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Trabajo de Fin de Grado

The Spread of English and its Implications for ELT

Autor: Evelyn Inés Esteban Aniceto

Tutora: Consuelo Montes Granado

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Tutor: Consuelo Montes Granado

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ABSTRACT

In the Globalised world of the 21st century, English has become the bridge language between people all over the world. A number of phenomena have been occurring which directly affect how we perceive English, which is now not only a language but a source of common ground and safe place for many people coming from different geographical and ethnic backgrounds. In a way, it can be argued, that such phenomenon has not only made communication possible but has enabled a common path for different and unique individuals who contribute in different areas of knowledge and thus, highly contribute to enriching future generations. From the media to scientific communication and dissemination, English has significantly expanded and its nature as a Lingua Franca language never ceases to amaze us. Therefore and in contribution to previous works done on the matter, this essay will explore traditional conceptions regarding the geographical distribution of English according to Kachru´s model of concentric circles. Then it will deal with scholar Penny Ur´s proposal of The Fully Competent Speaker of English Model to substitute the traditional Native Speaker Model in ELT. Finally and in order to conclude this essay, a close look into South Korean will exemplify how English is used as a cultural weapon in a society aiming for perfection now more than ever.

KEY WORDS: Bridge language, Globalization, Communication, Lingua Franca, South Korea.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English as a language is with the passing of time and in our current society, a bridge language almost essential to international intelligibility. Living in a world where English is a globalized language, it is of no surprise that it has become the chosen means of communication amongst non-natives of the language which might not have any other common language to rely on. From its humble origins back in the fifth century, English has taken over everyday aspects of our lives from business to diplomacy, including scientific communication and dissemination, as well as technological advances, breaking down the existing communication barriers and allowing international responses or further reach of these advances into the world. Thus, English has been expanding at an even pace allowing non-native speakers of the language to easily surpass native ones, if we take into account the speakers from Outer and Expanding circles according to Kachru´s model. Standard English and its imperialism over other varieties of English is now constantly being defied as mutual intelligibility is coming to be more important than adjusting to the norm providing world of Standard varieties of the Inner Circle.

Nowadays, however, the disturbing question of `What does it mean to speak English´, is emerging. It remains a source of controversy to decipher at what level one is considered to actually speak English. Having said that, and despite the fact that English is now a global lingua franca, or in other words, a globalised language, native users still hold a certain degree of control over pronunciation and discourse patterns. Native users are believed to provide norms for the correct use of English and consider any variation from Standard, a fossilized mistake made on the learner´s side.

Regarding English as a Lingua Franca or ELF, a number of key issues arise that are worth explaining in depth. Furthermore, some common theories and assumptions are to be revised in order to understand how the multilingual world we live in is constantly changing and adapting to the present reality of its speakers and how English is not considered a foreign language but an international bridge amongst non-native and even native speakers.

This essay will take a look at Kachru´s model of concentric circles of English and how this model is revisited by scholar Penny Ur. To this purpose, an updated look at the native model of English in ELT will be provided as it is now gradually losing scientific foundation, though not ideological preference, in countries of the Outer and Expanding Circles. Due to this lack of foundation, thus, the native speaker model will be substituted by the Fully Competent Speaker Model. Furthermore, the ELF phenomenon will be analyzed in the north East Asian region of South Korea, along with the challenges and effects the use of English gives rise to in social stratification and regarding the accessibility to the working market now being crucially dependant on EFL test scores.

2. RE-DEFINING KACHRU´S CIRCLES OF ENGLISH

Linguist Braj Kachru in his early 1980s pioneering essay made a distinction based on the different usages of English all over the world according to the type of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional appropriation of the language in diverse cultural contexts, ranging from governmental use to educational policies.

2.1 Kachru´s model of concentric circles of English

This distinction is based on three concentric circles which are displayed as follows:
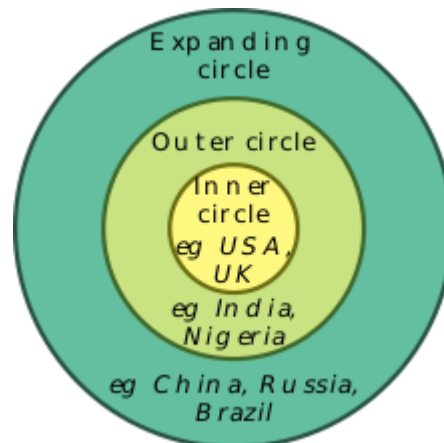
2.1.1 The Inner Circle of English

On the core of this distinction is what Kachru denominates Inner Circle of English. In the Inner Circle, English is spoken as a native language or L1 and therefore is comprised by such countries as U.K, USA, Ireland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the so-called traditional bases of English, which in total can amount to an estimated total of 375 million speakers worldwide (Bhatia and Ritchie). Such countries belonging to the Inner circle are considered in Kachru´s model, to be norm – providing as they hold ownership over the language in terms of correct usage. As Suzanne Romaine states: "In the so-called "inner circle" English is multifunctional, transmitted through the family and maintained by governmental or quasi-governmental agencies (e.g. the media, school, etc.) and is the language of the dominant culture." (3). That is to say, in Inner Circle countries, English is the basic means of communication as it is the mother tongue to the majority of its population, and an intrinsic aspect of their everyday lives.

