

English language essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



“ Language is a system of arbitrary, vocal symbols which permit all people in a given culture, or other people who have learned the system of that culture, to communicate and to interact” (Widdowson 1971, p. 3). Due to the complex nature of language and its intricate connection with its socio-cultural context (Hymes 1971, 1986, Halliday 1991), English must reflect the cultural values inherently present in those context. It follows then that as the usage of English increase around the world and the variety of contexts in which it is applied expands, then the variety of cultures it reflects will also continue to diversify.

For more than two decades, the ‘ ownership’ of English globally has been a topic of lively debates, as English has been increasingly used as a tool for international and intranatioanl communication. Due to the ongoing nature of the development of language and the diversification of English worldwide, it will be argued that English is ‘ owned’ by its current users, and both native speakers and non-native speakers should be free to apply and develop the language as a means to their own purposes.

However, in order for users to be in a position to take advantage of their usage of English, they need to be aware of the social implications of language use in context, to make informed language choices in order to achieve their goals. This has wide ranging implications for educators and learners in ESL/EFL classrooms in terms of the language itself, linguistic theory and social empowerment.

The emergence of English as an international language has largely been a consequence of two significant historical circumstances: British imperialism,

in nineteenth century; and the economic dominance of the USA, in the twentieth century (Brumfit 1982, p. 1). Although 'world English' has been developing for more than 400 years, the extent of the geographical spread, and the speed of this spread, especially in the last four decades, has been unprecedented (Crystal 1995, p. 110).

Varieties of English (including standard, pidgin and creole) are used in more than 72 countries with an estimation of 2, 090 million users by 1997, approximately a third of the world population at that time, with non-native speakers in the majority (Crystal, 1997, p. 57-60). Platt, Weber and Ho (1984) use the term 'New Englishes' to refer to varieties of English. "All living languages and language varieties are constantly changing in form and functions. (p. 198). Thus signifying the development of varieties of English as distinct from their parent forms, and as vehicles to new freedoms in the application of language.

The diversification of English has occurred, not only because of the geographical spread of the language, but also because of the benefits people believe it offers, primary in access to wide ranging fields of knowledge, business and politics. And extending a view to future, Lee (1981) speculates that this "widespread use of English in trade and commerce, the multi-national corporations, the travel, entertainment and communications industries and in medicine, science and information technology is likely to increase in the future if only because of the continuing operation of a powerful self-reinforcing cycle" (p. 57).

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that people around the world are turning to English for the perceived benefits it can offer to their immediate and long term futures. As a result of the spread of English into disparate cultures, it is being used by non-native speakers in new ways and forms. Platt, Weber and Ho (1984) define 'New English' as ones which meet the following criteria: has developed through an education system; has developed where a 'native variety' of English was generally not spoken; used for a variety of functions in society; and has become 'localised' or 'nativised' (culturally influenced) by unique language features.

They identified six new Englishes, meaning the above criteria, namely Indian English, Kenyan English, Singapore English, Ghanaian English, Nigerian English and Caribbean English (1984, p. 9). In Singapore, Lee (1981) raises the concern that with the introduction of English came a "distinctive western-oriented way of life" (p. 60) which resulted in a "two-layered Singaporean culture".

In an attempt to counter this shift away from traditional cultural values, the education policy in Singapore was then modified to use standard English for its 'utilitarian value', to try to minimize the use of 'Singlish' and to use mother tongues to reinforce traditional local values. In Indonesia, in the Expanding Circle, English is primarily studied for access to the latest developments in science and technology, however, English lexicon are also being incorporated into the national language Bahasa Indonesia, thus extending that traditional language to include vocabulary for "modern, cosmopolitan topics".

These are just a few examples of the different ways varieties of English being used in culturally diverse contexts by non-native speakers. This widespread use of English and the resultant diversity in its form has given rise to debate over the ‘ownership’ of English. With non-native speakers in the majority of English users in the world, what does this mean for the future of the language? Will it fracture into numerous and weak varieties that eventually will lose the commonality that facilitates the function of English as international language?

Or should a standard English be used for international communication, and if yes, then which one? These are not easy questions to answer, and hence a debate of more than two decades has ensued. Before the above questions can be addressed, the term of ‘ownership’ needs examination, as it sits uncomfortably with the topic of language. It implies that a language is a commodity that belongs to particular group of people, who have the right to control the access to, development of and usage of that commodity.

