English or ELFish? A teaching dilemma of the 21st century.

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Abstract

Contrary to the predictions of Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (1908), English has become the international auxiliary language worldwide. Not artificial Esperanto, but natural English. Globalization of a natural language, however, inevitably has consequences for the language itself. How English is International English, we may ask. For linguists, this is a question of language change. For teachers, this is a matter of choice between a full-fledged native version of the language vs. the so-called ELF (English as a Lingua Franca, cf. the discussion in Dziubalska-Kołaczyk and Przedlacka 2008). The aim of this paper will be to arrive at a moderate "recipe" for teachers and learners.

Streszczenie

Język angielski stał się międzynarodowym językiem pomocniczym wbrew przewidywaniom Jana Baudouina de Courtenay (1908). Stał się nim naturalny język angielski a nie sztuczny język Esperanto. Globalizacja języka naturalnego ma jednak konsekwencje dla samego języka. Można by zapytać, jak bardzo angielski jest międzynarodowy angielski. Dla językoznawców to pytanie dotyczy zmiany językowej. Dla nauczycieli jest to kwestia wyboru pomiędzy pełną wersją rodzimego angielskiego a tzw. ELF-em (angielskim jako lingua franca, por. dyskusję w Dziubalska-Kołaczyk i Przedlacka 2008). Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu jest zaproponowanie umiarkowanego "przepisu" na angielski dla nauczycieli i uczących się.

1.   The source of the dilemma

English is the only language which has a greater number of non-native than native users. This phenomenon has naturally drawn attention of language researchers and resulted, among others, in the idea of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and the notion of Lingua Franca Core (LFC). In her 2000 book, Jenkins proposed as a didactic priority in teaching English as a foreign language a set of phonetic features referred to as Lingua Franca Core. Since according to Jenkins, existent syllabuses contain features which are „*unnecessary, unrealistic, and (...) harmful*" (Jenkins 2000: 1) for the purposes of international communication, she proposed a *"phonological core*" (Jenkins 2000: 2) in teaching pronunciation which would guarantee intelligibility, local identity and learnability of important elements of English phonetics. LFC English would be a rhotic accent, (with /r/ pronounced as GenAm retroflex approximant), with no flap, no <th>, no dark l, in which, however, stops would be aspirated, <h> would be glottal and fortis/lenis contrast would be maintained. In LFC, cluster reduction would be allowed only medially and finally, vowel length distinctions would be kept while vowel quality distinctions ignored, weak forms would not be taught (but learners must know them in order to understand), lexical stress would be important while rhythm, intonation, and phonostylistics not at all.

There are essential problems with the notion of LFC. There is an implicit conflict between the assumed production and perception abilities of the learners: they are supposed to perceive and understand without being able to produce (cf. Motor Theory of Speech Perception for most obvious counterarguments). A teacher as a model is not to be imitated: this creates a problem of evaluation in the classroom. As Jenkins said in an interview for the Guardian (2004), "learners in Hong Kong, Poznań, Tokyo, etc - who are most likely to use their English with other non-native speakers - are being taught varieties of English that are more appropriate to conversation among native speakers in Brighton or Baltimore." Notwithstanding how grateful Poznań is for the appreciation, there is a major inconsistency in the approach: while native-speakers are not supposed to be models, and standards are not supposed to be the reference points, still, the learners are expected to come close to RP or GenAm, since intelligibility and irritability are measured against native speakers. In this light, Jenkins' (2004) *Beware the natives and their norms!* is not convincing.

Next, a typological perspective excludes a possibility of finding one common core for learners from various linguistic backgrounds. The proposed system is artificial, since an arbitrary selection is made from among the structural features of a natural language: is it learnable? Also, more empirical evidence is needed to support the idea that LFC might be practical in teaching English under certain circumstances. This would be evidence from more L1's, concerning expectations of the learners and inter-non-native communication.

