In an effort to curtail native-speaker dominance of global English, and in recognition of the growing role of the language among non-native speakers from different first-language backgrounds, some academics have been urging the teaching of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Although at first this proposal seems to offer a plausible alternative to the traditional standard version, it raises both practical and theoretical concerns. Moreover, since neither World English nor nativized local Englishes have yet gained full legitimacy, it is clear that the native-speaker model still has an important role to play, though one modified by new cultural and pedagogical priorities.

In the aftermath of independence achieved in the years following the Second World War, many former British colonies sought to repudiate their previous subordination by demoting English, the language of their erstwhile masters, from its inherited position of dominance and replacing it with one or more native languages. As a political gesture, this move often had wide appeal, but ‘the ghost of imperialism could not be exorcised overnight’ (Rahman 2009: 15), and the resulting difficulties soon became apparent. In countries where several major languages were spoken, English had provided an effective means of communication between different ethnic and linguistic groups, who did not always take kindly to one native language being given precedence over another. One example here is provided by India, where the Official Languages Act of 1967 declared Hindi to be equal to English for all official purposes. This caused significant resentment among Tamil speakers in the south of the country, with protests leading to civil unrest and actual violence, forcing the government in New Delhi to suspend the implementation of the law in the state of Tamil Nadu. In the same way, the replacement of English by Malay in the new Malaysian Confederation led in 1965 to the secession of Singapore, where the majority Chinese population feared that the policy would lead to their marginalization within the larger state, where they constituted a minority.

Even where new language policies were designed to ensure equal status among native languages, it often proved impossible to accommodate all of these. In Nigeria, for example, while in 1969 Yoruba, Hausa, and Ibo were all declared to be official languages, more than 380 other languages were not granted such status, so disadvantaging all their respective speakers. Apart from practical considerations, the real concern here was that attempting to
accommodate more local languages (in the provision of education and other services) would tend to limit professional mobility and to undermine that sense of national unity which the new governments were so keen to promote. Indeed, speaking of Zambia, which faced a situation comparable to Nigeria after independence, but which chose to maintain the special status of English for longer, Nichindila (2009: 330) concludes that ‘... English has been one of the cardinal unifying factors for Zambian society’, although as a consequence literacy in local languages noticeably suffered before the policy was eventually modified.

There were other relevant factors too. Few educational materials in the chosen native languages were available, especially at tertiary level, and subsequent attempts to limit schooling in English tended to drive the more affluent and informed into sending their children to private English-medium academies or to schools abroad. As Nichindila (ibid.) comments again:

... very few of the Zambian government ministers send their children to government schools where the policy of teaching in local languages applies now. Most of them send their children to private schools ...

Even when it was relatively straightforward to promote a single native language as a replacement for English, as with Bangla in largely monolingual Bangladesh, the consequences of doing so were often a decline in general English proficiency among the educated section of the population, as happened in this country following the implementation of the Bangla Introduction Law of 1983, leading the government to subsequently modify its position, with English being reintroduced as a language of instruction at university and as a parallel language of administration at both local and national levels (Rahman op. cit.: 18).

The development and nature of English as a Lingua Franca

So it has proved difficult for former colonial and other peoples subjected to anglophone hegemony to escape from the linguistic legacy of the past. One response has been to attempt to neutralize English, to sheer it of its cultural baggage, to remove it from the hands of its Anglo-Saxon native speakers, and to emphasize its role as a value-free means of international communication belonging equally to all who speak it as a first or second language. It is in this context that the notion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has developed and been recently fostered. However, there remains some uncertainty over exactly what this term means in practice. It is usually seen to refer to the end result of the gradual abandonment, avoidance, or alteration by non-native speakers of those parts of English that tend to cause significant misunderstanding in interactions with other non-native speakers or are redundant in that situation, thus producing a reduced version of the language which allows more straightforward interchange to take place. But what is the nature of this abbreviated alternative?

Seidlhofer (2004: 222) is adamant that:

... ELF is a natural language and can thus be expected to undergo the same processes that affect other natural languages, especially in contact situations.
This would suggest that ELF can be viewed as an identifiable, discrete entity, yet this idea is called into question by the pronouncements of other writers in the field. Jenkins (2007: 41) is clear that it does not refer to a monolithic construct which will merely replace traditional native-speaker norms with new but equally inflexible standards. Instead, it would consist of ‘a variety of local versions of English’, each influenced by the local native language. Dewey and Cogo (2007: 11) argue that it should be seen:

not as a uniform set of norms or practices but rather a set of linguistic resources which, while sharing common ground, is typically more variable than other language varieties.

This apparent contradiction undermines attempts to give a clear status to ELF, a problem reminiscent of the dilemma which exercised philosophers of the Middle Ages in Europe: whether types or categories of things actually exist in their own right (as the Realists asserted) or whether they are merely abstractions deriving from multiple concrete instances of things, which alone have true being (as the Nominalists maintained).

