

A World Englishes Mini-Unit for Teachers to Use in the EFL Context

Terence McLean

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Abstract: Although awareness of the importance of recognizing World Englishes is increasing throughout EFL literature, there remains a need to ensure that this trend is indeed reflected in course curricula, materials development, and pedagogy. The purpose of this paper is to present a practical suggestion for implementing a World Englishes mini-unit into the EFL classroom in Japan. Students should be encouraged to consider themselves within the concept of WE-ness as Japanese speakers of English--giving them a sense of identification with a personalized variety of English. If we can instill a deeper sense of confidence in young learners of EFL, then perhaps they will be better able to actively communicate in a foreign language that, until now, they have probably believed to be a *thing* owned by others. English is something *we* speak; it is not something *they* own.

1. BACKGROUND

While Graddol (1997) argues that, in this century, those who speak English alongside other languages will outnumber first-language speakers and, increasingly, will decide the global future of the language, Kachru and Nelson (2001) stress the importance of raising teacher awareness of the status and functions of Englishes in the world today. This increased attention and research regarding World Englishes subsequently pressures English language teachers to not only familiarize themselves with the issues, but also to incorporate World Englishes into their courses: added responsibilities for already busy educators.

The circles model of the global situation of English (Kachru & Nelson 2001) has become the standard framework of World Englishes studies. This model divides English speakers into three groups: the *inner circle*, where they speak English as a first (native) language (ENL); the *outer circle* where they speak it as a second or additional language (ESL); and the *expanding circle*, where they use it as a foreign language (EFL) (Yano 2001). Although the circles appear to attach well to the ENL, ESL and EFL labels, Kachru (1992) emphasizes that all speakers of World Englishes be recognized according to the concept of *WE-ness* and not be trapped in the dichotomy of *us* (ENL) and *them* (ESL/EFL).

One resource available to confront this potential *us* versus *them* pitfall is an instructional unit developed by Kubota (2001) that attempts to raise awareness of the global spread of English and its implications. Whereas Kubota's unit is designed for high school native speakers of English in the United States, the unit presented in this article is designed for EFL students in a Japanese university.

2. UNIT — WORLD ENGLISHES

Overall Objective: To raise learner awareness regarding varieties and functions of World Englishes.

Day One

The teacher will begin the lesson with an informal talk about the various kinds of dialects of Japanese found throughout Japan (*Japanese Tongues* rather than *American Tongues* referred to in Kubota's study). The students should be encouraged to talk about feelings and perceptions associated with certain Japanese dialects (Kansai dialect, Okinawa dialect, Tohoku dialect, and so on). For example, many comedians on Japanese television speak with a Kansai dialect — perhaps some students associate this Japanese Tongue with humour or directness.

After discussing Japanese Tongues, the teacher can ask the students about the

varieties of English that they can identify. If the students do not bring up any World (*outer* and *expanding* circles) Englishes, the teacher can have them work in pairs in order for them to come up with a list of countries in which English is not a native language but is used as an international or intranational language by people living there. Students can share their brainstorming results with the rest of the class. This brainstorming session can lead to a simple presentation by the teacher illustrating Kachru's three circles of World Englishes (Kachru 1992). The students can work together in order to identify examples of names of countries that can be placed in the circles.

The remainder of this lesson will consist of the class watching video clips (e.g., from satellite/cable news programs, documentaries, or a video-recording such as *The Global Tongue: English*, 1998), listening to audio clips (e.g., record short interviews with a few colleagues on campus who speak World Englishes), and reading short newspaper articles (paper or the Internet) that offer examples of a variety of World Englishes. The students can express which Englishes are easier and which are more difficult to comprehend as well as review preconceptions they had about the use of English in the world.

The teacher will continue by explaining the task that the students will undertake. The students will, in small cooperative learning groups, research the history, status and use of English in one *outer circle* or *expanding circle* country (each group has a different country). The teacher should encourage the students to use the university library, the Internet, e-mail, and so on. The students will prepare for a culminating activity: a presentation, on their chosen country and the English used there, to be assessed on both content and communicative competence.

Day Two

The objective of this lesson is to give the students the opportunity to become

researchers and interact with non-Japanese students while learning about World Englishes groups. In addition to providing students with resources such as encyclopedias, newspapers, Internet access, and so on, the teacher should ask international students who are attending the university to join the class for this lesson. The growth in population of non-Japanese students on Japanese university and college campuses should be make it feasible to arrange for a classroom visit. Teachers can also contact the International Relations department of the nearest prefectural offices for information regarding contacting foreign nationals living in the area.

The Japanese students will have the opportunity to conduct interviews to learn more about World Englishes as well as to ask other speakers of World Englishes about their feelings and opinions regarding the status and use of English in the *outer* and *expanding* circles. The teacher may wish to provide his or her students with sample questions and remind the students of the importance of sharing communicative responsibility when speaking and listening. Also, assuming that the international students can speak Japanese, an option for the teacher is to have the students interview the foreign guests *in Japanese* in order to elicit a variety of opinions about languages and ownership – this could even lead to an interesting discussion about whether there is such a phenomena as *World/Asian Japanese*. The information gathered on Day Two will be the substance for the group presentations to be done in the next lesson.

Day Three

The objective of this lesson is to give the students the opportunity to present the results of their research. The first part of the lesson can be used for additional preparation time as the teacher circulates among the groups offering help. The teacher may choose to use an analytic or holistic rubric in order to assess the students' communicative abilities during the presentations. Another option is to invite international students to come and watch (and help grade) the presentations.

Following the presentations, the teacher can lead a class discussion regarding the globalization of English in order to elicit student responses and reactions. Given that some students may not feel comfortable with expressing feelings and opinions publicly, a follow-up homework assignment to this activity could be to ask each student to write a personal reflection about what he or she did and learned during the World Englishes unit. This assignment will give the students time to organize their thoughts without the pressure of speaking in front of the class. Overall, the students should be encouraged to consider themselves within the concept of WE-ness as Japanese speakers of English, giving them a sense of identification with a personalized variety of English. If we can instill a deeper sense of confidence in young learners of EFL, then perhaps they will be better able to actively communicate in a foreign language that, until now, they have probably believed to be a *thing* owned by others; we need to let the students know that nobody *owns* English.

3. CONCLUSION

This unit is in response to the increasing pressure on English language teachers to incorporate World Englishes into the classroom. Crystal (2001:59) proclaims that “It is a brave new world, indeed; and those who have to be bravest of all are the teachers.” Teachers are encouraged to expose students to as many varieties of English as possible (Crystal 2001). Inviting speakers of World Englishes into our classrooms can be a meaningful experience for *both* teachers and students. By opening up the classroom to visitors and by learning with (and from) students, teachers, too, can develop deeper knowledge, appreciation and understanding of World Englishes.

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