VANNESSA MISSO
NINA MAADAD

The English Language and Cultural Appropriateness

ABSTRACT

English language acquisition needs to be taught from a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural perspective, with the right teaching materials, when pursuing cultural sensitivity and equality. After a brief historical overview and an explanation of the various definitions associated with English language acquisition, English is described in its multiple varieties. It is increasingly contended that non-native English speakers outnumber native speakers in a rapidly globalising world. Case studies are used to justify the need for culturally appropriate teaching materials and the challenges that exist. Change has been slow in addressing the inadequacies in current teaching materials and this paper concludes by suggesting some bottom-up approaches will transform the teaching pedagogy and teachers' attitudes. The professional development of teachers, together with the support of enlightened linguistic researchers can perhaps lead to an educational philosophy that cuts across colour, creed and race to bring about success to language learners. Thus, creating a better understanding of the English language in the context of cultural appropriateness.

Key words: English language, non-native English speakers, bottom-up approaches, and better understanding of the English language.

INTRODUCTION

> Culture is constructed and reconstructed by humans over time (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006:28).

English language acquisition has been extensively researched by B. Kachru (1982), A. Pennycook (1994), and D. Crystal (2004), who emphasised the role of colonialisation. For example, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, and the Caribbean have had a long history of British influence. B. Kachru states that this English-speaking heritage has helped open the doors to technology, science, trade, and diplomacy for once colonised countries (Kachru, 1982:3). According to S. Karmani and R. Phillipson, there is another perspective to using English besides the "linguistic imperialism" of the colonial powers. S. Karmani and R. Phillipson contends that the demand for English is growing because it is perceived increasingly as an opportunity provider:

Dr. Vannessa Misso and **Dr. Nina Maadad** are Lecturers at the School of Education UOA (University of Adelaide), Australia. One of them, for academic purposes, can be reached at: nina.maadad@adelaide.edu.au

This is well documented by the Mysore Central Institute for Indian Languages on research on slum dwellers where impoverished people were saving up their tiny earnings in order to get their kids into English medium schooling (Karmani & Phillipson, 2005:244-245).

Another perspective regarding the spread of English globally emphasises its functionality. Proponents of this view perceive English as a global commodity connected to economic development and expansion. However, D. Spichtinger (2000) criticizes S. Karmani and R. Phillipson's functionality argument because in its promotion of English other languages and cultures are devalued. A. Pennycook argues that the spread of the English language was: firstly, natural, "*its subsequent expansion is seen as a result of inevitable global forces*"; secondly, neutral since "*in some sense [it has] become detached from its original cultural contexts*"; and thirdly, beneficial since "*people gain access to the language, it creates cooperation and equity*" (Pennycook, 1994:9).

B. Kachru (1983) developed a theory wherein English spread through the workings of an Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle consisted of North America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand; while the Outer Circle was made up of post-colonial nations such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. Furthermore, there was an Expanding Circle of linguistically diverse and culturally pluralistic societies such as China and Thailand. The way that English has cut across regional, linguistic and geographical boundaries, and developed a local "character" is worthy of research. Consequently, the English language has economic, political, cultural, and social implications for the countries which adopt it.

This paper focuses on the cultural aspects of teaching materials used in English language acquisition, its cultural inappropriateness, the need for a more global perspective, some challenges of redesigning of teaching materials, and suggestions in making change possible. The cultural domain is significant because, unlike politics or economics, it has more bearing on the classroom teacher of English to international students.

DEFINING THE TERMS

The teaching and diffusion of the English language has created a variety of definitional classifications. English as a Second Language (ESL) refers to the teaching of English to non-English speakers in countries where it is the official language; English as a Foreign Language (EFL) concerns teaching of English to non-English speakers in countries where it is not the official language; and English as an International Language (EIL) indicates the global nature of the language in contrast to the native-speaker model. In this paper, teaching the English language to international students whose first language is not English, is referred to as English Language Teaching (ELT) and English Language Learning (ELL).

B. Kachru (2005) coined the terms "World Englishes" and "Asian Englishes" to indicate the varieties and acceptably unifying nature of English as it moved

across regional, geographic, and linguistic boundaries. English is nowadays a very functional language and its users determine its spread, importance, benefits, and evolution (Kachru, 1983). While these terms have been elaborated on by D. Crystal (1994), to name but a few, whatever the terminology used and argued for or against, English has crept into a variety of aspects of our lives, both internationally and intranationally.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

In *The Stories of English* (2004), D. Crystal traces the rise of Standard English from its origins to its global supremacy. The history of the English language shows a richness of diversity over 1,500 years. D. Crystal (2004) states that Standard English, capitalised to symbolise its special status, was born out of a "*kaleidoscope of dialects and styles*" (p.5). Standard English became powerful due to the influence wielded by the merchants of the rising middle class in London in the 16th century. Works were commissioned to collate grammars and dictionaries aimed at the middles classes who wanted a form of English that reflected the version they used.

