

In Selected Papers from the Sixteenth International Symposium on English Teaching (English Teachers' Association/ROC November 9-11, 2007, pp. 172-179)

International English as a Performance-based Phenomenon

Kensaku Yoshida (Sophia University)

Introduction

In the last two decades of the 20th century the world experienced a revolutionary development in communication technology, fulfilling the prophecy of Marshall McLuhan (1967) that the world would soon become one big Global Village.

If we take the situation in Japan, up until the end of the 1960s one of the objectives given in the Ministry of Education's Study Guidelines for the teaching of English was the learning of the English language and cultures of the countries in which English was spoken as a native language. Before the Second World War, the model of English used in English education was British English; however, after the War, the model became American English. It, therefore, meant that the Japanese were expected to learn about American culture along with the language. Many of the topics taken up in English textbooks tended to be about British and American culture, history, and people. English in Japan was a 'Foreign' language—a language which was not used intranationally for any practical purposes other than to enter high school, university, and to get a good job. There were still very few foreigners living and working in Japan, and very few Japanese went overseas.

However, with the success of the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and the Osaka World Fair in 1970, the need to not only passively learn 'about' English and English-speaking

countries and cultures, but also the need to 'use' English to participate in the international community gradually became acknowledged. As a result, the 1970 Study Guidelines, for the first time, noted the importance of cultivating international understanding as a primary objective. (cf. Yoshida, 2001) Since then, the objectives in the Study Guidelines have evolved ever more towards the learning of English for the purpose of international communication. Recent statistics released by the Ministry of Justice (2007) show that the number of foreigners who came to Japan in 2005 surpassed the 7 million mark to 7,450,103 (compared with 5,286,310 in 2001), and the number of Japanese who went abroad in 2005 increased to 17,403,565 (compared with 16,215,657 in 2001). In other words, the need for the Japanese to use a foreign language—in the great majority of cases English—is steadily becoming a reality. It can be said that English in Japan is no longer simply a 'Foreign' language—which has no practical function in real life in Japan—but a language which must be 'used' for the purpose of international communication both in and out of Japan.

This new development towards the use of English for international communication is also reflected in the topics included in recent English textbooks. Whereas topics related to British and American culture, etc., are gradually decreasing, topics related to so-called Global Issues, such as the environment, war and peace, economic and digital divides, as well as lessons featuring Japanese living and working abroad are on the increase.

Types of Englishes and International English

The recognition that, with the world becoming as small as it has in recent years, there is a need for a common means of communication making it possible for the peoples of the world to understand and cooperate with each other is now accepted by

many people around the world. Fortunately or not, English has *de facto* emerged naturally as that common language. Kachru (1990), Smith & Forman (1997), Crystal (2003) and others show that the number of people in the world today who use English as a second or foreign language greatly outnumbers those who speak it as a native language.

What this implies is that the majority of English language speakers do not use American English, or any other so-called Native Englishes. According to Crystal (2003) there are over 60 countries in the world where English is spoken either as the native language or second (or official) language, and all of these Englishes have their own linguistic characteristics. Indian English, Malaysian English, Nigerian English, Cameroon English, Hong Kong English, Tanzanian English, etc. all have unique pronunciations, vocabulary as well as grammars. In many cases, the Englishes spoken intranationally in these countries are unintelligible to speakers of other Englishes. Furthermore, the English learned non-intranationally in 'Foreign' language environments is also unique to each country. For example, the English spoken by speakers of Japanese is very often not understood by speakers of other languages either.

It is, therefore, important for us to acknowledge the importance of the existence of a kind of English which could be used to override the differences which might inhibit mutual communication between peoples who speak different versions of 'Englishes'. Based on previous theories on international English (c.f. Strevens, 1980; Smith & Forman, 1997; Crystal, 2003, etc.) it can be said that under the overall cover term ENGLISH, there are several kinds of Englishes which must be distinguished. There are areas in the world where English is acquired as the mother tongue, areas where it is learned not as a mother tongue but as either a second or official language, and areas

where it is learned as a foreign language. Furthermore, even among the non-native Englishes we can say that the English used in the Philippines is an intranational variety because it is used in the country itself for academic, social and economic purposes, whereas the English learned in Japan is a non-intranational variety, because it is not necessarily required in academic, social or economic contexts within the country. (Figure 1)

