World Englishes Literature Review

Introduction

The subject of World Englishes has drawn a lot of attention in recent years, and this literature review will try to bring some of the recent research on the topic into context.

In the literature section, I will begin with a description of what World Englishes are, examine two theoretical concepts and look at some of the different varieties. I will then look at globalisation effects, and the future of World Englishes.

In the applications and implications section, I will examine my own teaching practices, and how the theories of World Englishes can be applied to these practices.

Literature

World Englishes are described as the local forms of English that have developed as a result of a type of interlanguage becoming the standard in that region (Rudby & Saraceni, 2006). There is also a distinction between “World English” and “World Englishes” that is important. “World English” refers to English as a lingua franca (ELF), whereas “World Englishes” refers to different forms of English that have developed in different areas throughout the world.

The World Englishes are apart from Standard English, which is the most popular form of English (Rudby & Saraceni, 2006). Standard English has a specific grammar and lexis that sets it apart from the World Englishes. It is standard English that is the international language of education, administration, business, aviation, navigation, entertainment and most other aspects involving international institutions.

One of the most recognised models used to demonstrate the spread of English around the world is Kachru’s Concentric Circles (Tripathi, 1998) (Appendix A). The first group of World Englishes are called the inner circle, and consist of five countries: United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. These countries are static, and all use a fairly standard form of English (Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang, 2011).

The outer circle World Englishes consist largely of former British colonies, such as India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Malaysia and Singapore. Many of these countries are still “attached” to the United Kingdom, but some, such as the Philippines and the Caribbean countries are attached to the United States (Tripathi, 1998). Again, the list of countries is static, though they all use distinct local varieties of English. Within regions such as Africa, the Caribbean and East Asia, there are similarities between the varieties of English. People in this group can use English fluently for most types of communication (Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang, 2011). They are generally called English as second language (ESL) countries.

The expanding circle World Englishes includes countries where English is a foreign language (EFL) (Tripathi, 1998). It includes China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Korea. It is this expanding circle that accounts for the largest number of varieties of World Englishes (Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang, 2011).

It is at this point that traditional TESOL teaching seems to fail. Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang, (2011) point out that each of the expanding circles varieties of English have their own
indigenous histories, literary customs, pragmatic contexts and standards of communication. As such, some fallacies have developed about World Englishes.

The first of these fallacies is that learners in the outer and expanding circle groups are learning English so they can communicate with speakers in the inner circle (Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang, 2011). While this may be true for those intending to study in the west, the largest number of people will use it to speak with others who use English as a second language.

The second fallacy is that the native speaking model of English, or Standard English, is the model that should be used for all English learners (Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang, 2011). Some of the English varieties in the outer circle group have set up their own standards and norms for English use, separate from standard English.

A third fallacy is that all native speakers can teach English to learners in the outer and expanding circle groups (Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang, 2011). Native speakers teaching in ESL and EFL countries usually have other reasons for being in the EFL country, and usually don’t know how to teach. Such foreign teachers don’t add very much to the ESL/EFL program. Kachru (in Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang, 2011) also supported the idea that non-native English speakers, rather than native speakers, make better English teachers.

A fourth fallacy is that learning English can also help to understand British or American cultural and ethical standards (Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang, 2011). In reality, a greater number of people are learning English in the hopes that they can introduce their own culture to the world.

Alatis (2005) reinforces this notion by saying that learning and teaching English as a second language is different from doing the same for English as a native language. A teacher who knows the learner’s native language, or a different foreign language, would have better understanding of the second language learning process. This teacher would also be more tolerant and flexible to the learner’s language and culture.

Jenkins (2006) addresses the concept that English is now an international language, and the most frequent use is as a lingua franca among non-native speakers, with different native languages. The native speaker should not be the measure to which non-native speakers are compared.

Jenkins (2006) also gives examples of lexicogrammar, Halliday’s term to describe grammar/lexis continuity. In different varieties of English, the lexicogrammar alters slightly. Additionally, different varieties of English have their own peculiar phonologies. While these features have long been known among indigenised varieties of English (IVEs) of the outer circle, it appears they are evolving even faster amongst ELF varieties in the expanding circle.

Schneider’s Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes (PCEs) examines the evolution of these linguistic features in detail (Schneider, 2007) (Appendix B). There are five phases to the evolution of English amongst a non-native speaking community: foundation; early stabilisation, nativisation, late stabilisation; and differentiation.