When considering ‘English as an international language’, its development has occurred over a period of more than four hundred years and been shaped by generations of users from a multitude of cultural backgrounds, within the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Colonial Africa, South-East Asia (including Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Kowloon, The Philippines), and the South Pacific (Crystal 1995, pp. 92-105), hence the notion of ownership seems somewhat misplaced.

If it can be said to ‘belong’ to those involved in its development, its diversity in form means it must therefore ‘belong’ to many different groups of people.

To fracture or not to fracture? With the benefit of hindsight, the increased usage of English for international communication around the world is evidence that the concern that diversity in varieties of English may cause the language to fracture and as a consequence, lose its capability to function as a global communication tool has not been realised.

It seems that the more widely English has been used, the more it has been valued. As people invest considerable resources, including time and money, into acquiring another language, that is perceived as beneficial, it seems that a momentum of desire fuels the motivation necessary to generate further investment. Thus the result has been the burgeoning development of varieties of English and their wide ranging application worldwide.

In search of standard Global English As international communication is being conducted using English everyday, the existence of Global English cannot be questioned. However, it can be elusive in form and therefore difficult to descriptively define comprehensively. This is due in part to the rapid rate of change in the ongoing development of its varieties, in diverse situations around the world, as the language is used in new ways according to need.

When a language is being used to communicate internationally with other varieties of that language, then there will be a tendency towards the formation of a standard that is negotiated through its use in “ extending networks of interaction”. Such a global standard in English would therefore exist in the common subsets of one or more varieties known to the interlocutors. It follows then that the diversification of English has resulted in

an international language where the global standard is self-regulating, with its power for international communication in its flexibility of form.

For the purposes of discussion in this paper, let us define standard 'Global English' as English that has been used for communication as an international language, that can be found in the common subsets of one or more of its varieties in the process of international communication. The elusiveness of standard Global English, however, raises one of many issues for educators and learners of English where international communication is one of the intended language applications.

A primary concern facing many teachers of English as a second or foreign language is to find ways to meet the learners' wants and needs so that they may be empowered with the ability to use English flexibly in a variety of contexts as a means towards their own ends. English provides opportunities for non-native speakers to "explore it in their unique ways" which implies a high level of language skills to be able to manipulate its application in unusual ways to their own advantage.

Whilst many will agree that such language empowerment is desirable in a democratic world, the challenge facing educators and learners of English as an international language is in how to achieve this. Language use reflects culture. Therefore when English is being used for purposes of international communication, then more than one culture will be involved, that of the context and those of the interlocutors. This means that the task of international communication necessarily involves intercultural communication.

Crozet ; Liddicoat (1999) state that “ Intercultural Language Teaching (ILT)... as shifted the aim of language learning from communicative competence to intercultural competence” and suggest that learners need to find a ‘ cultural position’, ‘ a third place’, which facilitates communication between these cultures. The following definition by Byram (1995) of an intercultural speaker gives an indication of the complexity of the task of international communication: An intercultural speaker is someone who can operate their linguistic competence and their sociolinguistic awareness of the relationship between language and the context in which it is used, in order to manage interaction across cultural boundaries, to anticipate misunderstandings caused by difference in values, meanings and beliefs, and thirdly, to cope with the affective as well as cognitive demands of engagements with otherness. (cited in Crozet ; Liddicoat 1999, pp. 113-114)

It is clear that lexico-grammatical knowledge of a language is far from enough to be able to use it effectively as a global communication tool. Knowledge of linguistic theory that models the relationship between language and culture would also be highly desirable.

This would assist the speaker in the prediction and analysis of responses received during communicative events with a view to responding in ways that permit the negotiation of an outcome that is satisfactory to the speakers. This, I believe, non-native speakers of English as intercultural speakers. In relation to the teaching of English for international communication, if the general aim is providing learning opportunities that may help to empower language learners in their efforts to become effective

intercultural speakers, then this has many pedagogical implications for English language education.

However, when considering teaching English as an international language, the diversity in varieties of English, the local context and/or the target context, the complexity of the task of international communication and the goals of its participants will make each teaching situation unique in many ways and the issues raised dependent upon that situation. Therefore, the following discussion of the pedagogical implications for English as an international language will be discussed in the light of one professional international context in Australia.