Leaving aside this ontological issue, the purpose of the simplification seems clear: to exclude culturally restricted items (what Seidlhofer op. cit.: 220 terms ‘unilateral idiomaticity’), particularly Anglo-Saxon ones, so easing the process of communication and curbing the authority of native speakers. Another key reason for encouraging the use of ELF, though, is that it is said to more closely resemble the versions of English actually spoken by various groups of non-native speakers, who are known to outnumber native speakers in their use of English by a large margin and whose communications with each other are said to constitute the majority of global interchanges in the language. So it could be considered both a more achievable and relevant target for the majority of learners. To this end, some core features have been described, pre-eminently on the basis of the VOICE corpus, allowing certain awkward and apparently insignificant elements of traditional Standard English (such as the third person ‘s’ ending in the present tense of verbs) to be ignored (Seidlhofer op. cit.: 119).

**Practical and theoretical problems**

Although at first glance this seems feasible, indeed attractive, there are fundamental problems, both practical and theoretical, with the whole ELF project. While some elements of a lingua franca core have been thus isolated, a complete and definitive description remains elusive. Shim (2009: 113) comments:

The fallacy in the ‘lingua franca core’ perspective is that . . . [i]t is not possible to get to a uniform lingua franca core that is shared by fluent bilinguals from different first-language backgrounds.

Kachru (1992: 66) too is clear that what he terms a ‘monomodal approach’ to non-native English cannot be defended and that attempts to subsume different local variations within a common version are doomed to failure because the functional roles assigned to English and the contexts in which these apply differ from one place to another. Kirkpatrick (2007: 163) makes the same point when discussing the varieties of English used in South East Asia: while they are very similar,
... it would be impossible to describe ASEAN lingua franca as a single systematic system that could be codified and then used as a model for the ASEAN English language classroom.

In fact, as he admits, it is the ‘mutual understanding, cooperation and tolerance of variation’ of the different national groups that allows them to communicate so well, indicating that cultural sympathy and interpersonal skills are just as important in lingua franca exchanges as sharing a broadly common language.

In addition to this problem of codification, there is the difficulty in any given situation of distinguishing between authentic non-standard alternatives and persistent error. By way of guidance, here Kachru (op. cit.: 62) contrasts mistakes with deviations. While the former

... cannot be justified with reference to the socio-cultural context of a non-native variety and is not the result of the production processes used in an institutionalized non-native variety,

the latter is the result of such a process,

which marks the typical variety-specific features; and it is systematic within the variety and not idiosyncratic.

Kirkpatrick (op. cit.: 163) suggests that where a process of simplification has taken place as a result of transferring the parameter settings of either universal grammar or a local language, then a legitimate variation of Standard English has occurred; in contrast ‘... the addition of inflections in contexts where they are not needed is a potential marker of learner English’. In both these formulations, though, the distinction remains notional and rather tentative, and therefore deficient for practical purposes: without clearer reference points, it is difficult to see how teachers of ELF could be adequately trained or supplied with appropriate classroom resources.

Besides this pedagogical difficulty, both teachers and students would face an attitudinal one: they would be obliged to embrace and foster a variety of English which up to now they have learnt to treat as inferior and by doing so risk undermining their academic self-image and limiting their professional aspirations. Reports suggest that neither group wishes to make this compromise:

Research shows that EFL teachers seem to recognize the usefulness of ELF-based skills mentioned in NS–NNS [native-speaker–non-native-speaker] communication, but are prone to taking up an NS-oriented perspective when asked specifically about language teaching. (Sifakis 2009: 232)

Norrish (2008: 5) agrees:

An obstacle ... to the ELF approach ... is the opinion expressed by many learners that they wish to learn a NS version of the language ... [I]n my own experience, this was strongly the case with teacher trainers in Shanghai in 1992 who expressed very strong feelings against any other target than ‘Standard English’.
Of course attitudes may change where the case for ELF becomes persuasive and it is officially adopted.

At a more fundamental level, though, the ELF project needs to take more account of the nature and purpose of second language learning. The majority of those who learn a language other than their first native tongue (or tongues, if they are effectively multilingual from childhood) tend only to reach a moderate level of competence; they rarely achieve full proficiency. Arguably, therefore, it is less crucial that the model presented for teaching can be precisely reproduced, since it will not usually be completely mastered, than that it serves as a clear marker for the classroom and, with more ambitious students, for the wider world beyond. This is the point made by Chien (2007: 5) when speaking of non-native speaker teachers in Taiwan:

> Although the majority may agree that conveying meaning is more important than perfect conformity with a native-speaker standard, they are generally inclined to keep the native form as a teaching model.

Kirkpatrick (op. cit.: 191) concedes the same point when he allows that native-speaker norms serve not for imitation but as a benchmark against which to monitor output.

Of course, classroom models must be offered intelligently and flexibly: good teachers soon learn to avoid complex idioms when dealing with beginners, to not insist on unimportant grammatical inflexions (the third-person singular verb ending again), and to make allowance for local accent and manners of speech. As Norrish (op. cit.: 5) says:

> ... teachers will continue to be guided by the wants, wishes and needs of the learners and the social, professional or pedagogic contexts in which they may need to use the language.

