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## English is not English

*Cet article discute des conséquences du développement de l'anglais comme lingua franca pour la profession d'enseignant d'anglais. Après une discussion de la politique linguistique de la Communauté européenne, l'auteur mentionne les facteurs-clés qui ont contribué à la montée de l'anglais comme langue mondiale. Il considère dès lors que l'enseignement de l'anglais, aujourd'hui, n'a plus pour but principal de préparer les apprenants aux interactions avec des locuteurs natifs d'un pays voisin, mais de leur donner accès à une communauté globale. Ainsi, plutôt que d'enseigner les connaissances culturelles traditionnellement proposées à l'école, il s'agirait plutôt d'amener les apprenants à acquérir une compétence de communication sans relation de dominance. Avec le développement de plusieurs variétés d'anglais "non-natif", la question s'est posée de la possibilité d'établir un standard commun. Ainsi, pour que l'anglais puisse bien fonctionner en tant que lingua franca, il est avant tout nécessaire qu'une intelligibilité mutuelle soit assurée. Pour l'anglais écrit, cela ne semble pas constituer un problème. La grammaire et le vocabulaire sont enseignés pour ainsi dire sans tenir compte des variations à travers le monde. C'est au niveau de la prononciation que des problèmes risquent de surgir. Néanmoins, un modèle international de prononciation a récemment été développé: le Jenkin's Lingua Franca Core. (Réd.)*

### Preamble

Many non-native speakers (NNSs) associate 'English' with native-speaker (NS) English and culture, as they were taught to do at school. But many more NNSs the world over use English to interact with other NNSs without giving a single thought to anything related to the English of England or the language and cultures of English native-speaking nations. For such language users (and their numbers are growing by the day) English is not 'English' in the restricted sense of 'relating to England or its people or language' (*New Oxford Dictionary of English*, 1998), but just a useful tool for communication between people of varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds in a variety of communicative contexts. The rise of English as a *lingua franca* and the resultant status of English as a medium for global communication (predicted by Sapir as long ago as 1931; Sapir 1931:66) poses new challenges to the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession. It is my purpose in the following sections to outline some of these challenges in relation to the various roles of English in the world and to suggest ways in which each of these challenges could be met.

### English in Europe

Over the last thirty years or so it has become received opinion in Europe that foreign-language instruction should be aimed at (primarily) spoken interaction between NSs and NNSs across the frontiers of the nation states. Underlying this view is the ideal of European citizenship, which requires learners to familiarise themselves not just with the other language but also with the culture concerned (often in-

volving extensive literary studies). The target language and culture are viewed as potential sources of enrichment which supposedly contribute to the formation of an 'open and multiple identity' (Sheils 2001:16). This ideal has a long tradition in Europe. Over the past decades it has received support from different quarters: linguistic, psycholinguistic, and anthropological ones. Thus it has been assumed for years now that all languages have a universal base that is largely genetically determined, and a culture-specific superstructure (probably the bigger part), which is fully integrated with the base. So much of what is transmitted through language, whether this has a referential or a social/expressive function is therefore not so much universal as culture-bound (cf. Lyons 1981). It is considerations like these which have legitimised the existence of a *Landeskunde* component in European foreign-language education, even if *Landeskunde* and the cultural referents of a language need not be co-extensive. No one would blame European language teachers for wanting to continue to cherish this ideal (after all to them English is just another national language of just another European state), had not the unprecedented growth of English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) upset the apple cart. This I shall take up in the following sections. But as we go along we shall have to keep in mind that our discussion is ineluctably bound up with European language policy as a whole. Apart from paying lip service to linguistic equality, plurilingualism and pluriculturalism ("letting all the flowers bloom"), European (here in the more restricted sense of the 15 states making up the EU) language policy is still far from transparent. As some

languages turn out to be more ‘international’ than others (a fact recognised by most EU citizens), the equality of the 11 official Union languages has largely remained a myth (Phillipson 2001:80). For a smooth functioning of the EU institutions, the use of ELF would therefore be infinitely better (House 2001:83). This is indeed a separate though related issue, which does not concern us here (for further discussion, see Phillipson [2001]).

