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The many names of English

ELIZABETH J. ERLING

A discussion of the variety of labels given to the language in its worldwide role

IN HIS article 'Is it *world* or *international* or *global* English, and does it matter?' (ET79, Jul 04), Tom McArthur welcomes further comment on the names of English in a 'globalizing world'. He examines the histories and meanings of the three most popular labels for English: *world*, *international* and *global*. In addition to discussing his contribution, I would like to draw attention to other, perhaps less familiar names for English that have been proposed as alternatives. This paper seeks both to survey these labels and uncover why there is such a strong compulsion to rename the language. I suggest that these proposals have arisen in response to postcolonial ambiguity about the spread of English and a desire to shape a new ideology for English language teaching (ELT) which more accurately reflects the global nature of the language and its diverse uses and users.

Introduction: *English as ...*

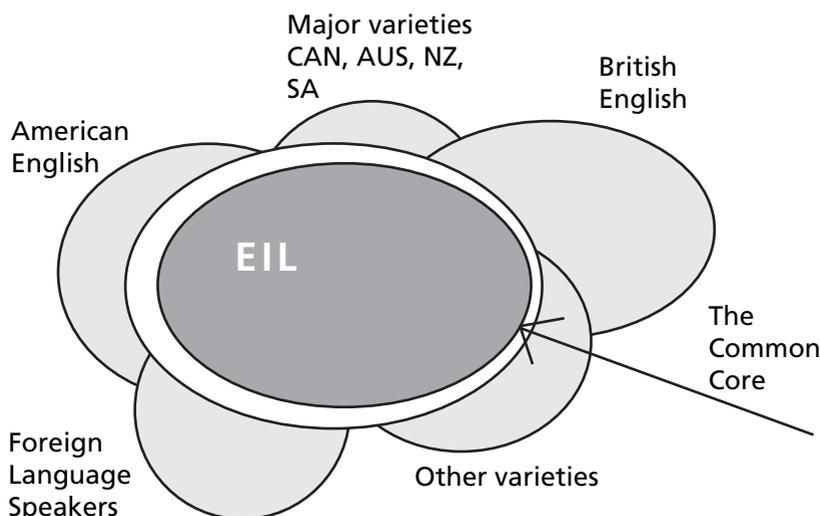
The terminology discussed in this section refers to proposals that have evolved in order to describe the increasing amount of communication among and between speakers that have English as an L2: that is, as an additional language that is being or has been learned to an adequate level (cf. McArthur 1992:406). These proposals place emphasis on functional uses of the language instead of geographical varieties and recognize that English can be used as a language of communication without necessarily being a language of identification. It has been suggested that the phrasing 'English as...' highlights the international use of English rather than suggesting, with a term like International English, that there is only one monolithic variety (cf. Seidlhofer 2002b:8).

Widdowson & Modiano: *English as an international language*

The first of these terms, abbreviated as EIL, has been used in a range of ways. Widdowson (1997) for example employs it to describe the specific use of English for international, professional and academic purposes, which is mostly carried out in the written language. He argues that EIL should be treated as a register of English, as most of the people learning it only need access to certain occupational or functional domains, and do not use it as a community or national language. Widdowson (1998:400) further argues that EIL is a 'composite lingua franca which is free of any specific allegiance to any primary variety of the language'.

Modiano, however, uses *EIL* in a different manner. He suggests that it is an appropriate alternative to 'standard English', providing a space where speakers can be culturally, politically and socially neutral (2001:170). As he sees it, EIL should combine those features of English which are easily understood by a broad cross-section of L1 and L2 speakers. Modiano

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Model of EIL (Modiano (1999:10, in *English Today*))

(1999) represents this conception of EIL as overlapping circles: At the centre is a core based on the commonalities of all varieties of English used by all 'competent speakers' of English who use all varieties of English that function well in international communication. He argues that English speakers of 'excessive regional accents and dialects' or of pidgin and creoles should only be included in this category if they are capable of switching into an internationally comprehensible variety (1999:25). In addition, for him, other features that should not belong to EIL are:

- extreme regional dialects
- words that have not gained international acceptance
- marked RP usage
- terms that have different meanings in British and American English

However, Modiano admits that EIL is difficult to describe, since there are few speakers who can be considered adequate language models.