There are many varieties of English that are not spoken of, recognised nor appreciated. Their marginalisation is due to the belief that only Standard English was the one true form. This thinking prevailed throughout the 20th century. Understandably, having a language in which there are common rules and principles to allow for national or international usage is valuable. English has become the lingua franca of the world through which business, politics, and scientific and social developments are made. However, other varieties of non-standard English should be recognised, which have become the norm for many people. Many of these non-standard varieties have made themselves "*popular and impressionistic*" (Crystal, 2004:7). Increasingly, it is felt that the Standard English used in the United Kingdom or the United States is not the only culturally acceptable forms. Learning the English language can be achieved in a regional context, incorporating many ethnicities, and cultural identities.

The question is whether one can do without the other? D. Crystal (1994) writes that as speakers, as well as social entities, we "need *both* stylistic domains to live a full linguistic life" (p.11). Both formal, Standard English and non-formal varieties pepper our everyday speech:

> The more we understand these nuances the better, so that we can use them appropriately upon occasion, and also respond appropriately when others use them. Being in control also means that we can switch from one style to another, in order to convey a particular effect (Crystal, 1994:11).

The 21st century has witnessed a movement away from the prescriptive dictates of learning and teaching of the English language in which grammarians flourished and people were taught to understand the mechanics of proper usage and where all other varieties were considered inferior (Crystal, 2004).

This, according to D. Crystal, is the transitional period, a time where non-standard varieties and usages of English will gain support and respectability. D. Crystal (2004) describes this period as a "pragmatic" period where there is an underlying understanding that variation and change are normal features of linguistic life, and should be recognised and respected. We concur with this call to change the educational practice, to create a more open, and equal linguistic environment.

English as we know, it evolved during the medieval and early modern periods. English, as spoken by the English, has become the widely accepted standard for writing and speaking, particularly where all other varieties sitting in the Outer and Expanding Circle do not conform to the norms. However, D. Crystal (2004) has shown that the key to the English language has been its ability to evolve and change. D. Crystal highlights also that this phenomenal change echoes an old relationship found in England's history where it moved from a *triglossic* to a *diglossic* nation where a distinction was made between "high" and "low" English. Standard English grew from the stems of Germanic and French linguistic variations, and it has co-existed with local varieties of English creating new *diglossic* forms which express an intricate multi-ethnic and cultural relationship. In 1982, B. Kachru stated as follows:

> [t]here will soon be more non-native than native speakers of English. At present, there are 266 million native speakers and 115 million non-native speakers; 33.1% of English speakers are non-native users. This figure, which includes only those who are enrolled in schools, therefore does not provide the total picture (Kachru, 1982: 36).

In 2000, the British Council's report, "The Future of English?", stated that there were about a billion learners (Graddol, 1997). The reasons for the widespread and rapid take up of English as a second or foreign language are more complex than merely looking at its historical relationship between coloniser and colonised. The functions of English are much greater today for many countries, particularly in the context of a globalised economy which is shaping socio-cultural, political, economic, and scientific outcomes. It has taken on a more pragmatic or "utilitarian" approach (Kachru, 1982:38) in which the learner does not aspire to cultural integration or attaining a second culture.

The rapid rise in the number of English learners and speakers and the variety of Englishes, that have developed worldwide are due to this rapid take up, has raised many questions. Linguists, educational policy-makers, and English language teachers alike question the standard or model for English. As Ward (cited in Kachru, 1982) envisaged in 1929, "*No one can adequately define it, because such a thing does not exist*". Arising from complex historical processes that helped the English language spread and take on diversified forms, it has been difficult to ascertain what various speakers of English consider to be normal (Kachru, 1982:34). The debate continues as the ELT (English Language Teaching) world attempts to locate where it stands on this issue.

THE STATE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS DESIGN

> The English language is generally discussed as a language that is in Asia, but not *of* Asia (Kachru, 2005:9).