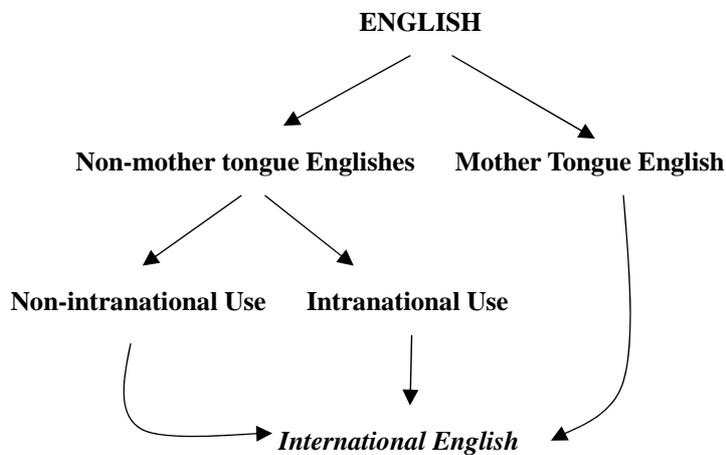


Figure 1. Types of Englishes

An important point to note, however, is that neither mother tongue English nor non-mother tongue English is International English. International English, presumably, is a kind of English which can be used and understood by speakers of any of the different Englishes shown in figure 1. As Strevens and others contend, International English is—at least theoretically—equidistant from any of the varieties of English mentioned above.

A crucial question, however, is the following: are there any specific structural characteristics of International English which could be commonly taught to all non-native speakers? McKay (2002) cites studies in which it has been found that, so

far as grammar (or syntax) is concerned, there seem to be only minor differences between mother tongue English and non-mother tongue intranational Englishes. Jenkins (2000) notes that pronunciation is probably the one most important area of language which can cause misunderstandings between people who speak different varieties of English. However, she argues that there are some core phonological features of International English which could be taught commonly to all non-native English speakers.

I do not doubt that there are certain formal characteristics that commonly exist among the various Englishes spoken around the world. However, I believe that International English is a performance-based concept, and as such, becomes a reality only in the context of 'real' communication between people who do not share a native language. I will come back to this point later.

First, however, I would like to present two models of foreign language teaching depicting the differences between the traditional, pre-Global Village era, and the more recent Global Village era. (cf. Yoshida, 2002)

Two Models of foreign language teaching: from the Fish Bowl to the Open Seas

As was the case in the pre-Global Village era when English was not really necessary for the ordinary Japanese person, there are still students studying a foreign language to pass entrance examinations, getting good grades on tests, etc. However, very often success on tests does not necessarily guarantee that he will be able to use English in real-life situations where the language will also be necessary for a wider range of objectives. For example, a student might do extremely well in foreign language tests opening doors to the best universities in Japan. However, whether these 'elites' in Japan will also succeed in a wider international arena is a different story. As

Funabashi (2000) points out, there are extremely few people in responsible government positions who are capable of using English equally with their counterparts from other parts of the world. In other words, even though their knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, their reading comprehension ability as measured by the ability to translate English passages into Japanese, as well as their ability to translate given Japanese sentences into English, are usually quite good, the criticism is that they cannot really use English outside of what I will call Japan's 'Foreign' language teaching 'Fish Bowl'. The English they acquire might not have much value outside of the classroom-based 'Fish Bowl', i.e., in what I call the 'Open Seas' outside the classroom.

What are the characteristics of this English learned in the Fish Bowl? Let us begin by first looking at the characteristics of the fish living in a Fish Bowl.

Reliance on others

- 1) The water must be changed
- 2) The fish must be fed

Preservation of an ideal (perfect) environment

- 3) The temperature of the water is kept constant.
- 4) The bowl is cleaned and fungi and molds are cleaned away.
- 5) The best feed is used.

Isolated—artificially limited environment

- 6) The fish are isolated from other fish outside the Fish Bowl.
- 7) The Fish Bowl provides for an artificially created limited living space.

If we were to apply these characteristics to the learning of English in the Fish Bowl, we would see the following:

Reliance on others

1) Teacher-centered, passive learning (waiting to be fed)

In this model, the students are always given the best 'English food' to eat, i.e., structures and vocabulary to learn, drills to do, dialogues to memorize, patterns to repeat, which will help them to pass tests and get good grades. Everything is provided by the teacher. Students studying in this model are passive, asking questions such as 'Do I have to memorize this?', 'Is this going to be on the test?', 'Do I have to do this assignment?', etc. .

Preservation of ideal (perfect) environment

2) Perfection—intolerance of errors

The goal is 'accuracy' in the 'form' of the language because that is what is expected most often of the students in tests.

3) Use of native language speaker models/ use of native language speaker values

Since there is no need for the students to use the language in real communication situations, and the primary goal is to acquire 'perfect' knowledge of the structure, only the most ideal, native model is used.

Isolation—artificially limited environment

4) The English learned cannot be extended to other situations

(non-communicable)

The English learned might be unnatural and pragmatically unacceptable in real-life communication, but that is not a problem in the 'Fish Bowl.'