Since legislation on educational, linguistic, and cultural matters is in principle the prerogative of the individual member state, all attempts at European curriculum development and syllabus design (such as those put forward by the Council of Europe’s Modern Languages Projects [CEMLP] group) cannot be other than ‘recommendations’. Despite the various updates of such a well-known specification of English language teaching/learning objectives as the Threshold Level, the CEMLP does not, as yet, seem to have taken the idea of ELF on board.

To give an example of the intrinsic vagueness of supranational language policy, in 1995 the Council of the EU (not the Council of Europe) adopted a resolution suggesting that “pupils should, as a general rule, have the opportunity of learning two languages of the Union other than their mother tongue”. Now the EU is home to over 200 indigenous languages, in addition to several hundred immigrant languages. So what are we to make of ‘mother tongue’ here? It could be any one of the hundreds of languages within the Union. In everyday educational practice the other two languages referred to would probably be a national language as well as English. And it is likely that English will always be included in the choice of languages. But official policy is loath to recognise this. This has led some scholars to accuse the EU of a hypocritical language policy (e.g. House

[2001]). They argue that the role of English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) is irreversible and that a distinction is therefore to be made between languages for communication (such as ELF) and languages for identification (used for interpersonal exchange across cultures and for expressing one’s identity as a member of a particular cultural community). The latter are traditionally objects of study in Europe, the former concern us here.

### English, a world language

The rise of ELF cannot be viewed in isolation from the global spread of English. Few people today will contest the fact that English is a world language. But what *is* a ‘world language’? Numbers of NSs are not decisive here. When it comes to numbers English is probably outdone by Chinese or Urdu. Saying that English is a world language does not mean that everybody on earth speaks English, or that everybody views it as such. That English has become a world language has nothing to do with the intrinsic qualities of the language ei-

ther, even if it has a rich vocabulary, thanks to its contact with other European and non-Western languages. Some would view this richness as proof of its flexibility, others see in it a helpful bridgehead to learning other languages (and thus a considerable asset for a linguistic passkey). Still others would aver that English is businesslike, with a lucid syntax, exuding masculinity (Jespersen 1938:1-16). Even so the global spread of English has been the result of totally different factors, namely political, military, and economic (Crystal 1997:7-8; Kennedy 2002). In the 19th century and the early half of the 20th Britain was one of the world’s leading industrial and trading nations, the biggest colonial power of the world and one of the world’s leading military powers. After World War Two this leadership role was taken over by the US. This seamless transition has helped English a lot to root itself outside its natural habitats and to ensure its position as a world language. For the spread of English the end and the aftermath of the Second World War have been decisive. During the war the populations of the occupied



Winslow Homer, *Crab fishing*, 1883.

countries looked to the English-speaking nations for help in their liberation from tyranny; the English-language broadcasts from the UK and the US stood for freedom and peace. Had the English-speaking nations lost the war, German and Japanese had now been world languages! After 1945 English chiefly symbolised progress and a better material future (cf. the Marshall Plan). Though it may require military power to establish a dominant language, it takes economic power to expand it and to keep it up. After the last war, during the decline of its Empire, Britain had to face up to the consequences of this reality, as it had to withdraw from its numerous overseas bases, unable to foot the bill for a continued military presence (cf. Neillands 1996). These days the US is virtually the only nation to have the economic resources to maintain and promote English around the globe. Other factors that have contributed to the worldwide spread of English over the past century are the development and explosive growth of the new communication technologies (e.g. wireless, telephony, telegraphy, the Internet, satellite-tv). They have enabled us to communicate (in English!) on a truly global scale. If we add to these the various international organisations using mainly English as their working language (such as the United Nations, the World Health Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, or the World Bank) and it will be obvious why English became a world language (Crystal 1997:8-10). The only real rival to English in international forums is French, which is, however, not seldom used as a means of resistance to the hegemony of English (Graddol 1997:9). But this is not all. English has also become the language of science and technology. This is particularly true of the natural sciences. In Germany, for example, 98 p.c. of all physicists claim English as their working language, as against 8 p.c. of all students