In the way, languages have spread, either one replacing the other or retaining some aspects of its original, the spread of a language like Sanskrit, Latin, Greek or even French had a religious or commercial purpose. What made English significantly unique is that, "*there has not been before a single language which spread for such purposes over most of the world*" and when "*the need for global communication came to exceed the limits set by language barriers, the spread of English accelerated, transforming exiting patterns of international communication*" (Kachru, 1983:ix). Furthermore, B. Kachru (1983) states that two trends are emerging. *Firstly*, English is regarded less as a European language; and *secondly*, its development is less determined by the usage of its use by the native speakers of the Inner Circle. Hence, D. Graddol suggests that these three circles of English overlap and the shift is now towards the ESL (English as a Second Language) speakers because "*those who speak English alongside other languages will outnumber first-language speakers and, increasingly, will decide the global future of the language*" (Graddol, 1997:10).

Looking at English in the present context, it has one standard recognisable form that is linguistically biased and narrow. According to J. Tollefson, there are many tools to this standard language ideology, namely dictionaries, grammar books, and teaching manuals and textbooks which try to "*sustain the illusion of a uniform standard language or a target language"* (Tollefson, 1999:1-2). J. Tollefson calls this "*the myth of the uniformity of languages*" (Tollefson, 1999:2) as it entails the idea that any variants are deviants. Meanwhile, B. Kachru (1983) views the speakers of English in the Outer and Expanding Circles as its controllers, and their challenge is to create a standard form of English for themselves by promoting indigenized varieties of English. This new standard variety, according to B. Kachru (1983), is based on the region the speakers come from or the sector of the population using English.

The argument for more local, contextually-sensitive teaching materials, and pedagogy has risen as a means to challenge the Anglo / American-centric (Inner Circle) content and to create a more holistic approach to ELT (English Language Teaching). Accordingly, M. Modiano (2001) proposes approaching this change in curriculum and pedagogy by using multiple teaching practices. The teaching and learning of the English language is viewed as a language that belongs to an extensive range of peoples and culture, thus leading to the creation of cultural equality.

Prodromou cautioned against using internationally-published materials for international students from non-English speaking backgrounds, claiming that "*globally designed textbooks have continued to be stubbornly Anglocentric: appealing*

to a world market as they do, they cannot by definition draw upon local varieties of English" (cited in Zacharias, 2005:24). These textbooks impose an old-world belief that learners of English are motivated by cultural integration and in teaching these prescriptive linguistic pedagogies, we force them, according to M. Modiano, to become "*auxiliary members of the culture which is represented by the prescriptive educational standard, something not in harmony with their self-image*" (Modiano, 2001:340).

A person is driven by many reasons to learn English and M. Modiano (2001:340) highlights cross-cultural communication and access to the global village as poignant examples. Irrefutably, acquiring English prepares the learner to participate in a host of activities in this global village, for instance information technology, science, finance, medicine or healthcare, diplomacy, etc. For these reasons, the call for a continued prescriptive culture-specific Standard English is not plausible in the twenty-first century globalised economy.

Wallace examines the culturally biased testing system known as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) which assesses "*the language ability of candidates who need to study or work where English is the language of communication*" (cited in IELTS Handbook, 2007:2). In his research, Wallace discovers that there is a prejudice in the way the paper is set up for non-English speakers where there is a:

> […] lack of sensitivity to the broad range of contexts inhabited by EFL students worldwide, and a surprising lack of awareness of the actual language skills that the examination should be assessing in the case of overseas undergraduate students (cited in IELTS Handbook, 2007:371).

Indeed, many of the test components lie outside the students' experiences and world view which disadvantages them when there is no access to additional materials to assist them. Wallace further suggests how in many British EFL textbooks there is "*almost an obsession with Western interests, such as diet/fitness, careers in the entertainment world, and Western pop music/media*" (cited in IELTS Handbook, 2007:372).

Therefore, a "one size fits all" Westernised textbook and pedagogy is an ill-fitting choice at best. Learners need to make deep connections and not merely to the culture found in the textbook or that of the teacher but to their culture and each other. The cultural relevance of teaching materials cannot be ignored. M.H. Long (1997) refers to Tickoo's illustration of this lack of cultural sensitivity in which some textbooks refer to bars and pubs which are familiar to English culture but substantially irrelevant or culturally inappropriate to some parts of Southeast Asia. Furthermore, much of the ELT curriculum has been prescriptive in that it has a heavy emphasis on linguistic rules. As A. Gilmore states, "*[i] t has long been recognised that the language presented to students in textbooks is a poor representation of the real thing*" (Gilmore, 2007:98) and "*that it is time for a fundamental change in the way we design our syllabuses*" (Gilmore, 2007:99).