Each of these stages are defined by four parameters: extralinguistic factors; mutual characteristic identity constructions; contact setting sociolinguistic determinants; and emerging structural effects (Schneider, 2007).
While this model is helpful in explaining how PCEs evolved, there are questions about whether it can be applied universally (Wong & Schneider, 2008). There is also a question of whether the model focuses too much on lexis, grammar and pronunciation, when it could focus more on cultural aspects (Wong & Schneider, 2008). Regardless of its criticisms, Schneider’s model raises awareness of sociolinguistic universals of English (and other language) contact situations.

Schneider’s model also raise the topic of the different varieties of English. Melcher et al (2010) proposed that the different varieties could be distinguished by phonological and morphosyntactical features. They also classified the different varieties into four geographical areas: The British Isles; the Americas and the Caribbean; the Pacific and Australasia; and Africa, South and Southeast Asia.

Melcher’s (2010) book is a useful guide to the features of each of the different varieties of English, and can guide the ESL/EFL teacher in specific features of the English variety of the student’s being taught. However, it is for the professional teacher, and not for “backpacker” teachers so often found in EFL countries.

Notwithstanding research that says non-native speakers are generally better teachers, and that Standard English isn’t necessarily the universal by which ESL/EFL learners should be rated, other research shows the students view things differently. Kobayashi (2011) showed that expanding circle Japanese students preferred native-speaking teachers.

This then raises the question of globalisation in World Englishes. Much of the theoretical framework for the different varieties has already been covered. However, Rubdy (2011) reports that globalisation has been seen by some to be a threat to the World Englishes. Rubdy (2011) does not agree, stating that English has been adopted and localised by different cultures outside the inner circle countries (what is perceived as “the west”).

If English is adopted as a global language, there is the prospect of language death (Crystal, 2000), whereby it is estimated that 50-80% of the world’s 6,000 languages will become extinct in the next 100 years. Crystal (2000) believes that languages need to be preserved, because they express identity and culture, as well as the history of mankind.

Crystal (2000) explains the reasons for language death: linguacide (when all the speakers die); radical language death(language ceases being used within one generation); gradual language death (a dominant language takes over); bottom-to-top language death (language partly survives in rituals, etc); and emblematic language maintenance (survives as “secret codes”).

While the future for many languages is uncertain, the rise of World Englishes in 2000 and beyond also poses some problems (Yano, 2001). One question is how to sustain common standards and mutual intelligibility between the varieties of English. It is predicted by Yano (2001) that new varieties of English will develop in EFL regions that reflect local languages and cultures, divergent from British or American English.

There are two possibilities about the future of English as a World Language. One is that it will splinter into many Englishes that are mutually unintelligible. The other is that the many varieties will evolve into one common variety, that is understood by all English speakers (Rubdy, 2011).
As the number of ESL/EFL speakers continues to rise, far exceeding the number of native speakers, the centre of power regarding English will swing away from the native speakers. It is hoped that cultural features of the local areas can be incorporated into the new varieties of English.

Applications and implications for TESOL teaching

Kachru’s model (Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang, 2011), and information from the other readings, seems to divide the world into three categories of Englishes; English as a native language (ENL); English as a second language (ESL); and English as a foreign language (EFL). However, I feel that this may be misleading. Developing countries seem to be a separate category.

I have long felt that teaching Standard English to most students in China is not particularly beneficial, and perhaps even detrimental. While I did not fully understand what could be done about it, after learning the differences between “World English” and “World Englishes” (Rudby & Saraceni, 2006), I now feel more focussed on the work I have done in the past, and the course I would like to set for the future.

My work in China was across several fields, including high schools, universities and corporate workplaces. While each of these had different teaching methodologies, the common factor was the variety of English spoken in China.

For the average high school student, attaining proficiency in English will help them secure a good job in China, probably with a company doing business internationally, or in the tourism and hospitality industry. For these students, the local variety of English is sufficient. They will be dealing mainly with some native speakers, but mainly non-native speakers. Intelligibility is the key to their English language needs (Tripathi, 1998). This point supports the first and second fallacies defined by Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang (2011).

At universities, I was teaching at two levels. First was a university preparation course, and second was the first two years of an Australian degree in Tourism and Hospitality. For the preparation course, the students needed to achieve an IELTS score of 6.5. For the degree, they needed a score of .5 to enter. For both levels, standard English was required, so that they would be able to cope with the academic requirements of tertiary study in English speaking universities. In this respect, the teaching requirements contradict Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang’s (2011) second fallacy.

In corporate workplaces, most of the workers already had Chinese university degrees, or Chinese trade qualifications. However, the international companies recognised that these were far below international standards, and that the workers were not competitive on the international market. Both skills and language had to be honed to a level that would allow them to communicate with others in the organisation, in both native-speaking and non-native speaking countries (Jenkins, 2006). The largest group would be in non-native speaking countries, so Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang’s (2011) first and second fallacies again applied.