The dilemma of English vs. ELF might be potentially approached from two perspectives. English and ELF as two separate languages would be one perspective: different grammars, both (to be) codified, not mutually intelligible, one needs to make a choice which one to learn. Within this perspective, English speakers are not native speakers (NSs) of ELF, local ELFs are dialects of ELF and it is not important whether there are more NNS-NNS communications (i.e., among non-native speakers) than the mixed once (NNS-NS) since languages differ in number of speakers anyway. The other, much more familiar perspective, sees ELF as accented English, just as any other second language spoken with an accent (e.g. Polish with the German accent or German with the French accent, etc).

The former perspective could produce a fair approach to the study of the vast phenomenon of non-native English (ELF or EIL, or under any other name currently in use) with a view of predicting or forecasting its future. Such approach would be much more scientifically sound and much less politically tinted than the one adopted by Jenkins in her 2000 and 2007 books, granted that she has identified a viable and important research area for English linguistics. While the research is carried out, the learners should have a choice what they want to learn: English vs. ELF, standard English vs. a given accent of English, etc.

2. English as a *lingua franca*

A lingua franca is a language used systematically for communication among people who do not share a mother tongue, especially when it is neither of their mother tongues. Quite a few languages in the history have entertained this function. English has acquired the status of lingua franca of the world today. Interestingly, quite contrary

to the prediction of Jan Baudouin de Courtenay who said in a lecture delivered in Warsaw on May 5, 1908:

> "…some are of an opinion that one could deal with multilinguality by an introduction of one of the most common "living" languages as a general international language. […] Taking into account group psychology, we must consider such an idea impossible to carry through. Let us not forget about an irremovable international envy as well as national pride."

Baudouin feared "…the free entry to all countries for the teachers of English origin", he also considered pronunciation and structure as well as spelling (lots of homonyms) of the candidate languages (English, German, French) to be too difficult for other nations. If one were to simplify or improve them (cf. LFC today!), they wouldn't be those languages any more, but "disordered (*popsute*)" or "corrected (*poprawione*)" ones, and thus artificial.

Baudouin's miscalculation can be juxtaposed to some American opinions of the 18th and 19th century. Webster (1789:21, in Andresen 1990: 29) anticipated "the period when the people of one quarter of the world will be able to associate and converse together [in American English] like children of the same family". In 1780 John Adams prophesied (Andresen 1990: 35) that "English will be the most respectable language in the world and the most universally read and spoken in the next century...American population will in the next age produce a greater number of persons who will speak English than any other language" while Benjamin Rush predicted that English "will probably be spoken by more people, in the course of two or three centuries, than ever spoke any one language, at one time, since the creation of the world." Franklin (1798, in Andresen 1990: 51) was concerned about the appropriateness of English to become a lingua franca: "If ...we would have the benefit of seeing our language more generally known among mankind, we should endeavor to remove all the difficulties, however small, that discourage the learning of it". He considered French to be the number one candidate, and thus, wished a spelling reform "to facilitate the spread of English in the world marketplace".

Today English is spoken by more non-native speakers than native speakers of the language. The latter amount to an estimated number of ca 340 million (*Ethnologue*

2005)[1] while estimates of the number of non-native speakers vary greatly ranging from 350 million (Nettle & Romaine 2000) up to well over a billion speakers[2]. English is spoken in over a 100 countries and features hundreds of dialects. The statistics indeed indicates a potential for more NNS/NNS communications than mixed or NS/NS ones, which, however, is hardly feasible to prove.

3. The concept of a native speaker

I would like to propose the following typology of "native-speakerness" (cf. also Dziubalska-Kołaczyk & Weckwerth 2011):

A. *a prototypical native speaker* – a monolingual

B. *a non-prototypical native speaker* – a bi- or multilingual who uses more than one language for everyday communication

C. *non-native speaker* – a learner

Here is the argumentation for the above distinction. One can be a prototypical native speaker of one language only, thus, only monolingual speakers of English are prototypical native speakers. Prototypical "native-speakerness" means being a native speaker of one language in a generally monolingual community (cf. Dziubalska-Kołaczyk & Weckwerth 2011). Native language patterns of phonetic perception are formed in the first year of life (e.g., Werker 2003, Werker and Tees 1984). As for production, a link develops between perceptual and motor processes by the second half of the first year. A native language serves the most primitive, basic, primeval purposes first[3], while other functions are built on later, in multilinguals also in other languages which is connected with education in the most holistic sense.