D. Crystal (2004) is positive that there will be a movement away from the prescriptive to the pragmatic, in that variations in the language exist and that change is a normal feature of linguistic life. The pragmatic approach will recognise and respect the users of these variations, resulting in a change in educational practice that is necessary to promote an egalitarian linguistic environment. One cannot deny that globalisation has made the need for a common tongue a precondition for success (Modiano, 2001:344). For now, English is the stepping stone upon which globalisation has surged since the end of the Cold War. However, with China having more than one billion people, we could share this linguistic platform with the Chinese language in the near future.

Globalisation or internationalism has implied that English has to be intelligible (Crystal, 1994) and in promoting English, there is greater access to the English-speaking world, thus making it imperative that people understand each other. A delicate balance ensues between having a variety of English that is intelligible to all speakers and maintaining the integrity of local languages and regional varieties. D. Crystal calls this a World Standard English where there would be "*an agreed standard in grammar, vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation and conventions of use"* and one that "*promotes the notion of a diverse set of Regional Standard Englishes*" (Crystal, 1994:25).

CASE STUDIES FOR CULTURAL APPROPRIATENESS

Fuad Abdul Hamied (1994) and G.M. Jacobs ed. (1997:74) stated that the Indonesian government developed and implemented the "1994 EFL curriculum" with basic principles and guidelines for teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in secondary schools. Two national surveys were conducted; the first by Huda in 1990 suggested that there were changes in students', teachers' and parents' perceptions concerning the role and aims of English instruction in schools. About 55.6% of the students surveyed stated that they learned English to continue their studies while 22.3% did so to get good jobs, while 83.7% of parents stating that learning English would help their children attain better jobs. Finally, 87.3% of parents stated that learning English would help their children communicate better with people from other countries (as cited in Jacobs ed., 1997).

The second survey by Fuad Abdul Hamied in 1994 indicated that:

> Themes, instead of linguistic components, are to be used in developing teaching materials. Contexts covering the target culture and the students' culture are the very place for linguistic components such as structure, lexical items, and pronunciation to become more meaningful to the student […]. An integration of the four skills is expected to take place in the teaching-learning process, although the emphasis is still to be placed on reading (Abdul Hamied, 1994:75).

Consequently, these case studies indicate that learning English is economically and socially significant to people outside Kachru's Inner Circle.

It gives their children access to the global village. Despite this recognition of the global importance of English to business and communication, Fuad Abdul Hamied (1994) demands that teaching English should occur within a student's culture as well as alongside the target culture. The call for a more holistic approach to teaching the English language emphasises the global community of students' desire to learn the language in the world in which they live in and not some abstract construct or make believe Anglo / American-centric world of textbooks and teaching material. G.M. Jacobs ed. (1997:iv) stresses the importance of teachers being equipped for the challenges of "language classrooms of tomorrow". It is essential to be aware of the local contexts in which they conduct their lessons and yet recognise the global context in which the learning of the language occurs.

Kamal (cited in Jacobs ed., 1997) notes the Malaysian government's awareness of the political role of English in world affairs as it becomes the medium for communication. As Malaysia strives to progress economically, its government needs to equip people with the lingua franca of the business and political world. Kamal echoes Crystal's view of the inevitable dawn of the Internet and the necessity of gaining access to information which is a large percentage in English. Kamal states:

> […] it is becoming crystal clear that a knowledge of English is an advantage. The translation process from English into *Bahasa* Malaysia will in all probability not be able to keep pace with the rate with which information is made available. It would seem a less arduous task if individuals had a sound grounding in the English language so as to take advantage of state-of-the-art information as soon as it is made available rather tha[n] wait for translated material (cited in Jacobds ed., 1997:80).

An increasing number of people are living, working, and interacting "*between spaces, across multiple languages or varieties of the same language*" (Kramsch, 1998:70). Through globalisation and the vast cross-border movements of people, English has established itself in the cultures in which it is used. While it is time to celebrate especially in ESL learning, this human diversity and uniqueness, J.P. Lantolf and S. Thorne (2006) nonetheless show us that ESL learning classrooms and their materials have placed Western academic cultures above local cultural practices. Collingnon's study, cited in J.P. Lantolf and S. Thorne (2006), on Hmong women studying English in the United States advocates the need for cultural sensitivity and appropriateness in the classroom. Strategies that connect with one's early cultural patterns need to be utilized as bases for learning and perhaps even expanded, rather than discarded in favour of current popular practice (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006:45).

Kearney, cited also in J.P. Lantolf and S. Thorne (2006:114), argued that distinguishing oneself from others in society is an Anglo-Saxon concept, whereas in the Wintu culture of Northern California, for example, people see the self and others as a continuum without distinct words for "I" and "we". Similarly, Scollon (cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) demonstrated how the

Cantonese language does not make a clear delineation unlike the Anglo-Saxon concept of *freedom* as liberating one's self from others as, but as the freedom "to flock together" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006:72 and 114).