2.1.2 The Outer Circle of English

As a product of the British Empire, immigrants from England travelled all over the world and settled themselves in the recently established colonies. With this expansion, English was now, outside of its native settings and therefore constituted a new reality for the language as well as for its users. With this new reality, comes what is known as the Outer Circle English, a number of former colonies which used to belong to the British Empire. In the Outer Circle, a multicultural setting is encountered and English is therefore spoken not as the country´s L1 but as a second language not being typically the mother tongue of such countries. Among the countries included in the Outer Circle are Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, India, Jamaica and over 50 countries more. English speakers in the Outer Circle amount to an estimated 450 million, therefore surpassing native speakers in the Inner Circle. The Outer Circle is considered to be norm developing, causing the English varieties to depict a conflict between linguistic form and linguistic behaviour. Furthermore, "such varieties are both endo- and exonormative." (White 2)

However and as a matter of common sense, these countries seem too diverse to have a common variety of English applied to them all. As author Kimberly Brown states:

> "In these countries, a variety of English has evolved which possesses the common core characteristics of Inner Circle varieties of English, but in addition can be distinguished from them by particular lexical, phonological, pragmatic and morphosyntactic innovations" (Bolton and Kachru 423)

As Kachru himself considered, English is a World Language, a global lingua franca that allows both native speakers and members of the outer and expanding circles, who do not share a common language, to communicate among themselves so as to

have cross-cultural enriching communications. Focusing on the Outer Circle, examples such as Nigeria and India pop up when using English for elite distinction and social stratification based on linguistic varieties. However, this is not a reality homogeneously applied, and in most cases, first and second languages co exist to enrich the image the country projects towards the outer world and its legacy.

2.1.3 The Expanding Circle of English

Finally, according to Kachru, the last concentric circle is the Expanding circle,in which English is neither L1 nor the L2 but still portrays the lingua franca position and is widely studied as a foreign language. That is to say, it has neither official nor special administrative status as it has not been institutionalized however it´s importance as an International Language is still very much present in the country´s everyday life. Included in the Expanding Circle are countries such as Denmark, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Korea, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, and Brazil among many others, which amount to an estimated 750 million speakers and which are considered to be norm dependent in regards of Kachru´s model. It is estimated that speakers in the Outer and Expanding circles already surpass native speakers of the language and that interactions amongst non-native speakers of English surpass as well interactions made in native settings or amongst native and non-native speakers.

2.2 Penny Ur´s new model of English as International Language

Having previously analyzed Kachru´s distribution of the English language, Scholar Penny Ur offers a distinctive view worth taking into account and presents a new phenomenon, which will change current perspectives over native speakers of English in ELT and their presumed authority on the assessment of the language. Starting off, Ur considers that English is not a foreign but an international language

following Kachru´s regard to English as a World language though with due differences. Furthermore, English has gained its international prestige due to its use in order to interact with others for whom English is not their mother tongue and have no other common means of communication.

However, and with one third of the world´s population speaking a certain degree of English the question of `What does it mean to speak English´ arises. Remains uncertain where to place the intelligibility barrier and which are the factors endangering mutual understanding. Intelligibility, however, is not only a problem faced by non-natives but by natives as well since they not only speak their own dialect but need to speak "some kind of generally intelligible international English" (Ur 5:05). In continuing with users of English, the native and non-native distinction needs to be expanded as this kind of speakers are increasingly multilingual as well as bi dialectal, as to attend the demanding conditions of the English language. Nowadays linguistic proficiency in English does not suffice but "communicative and comprehension strategies" or, as Ur claims "pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competences" (White 6) need to be developed up to a high level in order to achieve mutual intelligibility and avoid breaking the communicative channel. Speakers therefore, especially native ones, need to be flexible in order to apply their own knowledge and personal inputs to the target language and achieve the desired exchange of information in an effective way. It has been demonstrated that non-native speakers tend to be much more flexible in understanding local varieties of English alongside its characteristic expressions and vocabulary as opposed to native speakers, who remain less flexible in understanding other varieties of the language. This distinction is what Ur calls the "Speaker of English

as an international language" as opposed to the "Speaker of English as a Monolingual Intralingual language".

2.2.1 The Fully Competent Speaker Model in ELT versus The Native Speaker Model

Traditional conceptions over the teaching of English as an international language tend to focus on the intrinsic need of a native speaker in order to achieve success. However and in recent years, this model is coming to be quite vague regarding the actual benefits its implementation might bring. To begin with, when choosing a native teacher as the model, certain disadvantages emerge as opposed to the few benefits this models proves to have. If taking into account that non-native speakers already surpass native ones, the option of teaching a national variety of English as British English or American English seems quite baffling. English nowadays is taught in a variety of contexts, and it is used as a common means of communication for speakers of different native languages. Thus, it seems unreasonable to teach a national variety of English to an international audience, which might not be familiar with it. English as a language is therefore, an international construct rather than a national one due to its global function. If however this model proves to be somehow beneficial, the question is now placed, on which Native Model is to be chosen. Is British English the right option, or on the contrary, is American English the best language variety for global learners. This question remains without an answer and thus, is considered to be a problem in choosing the most suitable model for the diversity of English learners nowadays. Furthermore, if a clear model cannot be provided, materials and assessment become an issue for both teachers and students, which have nothing to rely on. As proven by

previous arguments, the Native model lacks scientific foundation to prove whether it is actually beneficial or not to a wider non- native audience.