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of law. It will be obvious that a person's lack of proficiency in English (or French for that matter) may result in inequality, in science just as in politics. Some of us, having submitted an article to an international journal and having found it rejected on the grounds of 'poor' English, and others, like our Europarliamentarians, having had to struggle in their debates in a non-native language (even though translation services are provided), have found this to their cost (cf. Van Essen 1989:113-26). This may not be fair, but it is a fact of life. While for a language to become a world language it need not have a large number of NSs, the latter may facilitate a wider communicative range. It will be clear that a large body of NSs has the capacity to produce a greater variety of culture goods (e.g. literary works of art, motion pictures, (pop) music, news broadcasts, etc., as well as dictionaries, grammar books, educational materials, etc.) than a small number and that it will also create more opportunities for interactions with its NSs (Graddol 1997:12). This may all be very well but today English increasingly acts as a *lingua franca* between NNSs (thanks to the fact that it has become a world language). Therefore if one wishes to understand fully the position of English in a world where the majority of its speakers are NNSs, one needs to consider the place English holds *vis-à-vis* the other languages that are used alongside it. In Europe, for example, the view is universally held that each language has its natural home (e.g.

German in Germany, French in France, Italian in Italy, English in England, etc.) and that a bilingual speaker is somebody who can converse and/or correspond with unilingual speakers from more than one country (i.e. from their own country and the other country). In other words the ideal bilingual speaker is imagined to be someone who is unilingual in two languages at the same time (*co-ordinate bilingualism*). Elsewhere in the world, especially in the former British colonies, where a more or less independent variety of English has evolved, one may come across a situation where bilingual or multilingual speakers will communicate with other multilingual speakers in English, not because English is the only language they share (more often than not they share more than one language), but because in that particular (e.g. formal or official) communicative context English is regarded as the most appropriate language in the verbal repertoire available to that multilingual speaker. In such multilingual countries it is equally possible that a speaker will switch from one language to another during a conversation (*code-switching*), indeed even within a single sentence, in ways that are fully appreciated only by other members of the same speech community. In these societies English occupies a position of its own in the linguistic hierarchy, mostly at the apex. It is not inconceivable that within the EU a similar hierarchy will evolve. Recent surveys into the use of non-native languages within the EU already show English at the top, followed by German and French, which are in turn followed by national and regional languages. Along with Graddol (1997:12-3) on whose work I am basing myself here, one may conceptualise a linguistic world hierarchy with English and French at the top, but with the position of French on the decline and that of English becoming more clearly the world's *lingua franca*. All the more reason to re-

consider the position of English in the EU curriculum.

### **English for specific purposes**

A special case of English as an international language (EIL) is its use for specific purposes (ESP). Like other varieties of English as a *lingua franca* ESP is chiefly learnt not to indulge in social talk with NSs but to acquire a passkey to a global community of experts so as to become a member of that community and communicate with other members of that community (medical doctors, airline pilots, engineers, business people, lawyers, scientists, bankers, etc.), in the language (*register*) of that community, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds, about topics of common concern. In a word, ESP is a variety of English used not so much for *interactional* as for *transactional* purposes and learnt not so much as a language for identification than as a language for communication.