These examples of the notion of self and society indicate how much of the ESL materials contain Anglo-Saxon concepts favouring the individuals, individual activity, and self image. The classroom is a social environment in which individuals' thinking is influenced *vis-á-vis* the materials, classroom pedagogy, teacher's behaviour and attitude, and the behaviour and attitude of fellow learners. It is therefore of utmost importance that global values and citizenship, not merely Western academia be taught to promote understanding and respect for all cultures and for learners to not lose their local culture.

Vygotskyian theory posits that society provides the conditions in which individual thinking emerges and language has a central role in cognitive development and functioning. As such, language can be directed outwardly and inwardly to regulate and control our mental processes like memory, attention and rational thinking. As J.P. Lantolf and S. Thorne (2006:28) state succinctly, "*culture is constructed and reconstructed by humans over time*". According to Vygotsky, society influences individuals' thinking through cultural constructs such as language. Thus, J.P. Lantolf and S. Thorne proposed that learning a second language involves more than observing the host culture's linguistic behaviour. What must also be considered is the "*appropriation of cultural models, including conceptual metaphors*" that would mediate the learners' psychological and communicative activity (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006:118).

Language is, therefore, not culture-free but "*plays a major role in the perpetuation of culture particularly in its printed form*" (Kramsch, 1998:8). Consequently, ESL teachers have to be aware that teaching materials incorporate Western culture and values with themes which may seem alien to students from a more socio-culturally conservative environment. There have been occasions where Asian students from societies that are just opening up politically have embraced the concept of democracy and new ideas which many Westernised societies take for granted.

D. Jolly and R. Bolitho (1998) examined the process of materials writing and discovered a diversity of teachers and students' responses to textbooks as part of their research:

> It's a very nice book and very lively, but in the section on "processes" for example all the exercises are about unusual things for our country. We are a hot country and also have many Muslims. The exercises are about snow, EFL books and making wine. I can tell you I can't do making wine and smoking pot in my county! [An experienced school teacher from the Ivory Coast].
>
> Previous materials were not based on life in Brazil which is why I don't think they worked very well ... [Brazilian teacher of English in school] (Jolly & Bolitho, 1998:91).

These quotations imply a problem with contextual appropriateness in materials where content went beyond the cultural experience of the students

in the Ivory Coast and proved to be ineffective. A Brazilian setting would have had more advantages for the students over foreign contexts and perhaps provided more motivation.

There is a growing need to acknowledge these challenges and view ESL learning as a means for international communication in business, politics, education, and cultural exchange, allowing for sharing and development amongst all peoples who converge and interact. The *pluracentricity* of learners and of the world need to be taken into account. No one owns the English language anymore; it has become the language of the world. As Strevents says as follows:

> "standard" here does *not* imply "imposed", nor yet "of the majority". One of the interesting aspects of Standard English is that in every English-using community those who habitually use *only* standard English are in a minority (cited in Kachru, 1982:34).

In J. Grzega's evaluation of ELT which he deems the world's lingua franca, he feels that:

> [...] teachers should evaluate "errors" according to their "degree of endangering comprehensibility" (not according to their "deviations from native norms") and English should first be taught to enable learners to communicate successfully (not "native like") and "internationally" (not "to natives") as soon as possible (Grzega, 2005:44).

According to M. Kohler, "[l]earning is a continuous process" and English language teachers should not only teach the here and now but also that the world is changing rapidly and values, ideas and experiences need to be valid when students learn and apply them in the real world (Kohler, 2003:9).

In J. Sharkey and K. Johnson's study, various teacher researchers, teacher trainers, graduate students, and research analysts share their experiences on the ground about ELT and ELL as a second or foreign language. One such example is Lisa Scarola, a teacher of ESL to adults in Connecticut, whose experience reflects the growing voice of the ELT world. Scarola found that in teaching students from diverse backgrounds and educational experiences, "*the text was not aligned with the needs of the students*", there was "*no alternative for handling variation in dialogue, vocabulary, or question posing*" (Sharkey & Johnson ed., 1985:9-10). Instead, Scarola drew on getting her students involved in course planning and giving them opportunities to practice life skills that they could identify with and found useful to replicate in the real world while the text acted as a springboard for their dialogues.