Working in high schools, it was common for many different types of teachers to be employed. These were both qualified and unqualified teachers, and native and non-native English speakers. From observations, and relating to the literature, several oints become apparent. Qualified teachers, whether native speakers or non-native speakers, were able to teach English adequately to the students. However, the largest number of teachers were
unqualified, and it was very clear that they could not teach English. This partially supports Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang’s (2011) third fallacy about the ability of native speakers to teach English. However, I think his needs to be extended somewhat.

A native-speaker cannot automatically teach English based on being born in one of the inner circle countries. However, this does not exclude all native speakers, as implied by Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang (2011). It does exclude native speakers who are not trained as teachers. By extension to this, native speakers trained as teachers generally were successful in teaching English in China.

Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang (2011) also stated that non-native speakers were better teachers than native speakers, but I feel that this statement is itself a fallacy. My observations were that untrained non-native speakers were not as successful at teaching English as untrained native speakers. However, teacher-trained non-native speakers tended to be better teachers than untrained native speakers. Teacher-trained native speakers tended to be the most successful teachers.

While theoretically it may be true that teacher-trained non-native speakers have the capacity to be better teachers than teacher-trained native speakers, this theory leaves out one crucial variable. Students perform better when taught by a native speaker, based on the students’ own perceptions and expectations (Kobayashi, 2011).

Another variable that is not included in (Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang, 2011) analysis, or my own analysis for that matter, is the English level of the non-native speaking teachers. Even a trained teacher without high level language skills is an ineffective teacher.

In general, I think the four fallacies are a good starting point and a fair guideline. However, I believe they need to be expanded and redefined to take into account the teachers’ language skills, qualifications and experience, not just their country of birth.

Hu Xiaoqiong & Jiang (2011) also stated that learning English cannot help to understand British or American ethics or cultural standards. The implication seems to be that learning such values is not necessary. While it is agreed that learning a language doesn’t necessarily impart these principles, it is probably prudent for students to make the extra effort to understand them, due to the fact that many will be doing business with these countries, or working and studying there.

It is also important, however, that the students retain their own cultural values, as a way of maintaining identity (Yano, 2001). To this extent, it is important that the TESOL teacher in EFL countries has an understanding of the local culture and language (Alatis, 205).

Jenkins (2006) spoke of the differences in lexis, grammar and phonology. Some of the idiosyncracies I found with the Chinese variety of English included: consonant sounds; aspirations; word stress; connectivity; and syntactic transfer. This is perhaps in keeping with the nativisation phase of Schneider’s (2007) Model of PCEs.

Even though I feel I know enough about the structure of Chinese languages, I feel that Melcher’s (2010) book on English varieties is worth investigation for future TESOL work, as well as future research into TESOL. I think that my methodology can improve drastically by being more aware of the specifics of at least some of the varieties of English.
Because I also work in English language corporate training, I think that doing more research on the effects of globalisation will be beneficial. In particular, I would like to investigate the impacts of globalisation on the need for English as the international language of just about everything (Rubdy, 2011).

There is an insistence in many parts of the Chinese government that Chinese will replace English as the global language, and I would also like to research how this affects English language teaching policies in China. Such policies no doubt affect the quality of the teaching and learning itself. I feel this is important to redevelop my teaching practices, both in China and elsewhere. As the Chinese language has little influence outside China, it seems unlikely that Chinese will rise as a global language.

I would also like to explore philosophical concepts relating to Crystal’s (2000) prospect of language death, to encourage minority language speakers to retain their native language. Apart from the historical aspects of language and culture, I am well aware that bilingual have alternative cognitive perspectives based on the individuality of the different languages they use (thinking differently in different languages).

I also find the area of World Englishes Beyond 2000 to be an area to explore more (Yano, 2000). I think that considering the future evolution of English, particularly the variety of English in the EFL region where instruction is taking place, could possibly have benefits to the students.

As example, while Chinese language itself will probably never become the dominant language, perhaps the Chinese variety of English will have a major impact on the evolution of English as a lingua franca (ELF). Additionally, predicting the future evolution of the Chinese variety of English could possibly assist in teaching English for intelligibility to the Chinese students.

**Conclusion**

The area of World Englishes is an important an evolving field of study, and a lot of literature exists about it. Much of the literature seems to concentrate on the majority expanding circle EFL countries, and looks to negate the importance of Standard English.

While much of the research that has taken place may be relevant in most countries, I feel that the special circumstances in China, particularly its recent isolationist policy, may bear the need for further research as a completely separate area of study. English development in China has been extremely rapid, and there are unique sociocultural features in China impacting on this development.
Reference List


Appendix A – Kachru’s Three Circles of English

Appendix B – Schneider’s Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes

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