Widdowson (1997:144) has argued that EIL is ESP: “otherwise it would not have spread, otherwise it would not regulate itself as an effective means of global communication. And otherwise there would, for most people, be little point in learning it at school or university”. This would apply as much to places where English is said to be a foreign language (as in Europe), as to where it is said to be a second language (as in former British colonies). Though there is much to be said in favour of Widdowson’s argument that IEL and ESP are co-terminous, I cannot (yet) go along with his identification of the two. For as far as I am able to make out some uses of ELF are not even remotely related to ‘expert communities’ in Widdowson’s sense, for example, the ELF used by backpackers in a hostel in Nepal. But if Widdowson’s argument is valid that the primary purpose for learning English worldwide is *not* to prepare learners for interpersonal interaction across cultures with NSs from a neighbouring state (as is the case in Europe) but to

procure them access to a global community (not of experts but of ELF speakers, as I would like to believe), this too would have to have drastic consequences for curricula and syllabuses across Europe, as we shall see below.

### **Culture. What culture?**

The majority of ELF interactions worldwide take place between speakers for none of whom English is the mother tongue and for none of whom English is a cultural symbol. For example, if a Swiss person conducts business in China, English is likely to be used. And if any cultural elements enter the conversation at all (which is unlikely; see House 1999:84) they are likely to be part of the socio-cultural make-up of the individual interactants. The kind of traditional cultural knowledge acquired at school will not do here. What will rather be needed is the teaching of transcultural politeness strategies so as to prevent offending the other participant. What would also be required is an awareness of dominance behaviour, i.e. teaching learners to be communicatively competent without being dominant (cf. Janssen 1999). Dominance behaviour is often, though not always, a trait of NSs. Apart from a plethora of metatheoretical reflections on NNS interactions (for a review, see House 1999) very little research has been done on the actual nature of this kind of discourse, but it is “likely to have characteristic features, reflecting complex patterns of politeness and strategies for negotiating meaning cross-culturally” (Graddol 1997:13). What little empirical research there is in this area suggests that they stem not from any deep-seated cultural differences between NNSs but rather from a lack of pragmatic fluency. This would point to the need for teachers to aim at increasing their learners’ verbal repertoire so as to enable them to try out



Francis Bacon, *Self-portrait*, 1971.

more successful interactional styles and to leave aside cultural studies in the traditional, humanistic sense (House 1999).

### **Content-and-language-integrated learning (and teaching) for ELF**

As we have observed more than once, while traditional language-and-culture-integrated teaching may be acceptable for Europe, it is unlikely to be suitable for English in the global context. Here we need, first and foremost, the kind of English that is used by both NSs and NNSs in professional (and less professional!) circles around the world. And we would like to prepare our learners to become potential members of those communities (even the community of backpackers). A more appropriate approach to instruction here would be so-called content-and-language-integrated learning (CLIL), i.e. the teaching of subjects like geography, history, maths, etc. in English instead of in the learner’s mother tongue. In CLIL English is no longer the ‘object of study’ but the means of instructing other subjects across the whole of the school curriculum. CLIL currently takes place in many schools within Europe, and not just in English. Re-

cent research shows that the results are encouraging (Huibregtse 2001). If anything, CLIL marks a fresh approach to the teaching of ELF in Europe. In the upper forms of secondary schools it could be supplemented with more traditional assignments such as writing business letters, letters of application, reports, along with taking minutes, drafting memos, agendas, and calling and chairing meetings.

### **Evolving a global standard for ELF**

With the development of so many varieties of native and non-native English, regional (e.g. Indian English) as well as functional (e.g. ESP), the question arises whether some sort of common standard can be established for ELF. For it will be obvious that for ELF to function properly mutual intelligibility must be ensured. This question will be discussed in the next sub-sections.

#### ***Written English***

Two major developments have con-

tributed to the evolution of English as a standard language: the invention of the printing press and the rise of the nation state. The standard language solidarised the nation and gave an identity to its citizens. The standard language was thus linked with ideas about correctness, while the grammar book gradually evolved into a legal code. Printers' conventions and editorial policies put the finishing touches to it (Graddol 1997:56). As a result written English, apart from a few minor spelling variants, formed a fairly monolithic whole across the English-speaking world. This situation has allegedly now come to an end. Rather than fixing the language, as printing did, electronic communication has come to act as a de-stabilising force, which will subject English to various new influences which are likely to alter and extend it (Clear 1999:8). De-standardisation is rife. So is 'informalisation', which tends to close the gap between written and spoken English. Notice that ESP comprises, for the most, written varieties. The ensuing uncertainty will definitely aggravate the position of the teacher, who is