J. Sharkey and K. Johnson provided a personal insight regarding an incident involving a Russian 15-year-old student in an American high school who was given a task he considered childish (during a Christmas pageant, he was part of a performance for the poem, "Twas the Night Before Christmas" and his lines were "Dash away, dash away, dash away all" while holding up a coloured 16-by-20-inch page from a colouring book). However, unable to explicitly say

this to his teacher he decided to be outlandish in his colouring assignment only to be thrown out of the performance for non-compliance (Sharkey & Johnson ed., 1985:56).

This event resulted in several issues coming to the fore. *Firstly*, the student's position in the classroom – who is he? who is he allowed to be? - comes into play. *Secondly*, the ESL teacher perceived the teenager to be a "poor student" with a negative attitude. *Thirdly*, the insensitivity of the teacher meant his lack of understanding of his student, a teenager, who obviously would not have wanted to stand in front of fellow high school students holding a colouring page, calling out the lines or know his background (he was apparently a rather mature boy who contributed to his family's financial status and dreamt of being a pilot). Sadly, the ESL teacher was more interested in completing the multitude of Christmas activities and the ESL department's curriculum. It was erroneous to assert that because this particular student had an English competency level equivalent to that of a 10-year-old, his interests and mental development in other areas also lagged behind.

Unfortunately, J. Sharkey and K. Johnson had seen and heard similar incidences in North American public schools in which some ESL teachers were not trained nor required to have any background in language acquisition theory (Sharkey & Johnson ed., 1985:60). The imperative element missing in the above scenario was that tasks and any given content had to match the student's stage of conceptual development and experience. According to M. Kohler (2003), teachers have to think of what texts, language use, language structures and strategies to incorporate which raises the question of content – that is, its selection, sequencing and continuity.

CHALLENGES OF CREATING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE TEACHING MATERIAL

> English belongs to the world and every nation which uses it does so with different tone, colour, and quality (Smith as cited in Brook, 1973).

The ELT (English Language Teaching) and ELL (English Language Learning) fields face several challenges in terms of creating culturally appropriate texts and teaching materials. These range from the contest over terminology, the smorgasbord of teaching methodologies and views, publishers, schools and institutions, governments who have vested interests in their citizens learning English and last but not least, teachers and students who have different perspectives on these issues. J.C. Richards (1997) acknowledges that a large percentage of the world's second language teachers are non-native speakers of English. Thus, native speaker knowledge of the content specific themes may prove daunting for the teacher and irrelevant to the learners.

J.C. Richards goes on to state that this acknowledgement of the inappropriateness and second language non-native teachers' unfamiliarity

with the context should not be confused with subject matter knowledge, namely phonetics and phonology, English syntax, second language acquisition, curriculum and syllabus design, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, analysis of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) methods and testing and evaluation (Richards, 1997:199). This clarification is an imperative reminder that second language non-native English language teachers have the knowledge set and skills to teach the language and are not incompetent compared to native English language teachers. It is becoming clear that ELT should shift from the traditional prescriptive philosophy that has dominated the ELT community for decades. There is a need for grammarians, teachers and linguists who have disowned non-standard varieties to come to terms with the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic variables that influence the lingua franca of the business world in the twenty-first century.

Secondly, there is the question of ownership of the language: for example, whose criteria is fluency to be based on? This can be expanded to include the issue of terminology such as Standard English, non-standard English (native and non-native) which imply a deficiency in those who come from the periphery in relation to those from the centre (Kachru, 1982 and 1983). According to B. Kachru (1982), the ownership of English is reflected by how it is used in the real world and the contributions by all who use it and every context in which it is used makes English an international language. Smith states also that English belongs to the world and every nation which uses it does so with different tone, colour and quality (cited in Brook, 1973:2). The challenge is assimilating various researchers' viewpoints including those of linguists and teachers.

Another significant problem is that teaching English is not apolitical or neutral. Most English language programmes are concerned with students' linguistic proficiency, i.e. teaching of grammar, phonology, vocabulary, and morphology. According to Brutt-Griffler and Samimy, teaching English based primarily on linguistic forms creates a problem if removed from other concerns such as how the language is used in social interactions and why some linguistic choices are made to attain communicative goals (cited in Auerbach & Burgess, 1985). Having a norm-based approach using a native-speaker as the criterion for gauging non-native speaker competency and performance may make it easier for curricula and assessment. Yet, they may have detrimental effects on students' cultural diversity. Language and culture intermingle and this involves both the target and the learner. Finding a balance in textbooks may prove complicated considering that it would be difficult to create a text for a specific group of learners from a specific region or area.

