such as vowel and consonant. Therefore, when teaching EIL, based on the studies above, the teachers need to stress teaching suprasegmental features.

4. English Teaching Curriculum

As the nature of English changes from one's national language to international language, so does the English teaching curriculum. Traditionally, English teaching curriculum was always based on the native speaker's point of view but the fact that English is now spoken among non-native speakers nowadays calls for adjustment in the English teaching curriculum.

McKay (2003: 31-47) gives three suggestions for EIL curriculum. First, EIL curriculum should recognize the diversity of bilingual speakers using English for their specific purposes. Secondly, EIL curriculum should acknowledge the fact that many bilingual users of English do not wish to acquire native-like competence. Thirdly, EIL curriculum should be sensitive to the diversity of contexts in which English is taught and used.

Although the ideas described by Mckay above are quite ideal, the reality is somehow different from the fact. In many countries, EIL might not be considered as having a serious implication in English curriculum. In a survey conducted by Nunan (2003: 589-613) in seven countries; China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam, it reveals that there are several problems in implementing EIL curriculum. Furthermore, the problems are related to confusion and inconsistency at the level of policy, particularly regarding the issue of age of initial instruction, inequity regarding to access to effective language instruction, inadequately trained and skilled teachers, and a disjunction between curriculum rhetoric and pedagogical reality.

Sometimes there is a mismatch between what the experts want and what the government wants to do. The two cases—McKay and Nunan—explained above are no exception. On one hand, the experts know what must be done in relation to the emergence of EIL, on the other hand, the government of the seven countries surveyed by Nunan face some difficulties in implementing EIL. Perhaps it might take times before EIL curriculum is able to be realized.

5. Materials for Teaching Pronunciation

The notion of EIL has also inspired English practitioners in developing pronunciation teaching materials. According to Jones (2003: 103-112), the teaching material for EIL should cover psychological and sociological aspects. Further, he explains that pronunciation teaching material should be focused not only on the learner's sociolinguistic situations and the political implications of attitudes towards non-native accents but also on psychological aspects of pronunciation training, integrating confidence building and reflective activities into their courses.

In a similar vein, Rajadurai (2002: 366-387) lists two important elements in teaching pronunciation: methods and materials employed and teacher-education. The first element includes the necessity for teaching pronunciation within a larger communicative context as well as teaching the pronunciation aspect which is fundamental for intelligibility. Moreover, the phonological information gap, role play, games, poetry, and songs activities are required to convey communication and pronunciation. In the mean time, textbooks on pronunciation should reflect the changing role of English, show a greater tolerance for variation, and be less prescriptive. The teacher-education element means the teacher should be familiarized themselves with the area of teaching pronunciation, the variability for L2 pronunciation together with the nature of intelligibility and the factors which intrude on it.

Alternatively, Cook (1999: 185-209) gives more practical solutions for English teachers in presenting EIL materials. This can be done through presenting authentic materials such as recordings of skilled L2 user, local English newspapers—Jakarta Post from Indonesia, Straits Time from Malaysia, and the course book that reflects successful L2 users. Furthermore, Cook (1999: 185) argues "a language teaching would benefit by paying attention to the L2 user rather than concentrating primarily on the native speaker".

Similarly, with regard to the use of recordings, Hannam (2003: 1) states that recordings as well as audio-visual resources used in EIL teaching should represent different accents. Further, she asserts that the use of materials containing different accents will make the students accept all accents in a positive way and see all accents as equal and valid.

Clearly there are similarities found in the three experts' recommendations above. All of them suggest the necessity of incorporating local learners' culture in EIL materials.

6. Conclusion

In summation, there are some implications of English as International Language (EIL) for English Language Teaching (ELT). There are at least two issues that have become the major concern of research with regard to EIL; attitudes towards variety of English and methods of improving non-native speakers' intelligibility. Although the findings of some researches on attitudes towards varieties of English show a shift from native speakers' accent to non-native speakers' accents, the majority of the students in many countries still favored native speakers' model. In the mean time, the findings from the research on methods of improving non-native speakers' intelligibility indicate the importance of giving emphasis to teaching suprasegmental features such as intonation and stress to non-native speakers.

At curriculum level, there is still a discrep-

ancy in implementing EIL curriculum between experts' point of view and the government's capacity. Although the experts have excellent ideas in responding to EIL, the governments might face many obstacles in implementing what have been proposed by the experts. Therefore, it might take time for the governments of certain countries to be able to implement EIL curriculum fully.

With regard to materials for teaching pronunciation, many English practitioners recommend the use of authentic materials that incorporate learners' culture in English classroom because such materials can enhance the students' self esteem. In addition, the students' variety of English is no longer regarded as 'deficiency' rather it is 'difference'.

However, there seems to be a lack of research in the area of language testing in re-

sponding to the nature of EIL. This is an important aspect since English standard tests such as IELTS and TOEFL still use native speakers' accents. Therefore, research on language testing can give an illustration of how effective the use of EIL curriculum as well as authentic materials can be for improving non-native speakers' English.

In addition, to get the whole picture, there should be studies that investigate non-native speakers' interaction because most of the studies carried out previously aimed to make non-native speakers intelligible to native speakers. Through the studies of non-native speakers' interaction, the potential problems that might break the communication down can be identified. Furthermore, the findings from this research can give important implications for pronunciation teaching materials.

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