5) The English learned is determined by and is applicable only to the specific environment in which it is learned

The English learned in the Fish Bowl is 'good' in so far as it serves the purpose for which the Fish Bowl was created. If knowing the various meanings and functions of the perfect or the subjunctive is going to make a difference in

whether or not the student will succeed in the Fish Bowl, then he will have to learn them, even if the knowledge might have no or very little significance outside the Fish Bowl.

The Fish Bowl was the most typical and 'accepted' model of foreign language teaching in the pre-Global Village era, when English was not considered important for communication purposes.

However, in the Global Village era, things have begun to change. We can no longer live without communicating with people from different countries and cultures. In contrast to learning and teaching of English in the Fish Bowl, the characteristics of the fish living in the Open Seas would look like the following:

Reliance on Self

- 1) Choosing own water to live in
- 2) Finding own food to eat

Adaptation to existing environment

- 3) Constant change in quality of water
- 4) Existence of fungi and other alien substances
- 5) Food provided naturally by the environment

Co-existence—naturally selected habitat

- 6) Co-existence with many different kinds of fish, animals, plants, etc.
- 7) A natural living environment, commonly shared by all things living in the same sea

Again, if we were to apply these characteristics to the learning and teaching of foreign languages, we would see the following:

Reliance on Self

- 1) Learner-centered, active learning (getting one's own food)

Through meaningful, communicative activities, students learn to contribute to their own learning. The students will look for their own 'English food' to eat, and their search will not be limited to their textbooks or the classroom. They will search for their own 'English food' in areas that interest them: songs, movies, books, newspapers, traveling and meeting foreign people, communicating with foreign people via e-mail, etc.

Adaptation to existing environment

2) Tolerance for mistakes and non-native norms of language

Accuracy in conveying 'meaning' and 'intentions' is more important than accuracy in form, because that is what communication in the Open Seas is all about.

3) Acknowledgement of acceptable English and diversity of values as the norm

The acknowledgement that it's all right to have different kinds of Englishes depending on the learner's background and situation is accepted, because so many people from so many different backgrounds communicate with each other in the Open Seas.

Co-existence—naturally selected habitat

4) Importance of cross-cultural, intercultural understanding

Strategies in cross-cultural communication are essential in communicating in the Open Seas. Simply 'knowing' about different cultures is not enough. Students must be able to communicate effectively in situations where differences between cultures exist.

5) The English learned must be communicable in international settings

Communicability—or the ability to 'communicate'—is the most important criterion for the learning of English as an international language.

International English as the English in the Open Seas

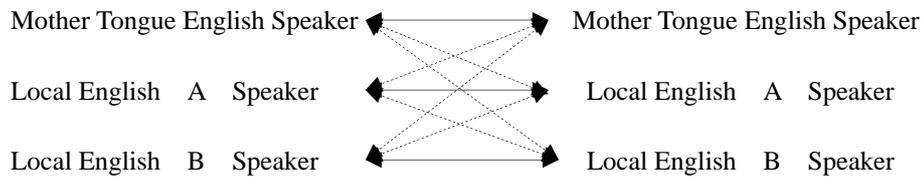
From the discussion of the two models presented above, it should be apparent that the kind of English taught in the Fish Bowl is the 'perfect' native (mother tongue) model. Mother tongue English pronunciation, grammar and usage are what the students aim to acquire, because that is what tests are based on.

In the Open Seas model, however, there is no 'ideal (perfect)' model on which the students' acquisition of English is based. A key concept in this model is 'communicability', which refers to the ability of the interactant to 'communicate' meaning and intentions in English regardless of the form (grammar, pronunciation, etc.) of the language used. An important point to note is that what level of language is communicable will depend not on any objective criteria common to all speakers, but on the individual situation existing between two 'real' speakers. In other words, it is assumed that, in the Open Seas, communication and use of language are created each time—differently—by the specific communication situation in which the interactants find themselves. (cf. Schegloff, 1987) In other words, in the Open Seas, people constitute environments for each other, where they constantly monitor the effects of their performance on the listener as to how effectively they are interacting and modify their language accordingly (cf. McDermott & Tylbor, 1986).

An important corollary to this is that if the interactants come from different cultural backgrounds, because they do not share the same 'macro' or general culture, they must try as much as possible to 'de-culturalize' their speech in order to create a common ground on which they can understand each other. In other words, we could say that International English is basically 'culture-independent' and that it is used to create a unique situationally-determined 'micro-culture' (cf. Schegloff, 1987) every time

it is used. Consider the following cases:

Figure 3. Relationships among Speakers of Different Englishes



When speakers of the same language are interacting with each other (solid lines), there will be more influence of the shared common culture (macro-culture) as well as shared linguistic forms—pronunciation, grammar, colloquial and slang expressions, etc.—in the process of communication. It should be noted that, when Americans are talking with other Americans, the English which is used is American English, and not International English; when Indians are talking to other Indians in English, the English which is used is Indian English, and not International English; and, when a Japanese is talking with another Japanese in English (e.g. in the English classroom) , the English used is Japanese English, and not International English.