In recent studies of English as a world language (e.g. especially Brutt-Griffler 2002), Widdowson's classification of EIL as a register has been rejected, because it stops a long way short of giving an accurate description of present-day global uses of English. Brutt-Griffler (1998:389) appropriately notes that the classification of EIL as a register 'seems to be an unjustified restriction on English use, one which also flies in the face of global practice'.

In her view, an accurate conception of English in the world should allow for the complex uses of the language in L1 and L2 English-speaking communities alike.

Modiano's proposal indeed offers this, but he fails to give further insight into what kind of English may be comprehensible to the majority of English speakers. It remains unclear what he means by 'competent' speakers of English and 'excessive' regional accents and dialects of English. However, the work discussed below may shed light on an internationally comprehensible variety of English.

Jenkins & Seidlhofer: *English as a Lingua Franca*

Because communication in English in the world today often does not involve L1 speakers of the language, the term *English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)* is preferred by several recent commentators. Both Jenkins (2000) and Seidlhofer (2001) suggest that since relying on L1 norms cannot guarantee successful communication, English norms should not be based on any particular national linguistic standard.

Jenkins (2000), basing her comments on the analysis of a corpus of exchanges between L2 speakers of English, advocates an approach to English pronunciation teaching that has as its goal mutual intelligibility rather than the imitation of L1 language norms. Similarly, Seidlhofer is currently compiling a corpus of the

most relied-upon grammatical constructions and lexical choices in ELF exchanges. Furthermore, she seeks to describe factors associated with L1 English speakers that might not be relevant in L2 English communication (cf. Seidlhofer 2002a). Both commentators insist that a pedagogical approach based on ELF norms will better prepare learners to communicate with other L2 English speakers from all over the world and allow them to express their individual identities through English.

While different in their approaches, the proposals discussed above all recognize the functions of English as a global language and the reality that it is being increasingly used as a lingua franca among L2 speakers. In the following section, I will examine three further proposals that suggest a change in discourse about English at large. In addition, these proposals promote more democratic practice in ELT by addressing the varying needs and identities of L2 language users.

Toolan: *Global*

In 1998, Wilk claimed that ‘everything today is becoming “global”’, as the word became a catchphrase in both business and academia. Toolan (1997) especially shares this enthusiasm when he uses the term *Global* on its own to refer to the English used worldwide by people of any ethnicity in any kind of international setting. He argues that an entirely new name for English is necessary to more appropriately cover its use in a world where British and American authority over the language is decreasing and its non-native users are also laying claim to ownership.

Addressing the dominance of L1 varieties of English, Toolan (1997:7) asserts that *Global* is a variety that L1 speakers of English also have to acquire, so that they can ‘accommodate their speech so as to conform to it when they talk to each other, thereby meeting on comparatively neutral linguistic ground.’ Here Toolan attempts to counter an on-going bias towards L1 norms in English communication and pedagogy.

Ahulu: *General English*

Like Toolan, Ahulu (1997:17) finds that the word *English* is ‘too restrictive a way of referring to the language’. He is equally dissatisfied with the label *standard English*, which, he argues, is associated with only British and

American standards. He therefore proposes *General English* as an alternative name for a broader sense of the language. Along with the need for a change of name, Ahulu argues that the standards of English should be broadened to reflect its international character. In doing so, he seeks to make the language more democratic by embracing the wide range of English speakers.