Another challenge that arises, according to Timmis (cited in Tomlinson, 2005:6), is governments, publishers, examining boards, teachers, and students who insist on the teaching of standard native-speaker varieties in order to protect themselves from loss of correctness and prestige while governments refuse to sanction the use of local varieties of English. Publishers maintain that

textbook production and its accompanying materials is a profitable industry and many are reluctant to risk enormous costs in developing global textbooks or those that are innovative (Tomlinson, 2005). At the same time, as each class is distinctive in terms of its students' needs, producing internationally marketed textbooks seems unlikely to be effective in meeting these needs (Gilmore, 2007:103).

An important outcome of N. Zacharias' study concerning ELT teachers in Indonesia was that people described locally-produced materials as inaccurate and incomplete. It was a belief stemming from the "*majority of respondents which continued to see English as belonging to English-speaking countries*" (Zacharias, 2005:32). The challenge is to have teachers and students value the communicative aspects of English (as opposed to the prescriptive and didactic formulae of the past) and understand the value of varieties, acknowledging that English is a global or international language owned by none, used by many.

Teacher Lisa Scarola (see Auerbach & Burgess, 1985) found that her students took comfort in having textbooks, tapes, and workbooks despite their limitations because they provided a reference point and made order out of the vast sea of English. E. Auerbach and D. Burgess' response to Scarola's experience is that these textbooks and standards set by the ELT departments should act as:

> [...] guides for organising their instruction. They engage their students in thematic activities, weaving in the development of much-needed language skills. They use assessments to inform their instruction so that assessment becomes an ongoing, formative process, not simply an end-of-the-unit test (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985:14).

M. Modiano (2001) acknowledges that English language teachers who are committed to learner diverstiy in the classroom find themselves faced with challenges. It is hard to divorce a language from its culture and being culturally-specific; it is equally hard to learn a language without being influenced ideologically, politically culturally, etc., by the language. An important question that arises is: "*What do we want to achieve with classroom materials?*" A. Gilmore's response is that the aim is to produce students who are able to "*communicate effectively in the target language of a particluar speech community, that is to say, learners who are COMMUNICATIVELY COMPETENT*" (Gilmore, 2007:98).

MAKING CHANGE POSSIBLE

> Your vision will grow, but you will never be able to achieve your goals as you envision them (Horton as cited in Auerbach & Burgess, 1985:17).

Creating a slew of culturally appropriate teaching materials is now teachers' responsibility. As noted by A. Gilmore (2007:112), despite the research and specific recommendations "*change has been slow to take place*". Furthermore:

> If we are going to promote an appreciation for diversity and equity in the organisation and content of our programs it must be simultaneously reflected in the make-up of our programs, both among students and faculty. Prospective teachers will be better prepared to help students appreciate cultural diversity, if they have learned through experience to appreciate it as a reality and not an academic exercise – a reality they experience through interactions with a diverse faculty and student body (Hixson as cited in Zeichner, 1992:5).

We agree with K. Zeichner that the issue of preparing teachers for diversity in the classroom in teacher education still remains. Though K. Zeichner was concerned with white monolingual teachers in America who have culturally and / or linguistically different backgrounds to their students, these concerns are far reaching. From personal experience, very little emphasis was placed on the ethnic and / or cultural diversity of the classroom during our English language training in 2004, with greater emphasis on managing diversity in language proficiencies instead. Therefore, to make change possible, K. Zeichner recommends a course on multicultural education or ethnic studies during teacher training (Zeichner, 1992:13).

Once teachers have attained specific knowledge about their students' culture, language, and circumstances, they need to know how to utilize them pedagogically. Armed with this knowledge, teachers can then organize the curriculum and instruction to stimulate learning, encourage dialogue, and teach about diversity and understanding, some of the important global values for the 21st century. Subsequently, from language schools to tertiary institutions, English language teachers are seeing their classrooms become more multicultural. Singaporean classrooms are witnessing a trend where more students from China, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and Indonesia are appearing. Despite all these students being Asian, they differ in terms of ethnicity, culture, linguistics, politics, and economic systems. Therefore, according to Ladson-Billingson, teaching has to be culturally appropriate and relevant (cited in Zeichner, 1992).

According to Tabachnick, it is important to maintain learner identity and the ELT curriculum should reflect a variety of traditions and relate to students' experiences through which they can develop their knowledge and abilities and not get lost in the dominant culture of the textbook (cited in Zeichner, 1992:8-9). Through reflective awareness, teachers need to be conscious of this cultural and linguistic biasness concerning the mother tongue of their students. Most importantly, teachers should look at each specific teaching situation and access the rich and complex multilingual and multicultural backgrounds and thus, be culturally appropriate and relevant. English language teachers who travel to teach, teach outside the home country or in the home country, must familiarise themselves with their students' cultural background. Dialogue and the internet are two ways through which we can bring about meaningful change. Accordingly, E. Auerbach and D. Burgess value dialogues with students and make a case for Freire's problem-posing strategy where the teacher is not

prescriptive but "*engages students in their own education by inviting them to enter into the process of thinking critically about their reality*" (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985:8). As both teachers and students exist in complex social environments, problem-posing via dialogue can help students navigate the culture of the language.