However, as the dotted lines show, International English is ‘created’ in situations where people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds use English to communicate with each other. In other words, International English is created in Intercultural Communication situations. Furthermore, when people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds communicate with each other, the interactants will not share the same cultural background, and, therefore, there will be an increased need for the creation of a unique ‘micro-culture’, determined by the concrete situation in which the interaction takes place.

International English created through the process of communication

How, then, is International English ‘created’? Research in child language as

well as SLA has shown that communication is possible if the speakers are able to modify their language to the level of comprehensible input (cf. Krashen, 1982) of the listeners. Although the literature on comprehensible input usually centers on the modification of language by the 'expert' speaker to meet the level of the 'novice' learner (e.g. caretaker talk, foreigner talk, teacher talk), it is equally possible to assume that mutual modification by both native and non-native speakers will occur between speakers of different types of Englishes. This means that it is not only the native speaker of English who has the responsibility of modifying his/her speech to meet the level of the non-native speaker, but the non-native speaker must also modify his/her speech to help the native speaker understand his/her version of English (cf. Jenkins, 2000). For example, when a non-native speaker uses a kind of English which can only be understood by people who come from the same linguistic and cultural community, the non-native speaker will have the responsibility of modifying his/her language so that the native speaker will understand what s/he means. The ability to modify one's speech to make it comprehensible to the listener becomes even more important when non-native speakers of Englishes from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds must speak with each other.

In other words, the creation of comprehensible input is a mutual requirement wherever International English is used, and comprehensible input can only be created through the process of communication. It can also be said that International English will differ depending on who the interactants are and the nature of the communicative situation. Thus, International English can be defined as that English which is created in the process of communication between interactants who come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It is not really necessary to define 'objective' linguistic structures (syntactically, lexically, or phonologically), because it is a

performance phenomenon and not necessarily a competence phenomenon. It is the result of the communicative efforts made by the interactants to provide comprehensible input for each other.

One other point we should note is that because there are no native speakers and only non-native speakers of International English, there is no macro-culture attached to International English. Instead, the interactants will mutually create their own unique micro-culture with each communication situation.

What 'Model' of English should we use in our schools?

Even if we were to accept the above concept of International English, an important pedagogical problem remains—if there is no objective structural criterion of International English, what can teachers use as the model to teach their students?

I believe that the most probable 'Model' of International English is the International English as it is used by native speakers of English. As was discussed above, when two Americans are speaking to each other, the English used is American English. However, when an American is speaking to a Japanese, they will be using International English. The interesting thing is that the International English used by native English speakers becomes much more comprehensible than their native English because the International English they use is the result of the modifications they apply to their native English so that non-native speakers understand them. The pronunciation is usually clearer, the grammar easier (and more accurate), the vocabulary simpler without the use of culturally-loaded and slang expressions, and the content is co-created with the non-native speaker (micro-culture).

It is interesting to hear anecdotes told by native English speakers teaching English in Japan who go home to their native country on holiday and are told by the

family that their English is strange. Their English had become International English.

It is interesting also to note that the English spoken in Britain, the United States, Australia and New Zealand are all quite distinct and sometimes very difficult to comprehend. However, it is a lot easier to understand the English spoken by a British, American, Australian and New Zealander teaching English in Japan. Somehow, their English seems to have 'converged'—as International English.

Who do I want to speak English like?

One further observation I want to make is that what we use as the Model for teaching English is not necessarily the same as the kind of English our students want to attain as a Goal. In the lectures I have been giving high school students, I have asked the following questions: 'Who would you be like to speak English like?' and 'Can you give me the name of a specific person you would like to speak English like?' Although I have asked these questions of several hundred high school students in Japan, very few students have answered that they want to be able to speak English like a native speaker. The majority of the students answer that they want to be able to speak English 'as a Japanese'. To the second question, not one student so far has given the name of an English native speaker as a person they would like to speak English like. On the other hand, several students have mentioned the names of their Japanese English teachers as people they would like to speak English like. It seems that the students are well aware that they cannot become like native speakers (even if their International English is the Model that they use to learn English), and they are also very aware of their identity as a Japanese.

Conclusion

We are living in an age where the Fish Bowl Model of foreign language learning no longer has a role to play. Even in an EFL environment like Japan, students must learn to cope with the Open Seas environment in which they are now living. In order to survive in and contribute to the Global Village, the ability to use International English is crucial. However, International English is independent of any of the local Englishes, whether native or non-native, and it can only be acquired in the process of communication.

Despite the fact that people around the world are already and will be using International English for the purposes of international communication, we should not forget that International English is independent of any one culture or country. In other words, speakers of International English can preserve their own identity while using English as a tool for communication.

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