to provide guidance to the learner. Help, however, is bound to come from the ELT industry in the various native-speaking countries. It is likely to follow markets (as it has always done) and provide materials in several standards. But at the end of the day it will be up to the NNS teachers to decide whether a British model, an American one, or one based on an ELF variety, will be taught, learnt, and used. They can take comfort from the fact that the grammar and vocabulary of English are taught virtually without variation throughout the world (Graddol 1997:56) and that grammatical change is very slow.

Though the choice of the British model for European countries, obvious enough in the past, may not be so obvious now, we would do well to consider the possible consequences of dismissing British English too readily. For much of the negative reaction to English around the world is directed towards the American variety. This was the case before 11 September 2001 and probably even more so now. The development of a separate (not: autonomous) ELF standard may obviate the need for a choice here. At the same time it would remove ELF (and part of the ELT profession) from the domination of any one NS variety as ELF favours neither of the existing NS varieties.

#### ***Spoken English***

The standards for spoken English that we used to have, have largely evaporated., due to a variety of causes (e.g. a lesser deference to authority, a greater tolerance of diversity and individual styles, etc.). Radio and television broadcasting, once powerful centralising forces, will probably no longer be able to serve this function, following the mushroom rise of regional stations.

What with the fragmentation and regionalisation of pronunciation models it is all the more remarkable that NSs of English are the least tolerant



*John W. Waterhouse, The Lady of Shalott, 1888.*

where phonological deviations from the norms are concerned, but that “they can live with semantic deviance” (James 1998:47). Naturally NNSs are less certain in passing judgments on cases involving pronunciation, as they lack the knowledge and experience of the NS. This often makes them the butt of derision by NSs. On the other hand NNSs may take heart from the fact that they are often better understood by one another than they understand NSs.

The most recent and convincing attempt so far to fill the need for an international pronunciation model is Jenkins’s *Lingua Franca Core* (LFC). Its aim is international intelligibility among NNSs, rather than the imitation of NSs (though learners wishing to sound as native-like as possible, e.g. prospective teachers, may pursue this ‘higher’ aim, provided that they familiarise themselves with the LFC in order to equip themselves for international communication). The model is empirically based, focusing on genuine interactional speech data. It is artificial in that it contains elements derived from Standard British, Standard American, and varieties of EFL/ESL. It is also a prescriptive programme, at least insofar as the core is concerned, while offering individual speakers the chance to express their identity through the phonological features of their own language. The LFC, which tries to keep sounds as close as possible to spelling (this is one of the reasons why American /r/ is preferred to Standard British /r/, and British intervocalic /t/ to American intervocalic /t/, which has a tendency to become /d/ intervocalically, thus endangering intelligibility), has a segmental and a suprasegmental part. The segmental part comprises all the consonants (some with the addition of phonetic features like aspiration, as in /p,t,k/ initially, to prevent confusion with /b,d,g/ here). Worth noting for NNSs is the possibility to substitute /f/ and /v/ for voiceless and voiced /th/

respectively. In the vowels length is all-important. Of the diphthongs only three remain (/au/, /ai/, and /oi/), due to the addition of American /r/ word-finally. In the suprasegmental part ‘weak’ forms are not recommended (unless one wants to sound native-like). Accentuation and especially contrastive stress are regarded as more important than intonation, which appears to have no clear-cut grammatical function.

Lack of space forbids us to go into more detail here. It goes without saying that anyone taking a serious interest in Jenkins’s proposal should refer to the work itself (Jenkins 2000). But it will be obvious from the few examples given that the LFC may drastically reduce the teacher’s task by removing from the pronunciation syllabus many time-consuming items which are either unteachable or irrelevant for ELF. It is equally obvious that CLIL needs to take the LFC on board as well.

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