In J. Sharkey and K. Johnson's perspectives, teacher trainers, graduate students, teacher researchers, and research analysts reported on their experiences in an ELL classroom (Sharkey & Johnson ed., 1985). Ling, who taught adult ESL in 1992 in Canada, reported on how in practising problem-posing, she had her classroom "*turned into a caring and sharing space for those immigrants trying to claim the right to speak*" (Sharkey & Johnson ed., 1985:64). Dialogue in the form of problem-posing led also students to:

> [...] discuss their dynamic, multiple identities as language learners, to reflect on why they were investing time and energy in learning English, and to discover how they could assert their right to speak even if they had not attained communicative competence as defined by the dominant culture (Sharkey & Johnson ed., 1985:64-65).

As shown in J. Sharkey and K. Johnson, though theory has suggested that living in a target language community will provide opportunities to learn a language naturally, it is not always supported by research. Therefore, if change does not come from the top-down through the English language associations, materials and publishers, then teachers have to formulate this change from the bottom-up by valuing and using the cultural diversity and perspectives which they face daily. Furthermore, they should include all students who require the language to function in this age of rapid globalisation, cross-border movements and social change (Sharkey & Johnson ed., 1985).

Kirkpatrick, cited in J. Grzega (2005), calls for a shift in English language teachers' mindsets. More should be invested, Kirkpatrick believes, in empowering local, non-native teachers: "*Instead of spending large sums of money on importing native-speaking teachers and externally developed materials, funding should be set aside for the professional development of local teachers*" (Grzega, 2005:54). As shown in N. Zacharias' research into Indonesian textbooks, if locally-produced materials were seriously invested in, then students would have greater confidence in their local teachers and learning aids as well (Zacharias, 2005).

Change is also possible through researchers who are making an impact in the ELT arena. Jenkins and Seidlhofer have attempted a definition of a "Lingua Franca Core" of English based on the corpora of non-native Englishes. Jenkins focused on pronunciation and Seidlhofer on lexicogrammar (cited in Grzega, 2005:47). This is in tune with the philosophy of teaching English as a communicative language rather than a set of normative rules since a large percentage of communication is between non-native speakers of English than non-native and native speakers. The key issue here is putting intelligibility before correctness. As Jenkins and Seidlhofer have shown, cited in J. Grzega,

certain phonological elements such as the 3rd person markers and grammatical elements such as present perfect and simple past, "*bear very little relationship to their actual usefulness, as successful communication is obviously possible without them*" (Grzega, 2005:54). Consequently, certain curricula priorities would have to change.

CONCLUSION

The global spread of ELT (English Language Teaching) and ELL (English Language Learning) is far more complex than simply being an imperialistic process which implies a forced acceptance by formerly colonised people. Today, English is viewed increasingly as the means for people to advance in the global village. Increasingly, more non-native than native speakers use it. The diversity of learners across different geographical boundaries has seen its evolution into multiple varieties of English. As such, promoting interlocutor intelligibility and cultural sensitivity have higher precedence than attaining native-like competency. Nevertheless, the multiple perspectives of ELT and ELL have made it a highly debatable subject with undeniably far-reaching effects and implications.

Debates have resulted in a greater understanding of the need for language education research so that more effective teaching pedagogies and strategies are produced. It is imperative to create a more holistic and pragmatic approach to ELT and ELL, because growing numbers of people use it daily as a common language to communicate. As A. Gilmore (2007) has shown, change from the top-down has been slow in addressing the inadequacies of current textbooks and teaching materials. There are many challenges facing the enlightened teacher or institution but a paradigm shift is possible. Teachers can herald change through a bottom-up approach in how English is taught and conducted in their classrooms, producing linguistic and cultural equality. Another possibility is for researchers like Jenkins and Seidlhofer to produce a lingua franca corpus focusing on English as a communicative language (cited in Grzega, 2005).

The professional development of teachers, together with the support of enlightened linguistic researchers can perhaps lead to an educational philosophy that cuts across colour, creed and race to bring about success to language learners. It also signals the possibilities for future research in classroom-based empirical studies on communicative-centre approaches, collaboration between material writers and teachers, and improvements in language teacher training to ensure that teachers are presented with current developments in knowledge of language and learning.

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