As opposed to the Native Model of English teaching, scholar Penny Ur suggests a new model known as the Fully Competent Speaker Model. As English is now a globalised language, a native speaker is not necessarily the best option when teaching the language. Present society and its needs suggest that what is actually necessary is a "fully competent speaker of English ... with a wide vocabulary, accurate grammar, easily understood pronunciation" (Ur 9:40). This reality suggests that there is a need to redefine the traditional three-circle division made by Kachru with a new set of criteria. This new foundation is therefore based on the level of competence rather than in terms of native or non-native speakers. This new model proves that when eliminating the local idiom of a specific variety and its usages and furthermore erasing the specific characteristics of a linguistic community, communication and mutual intelligibility are possible. Fully competent speakers need to make sure vocabulary and grammar are universally understood and accepted and need to select which particularities are to be erased; the cause of many troubles on the student´s side. When forcing a Standard variety into the classroom, students face the hardly ever achievable expectation of becoming a "native" of a language they are not natives of. Thus, this new model removes such pressures and sets students a much more realistic goal; the goal of becoming a fully competent speaker of English. Becoming a fully competent speaker has proven to be a fact and not a mere unachievable illusion. Recent tendencies drive towards mutual intelligibility and are against the fallacy of the Native Speaker in ELT. Thus, with innovative materials in ELT, ELF will significantly be benefited and will gain a deeper insight on the real struggles of English students worldwide.

3. ELF expansion in South Korea: New Challenges and Developments

South Korea is widely known for its highly remarkable excellence in the education field, and it is of no surprise to know the huge amount of pressure the educational system puts in the acquisition of English from a very young age. As English is now everywhere, some countries make it a top priority for the achievement of life success and elite job selection, a certain degree of fluency in the language. In the case of South Korea, students are required with the ultimate level of excellence in order to enter the country´s top universities leading to social recognition, prestige, and job acquisition, a matter Koreans do not take lightly. This road into English excellence starts quite soon for many and puts a significant amount of stress on students shoulders.

From primary bilingual education to being a crucial part of their SAT exam, or university entrance exam, students are expected to achieve parameters of native speaker competences in reading and listening comprehension. These requirements are used as a filter in the case of job applications but first and foremost, in the access to the top A and B Korean university categories, considered to be the most prestigious ones and which will lead to better job opportunities. Such emphasis results in massive English proficiency tests taken all over the county, which grant limited understanding and do not suffice for mutual intelligibility as they do not provide real communicative skills or knowledge in the language itself. Thus, what seems to be the real motivation for the expansion of English in South Korea is to succeed in highly competitive contexts where traditional teaching methods are implemented and real linguistic competence is precluded. As a matter fact, "even after many years of having studied the language a majority of ... students cannot speak the language enough to hold a conversation in it" (Schneider 252). Some

examples of this trend can also be seen in Japan and China where despite the prominent importance of English, educational policies are increasingly reducing the exposition to the language in early educational settings, in order to reduce stress levels and foster interest in the local culture. It remains to be seen the position South Korea takes on the matter, as Asian governments are increasingly projecting "Asian languages as cultural icons and promote English for its utilitarian function only" (Schneider 250). However, despite recent educational trends, the position of English as a Lingua Franca seems secure not only in the present but also in years to come and South Korea is an example to keep into consideration.

4. Conclusion

English as a Lingua Franca is with the coming of time a global and globalised significant phenomenon leaving ELT a long and difficult task, the preservation and assimilation of a language in constant change and development. Of no denying is the fact that English is now a prominent aspect of our everyday lives and that early exposure to the language is considered to be a determinant factor in an individual´s success in life. Whether is the case of academic communication, job selection or university applications, English is everywhere and ELF has become a global phenomenon connecting people all around the world. ELT is in a position where the necessary emphasis on the language and its globalised use collides with aspects such as which variety to teach or whether it is actually useful or not, as in the case of South Korea and many other Asian countries. Nevertheless it is unquestionable how English brings cultures together and is seen as a uniting tool for many. Considered as a "soft" power strategy, the world´s bridge language has experience a profound change to establish itself as a

communicative and cooperative tool current society cannot live without. From traditional perspectives and classifications to the most recent updates, ELF and its most important implications have been tackled in order to ease the understanding of this linguistic phenomenon. Furthermore, an insight in the real life signification of such phenomenon proves that despite its controversies regarding its implementation, ELF´s status is now more secure than has ever been. Next years will demonstrate whether such is the case for upcoming generations and whether English is to adapt itself to even more profound changes in order to fulfil the changing necessities of a world in constant change or is a language in no need of modification.

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