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[1] 210,000,000 in the USA, 17,100,000 in Canada = 60% of the population, 15,682,000 in Australia, 95%, 3,500,000 in South Africa, 9.1% , 3,213,000 in New Zealand, 90%, 2,600,000 in Ireland, and speakers in remaining 98 countries where English is spoken.

[2] According to David Crystal (2003), non-native speakers now outnumber native speakers by a ratio of 3 to 1.

[3] And for life, too. This includes the "sandpit vocabulary", but also everyday paraphernalia like eating, digestion, hygiene, sex, health, and the like.

Bi- and multilingual speakers are native speakers to various degrees depending on the range of usage of the language. Only a monolingual speaker has a chance to develop all (non-exhaustive) ranges/functions in one language. In a multilingual speaker, some ranges/functions get relegated to other languages.

Learners can benefit from communication with both prototypical native speakers and multilingual ones, since they need to get acquainted with as many ranges of use as possible. It is crucial to note, however, that a learner may eventually become a non-prototypical native speaker, but never a prototypical one since s/he no longer covers all required functions/ranges in one language only and will not be monolingual again. Learners do need native speakers (both prototypical and non-prototypical) for grammaticality judgements, while a prototypical monolingual native speaker remains the best reference.

4. Models for learners

We have now approached the question about which English to choose for teaching. The choice ranges from the native models through the "less-native" ones vs. ELF and new local ELFs, e.g., a European ELF for learners in Europe. The above typology of "native-speakerness" helps to distinguish the types of models for learners:

- prototypical monolingual native (e.g., RP, GenAm, broadcast speech, e.g., BBC English, other monolingual Englishes) = standard models
- non-prototypical multilingual native (e.g., Indian, South African, Hawaiian Englishes, other Englishes of multilingual native speakers)
- ELF/LFC, local ELFs

Prototypical native models have numerous advantages from the teaching perspective. They have been codified for the purpose of teaching (especially RP) and pedagogically verified, i.e. served as basis for didactic materials and have been shown to be learnable. They are easy to describe for learners. They are a-territorial, understood by all native speakers and identified with the English of the media (BBC, CNN, etc.). Ongoing changes in the models are observed and updated in the currently available, highly professional dictionaries of English pronunciation (Wells, J.C. 1990/2000/2008; Jones,

D. 2003,16th edition by P. Roach, J. Hartman and J. Setter; Upton, C., W. A. Kretzschmar, Jr, & R. Konopka. 2001; 2003). One would need to argue independently in favour of the other models while the above benefits are readily available. Naturally, exposure to non-prototypical multilingual native Englishes is a welcome enhancement for the learners, just as much as familiarity with local ELF's will facilitate communication with speakers of other mother tongues. This does not make ELF/LFC a general target in teaching English at an advanced level.

5.   'Recipe' for the teachers and learners of English?

Recipes contain instructions. Let me formulate a couple of discouragements and recommendations, or what-not-to-do's and what-to-do's in teaching English as a second language.

What-not-to-do:

- let us not intervene into the development of the language by imposing an impoverished model of English on the learners
- let linguists describe and explain rather than create or modify linguistic reality
- were English to share the fate of Latin, not much can be done about it, but let us not facilitate the process
- let us not deny the role of a (prototypical) native-speaker as an authority/model in teaching/learning English

What-to-do:

- allow a learner to have a choice of a model or language (if ELF is understood as a separate language)
- assure the learners that they do not need to feel insecure about actually wanting to learn the English language
- understand teaching English to be teaching the generally understood and existent native-speaker English, based on codified standards which are not monolithic and do reflect modern tendencies
- make learners aware of variety, especially by exposure
- teach learners stylistic variability, both in production and perception
- make use of L1's: here we can find real facilitators, rather than in LFC
- rely on learners' cognitive abilities

The message of this paper, astonishing as it might sound, is to let people learn English.

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