Wallace: *Literate English*

Like Ahulu and Toolan, Wallace (2002) argues that in a world where the majority of users are L2 English speakers, the English language should be less preoccupied with L1 norms. She therefore proposes what she calls *literate English* – a primarily written variety of the language which can also be used in spoken communication. She also argues (Wallace 2002:107–108) that this type of ‘transnational English’ should not be a reduced or simplified model of English which restricts communication to immediate utilitarian contexts; on the contrary, it should be elaborated to serve global needs, the most crucial one being as ‘a tool for resistance’. She argues that literate English needs to embrace a range of settings and bind diverse periphery and centre communities together so that its users can put the language to ‘critical and creative use, challenging and dismantling the hegemony of English in its conventional forms and uses’ (2002:112). Thus, her proposal does not only attempt to make English more democratic and neutral, but also more suitable as a tool of critical reflection and resistance.

Why so many names for English?

The reasons behind so many proposals for a new name for the English language in recent years include:

- the increase in the use of English globally
- the emergence of scholarship that critically assesses the spread of English
- the attempts of ELT professionals themselves to counter the perceived dominance of English

A main reason for the shift in discourse about English is demographics. As Graddol (1997) has shown, L2 speakers of English outnumber L1 speakers three to one. English is increasingly used to communicate across international boundaries, and is not therefore tied to one

place, culture or people. Furthermore, the label *English* was previously perceived to be a noun and adjective describing the national language first of England then of Great Britain, but now tends to evoke memories of the British colonial past and is consequently perceived as too narrow a categorization for a postcolonial, global language. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989:8), for example, make a distinction between the language of the erstwhile imperial centre and the linguistic code which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world.

The terminology discussed above is also deemed necessary because the pioneering work of Kachru *et al.* (1982 onward) has resulted in the increasing academic recognition of the once-radical phrase *World Englishes*. Recognizing that English is used in both the postcolonial context and as a lingua franca, the various above-mentioned scholars are all concerned that the language should no longer be based (only) on British or American norms. For example, Ahulu (1997) suggests that variations in English as it is used internationally should be subsumed under the general concept *standard English*. Moreover, as Toolan (1997) recommends, L1 and L2 speakers of English have to accommodate to one another's use of the language and share responsibility for intercultural communication.

The opening of standards to postcolonial or 'outer circle' Englishes (cf. Kachru 1985) has paved the way for Modiano, Seidlhofer and Jenkins to push the boundaries of standard English even further, so as to embrace both the English of lingua franca communication and the 'expanding circle' beyond both native and second-language usage. Corpus work investigating lingua franca use (e.g. Durham 2003; Jenkins 2000; Mauranen 2003; Prodromou 2003; Seidlhofer 2001) will certainly give further insight into the norms of L2 English.

Finally, these proposals for new names of English have been made in response to claims that English is an 'imperialistic language' (Phillipson 1992) or a 'killer' of indigenous tongues and cultures (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). This fear of English has become so pervasive that a critical approach to ELT is now indispensable (Holland 2002: 21). Thus, English-language professionals are now concerned with finding ways to protect local values, cultures and languages in the face of a global language. While subsequent research (e.g. Brutt-

Griffler 2002; Mufwene 2002) has painted a much more complex picture of the spread of English than the one presented by Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, a shift in English pedagogy is nevertheless crucial.

ELT courses must include an element that encourages students to critically analyse the role of English in the world and to appropriate the language to suit their own particular needs. ELT professionals should foster learners' use of the language creatively, effectively and successfully. Furthermore, the language should be taught as a means of intercultural exchange, so that the language and culture of learners will be valued alongside English (cf. also Corbett 2003).

Conclusion

The theories discussed above by and large promote theoretical platforms in ELT that move away from a conception of English that is dominated by L1 norms. The proponents of these theories are obviously conscious of postcolonial scholarship that explores both the many varieties and the global dominance of English. They therefore attempt to redress the balance within English use and instruction. However, the many names of English seem to add unnecessary complications to an already complex discussion. Due to the plethora of terminology, there is the danger that the chief result of such proposals is a shift in terminology without a corresponding change in practice.

More important than finding an appropriate name for English is ensuring that ELT professionals around the world move their practice away from an ideology that privileges L1 ('inner circle') varieties. The language must be taught as a means of intercultural communication, critical analysis and indeed, where necessary, resistance. ■

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