Mimatsu (2007: 6) makes this point with reference to teachers of English in Japan, arguing that they naturally adapt the received native-speaker models by making use of their knowledge of their learners' mother tongue:

> ... they communicate in a Japanese version of English that naturally occurs under the influence of Japanese linguistic and socio-cultural factors.

This kind of adjustment, like those between non-native speakers with different first languages seeking to communicate, has always taken place and will continue to do so; seeking to derive artificial norms from these *ad hoc* procedures is inappropriate.

Even if a convincing lingua franca core could be agreed and teachers and students persuaded and enabled to teach and learn it, the outcome might well be less beneficial than expected. As there would still be demand for native-speaker models among some sections of the non-native-speaker population, decisions would have to be taken about curriculum choice in schools. It is highly likely that where choice existed, the more affluent, ambitious, and well connected would opt for schools where native-speaker standards prevailed, and the poorer sections of the community would be
relegated to schools where ELF was the norm. Prodromou (2007: 10) makes this point forcibly:

ELF scholars would constrain L1 and L2 users within the limits of ELF varieties. In this way, ELF will serve to strengthen the power of those who already have the full range of repertoires available in existing models. The two ‘models’ would compete for the same space and it is not difficult to see which model will prevail.

A similar division of teachers would probably occur too, those attaining near-native competence teaching in the former while those less proficient would teach in the latter. Both these processes would have a divisive effect on the society and would end up exacerbating rather than diminishing existing inequalities by limiting the scope of the majority and confirming the privileges of the policymakers.

**Alternative futures**

While ELF does not seem to offer a plausible future for English language development and teaching, other possible scenarios may do so. One such is the notion of ‘Globish’ (Shim op.cit.), which draws on the standard usages of English in different parts of the world in order to create a World English owned by and accessible to all; although heavily dependent on the Anglo-Saxon native-speaker model, this agglomeration would in theory make space for and actually give way to other norms as respective peoples (for example speakers of Indian and Nigerian English) exert increasing influence on the world stage. This process can already be observed in the way that American English has tended to supplant British English as the leading native-speaker model in certain parts of the globe.

It is unlikely, however, that such a World English would significantly depart from existing Anglo-Saxon norms as long as America remained economically and culturally dominant among the world’s elites. For this reason, a more significant development is the one alluded to above: the current diversification of English around the world, spawning varieties which have achieved a degree of recognition in their respective geographical spheres. In this case, the local English exists and is accepted alongside both the local native language or languages and the traditional native-speaker model of English, each being used in different contexts and being allotted different roles. This situation is well described by Duruoha (2009: 202ff) with reference to Nigeria. He comments that Nigerian English operates as ‘an indigenous lingua franca . . . ’ (ibid.: 209) and adds that:

> [although [some people] see the new Englishes as ‘interference varieties’, they are adequate and have become institutionalized and close to native-like English. (ibid.: 207)

Of course the problems faced in establishing the legitimacy of such local varieties, and in institutionalizing their use, are similar to those discussed above regarding ELF. Even when supported by a shared sociocultural context, nativized Englishes have not been convincingly codified and may also elude being so in a way which wins wide acceptance in other than informal situations. In discussing the setting of norms in international proficiency tests, Davies, Hamp-Lyons, and Kemp (2003: 575) refer to the opinion of Lukami, a teacher of English in India, who
... argues that many Indian speakers of English produce an interlanguage, which is not systematic, either in grammar or discourse. Politically, no-one in India accepts the existence of Indian English as an acceptable written variety and there are no models on which to base it.

In the opinion of this Indian teacher at least, there is danger in moving away from native-speaker norms, even where recognized local varieties of English are concerned. The reference here to writing brings into focus another point on which the concept of ELF is unhelpful: it only really takes account of the spoken language; when formal writing is involved, it has little to offer. On paper, the need for precision, clarity, and rhetorical coherence, in the absence of scope for interpersonal negotiation and with a potentially heterogeneous audience, forces both writer and reader to give greater weight to recognized rules of grammar and syntax. Moreover, since such writing often takes place within a specific hierarchical and professional context, it must also take account of the appropriate lexis and register, which would be compromised by a less rigorous approach to the use of language, thus significantly disadvantaging anyone who had command only of ELF.

Conclusion

So, given the various constraints outlined above, it seems probable that the Anglo-Saxon native-speaker model will retain its leading role for some time to come rather than be replaced by its ELF shadow, although it will have to compete increasingly with developing nativized varieties in certain parts of the world. This does not mean, of course, that this model should be the preserve of the native-speaker alone. In fact, non-native-speaker teachers, who should be seen as successful multilingual practitioners rather than second-rate users of English, bring to the classroom vital knowledge of local languages and cultures, which often renders them more effective than those from a monolingual background. As the communicative methodology, which in its heyday helped promote the use of native-speaker expatriates, gives way to an eclectic approach more sympathetic to local pedagogic styles and priorities, so the value of local teachers will be recognized and their status enhanced. It is this shift in perspective and attitude rather than the pursuit of an uncertain substitute for authentic English which will really help empower both learners and teachers because it validates their own cultural experiences without devaluing the content of what they are studying.

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