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What do ELT professionals need to know?
about language
about learning

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What do English language teachers need to know about English as an International Language?

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1. English as an international language

Some authors have provided a definition of English as an international language (EIL) in order to distinguish it from other concepts such as English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL). Whereas EFL and ESL have usually been related to non-native speakers communicating with native speakers of English, English as an international language can be defined as "that English in all its linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects which is used as a vehicle for communication between non-native speakers only, as well as between any combination of native and non-native speakers." (Campbell et al. 1983:35)

2. Demographic and socio-political models describing international English

Attempting to demonstrate the nature and development of the English language all over the world in the twentieth century, McArthur (1998) has identified the three most common demographic and socio-political models used by linguists. The first one, proposed by Strang in 1970, identified the _A-speakers_ – speakers of English as a mother tongue in the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa; the _B-speakers_ – speakers who learn English in communities where the language has special status (mainly the former colonial territories in Asia and Africa); and the _C-speakers_ –

speakers who learn English as a foreign language as part of the country's educational system.

In 1972, Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik proposed another three-group model of English: users of English as a Native Language (*ENL speakers*), users of English as a Second Language (*ESL speakers*) and users of English as a Foreign Language (*EFL speakers*).

Finally, in 1985 Braj B. Kachru formulated a variant of the ENL/ESL/EFL model. Kachru distinguishes three concentric circles: the *Inner Circle of English*, made up of 'norm-providing varieties', the *Outer Circle of English*, including 'norm-developing varieties' and the *Expanding Circle of English*, with 'norm-dependent varieties'.

In fact, these three models are just different ways of describing the same set of characteristics, each one emphasizing one aspect of the international scope of English.

Barbara Strang (1970)	*Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, Jan Svartvik (1972)*	*Braj B. Kachru (1985)*
A-speakers	ENL speakers	Members of the Inner Circle
B-speakers	ESL speakers	Members of the Outer Circle
C-speakers	EFL speakers	Members of the Expanding Circle

3. <u>EIL as cross-cultural communication</u>

EIL aims at mutual intelligibility and appropriate language use involving nationals of different countries. Essentially, the concept of EIL focuses on cross-cultural, cross-linguistic interactions. Though using the term English as a global language (EGL), Gnutzmann (1999) provides a definition based on the situations of language use, which can be applied to the concept of international English. For him, EGL means English used as a medium of communication in all sorts of communication contexts and for many different purposes for instance, in written academic discourse or by a Frenchman talking to a Greek waiter ordering a pizza in an Italian restaurant in Norway.

4. Is EIL a language variety?

Besides such attempts to define and understand EIL based on the kind of participants and the contexts of communicative exchange, some applied linguists and researchers have tried to identify EIL as a prospective language variety. However, Baxter (1991:66) states that "'What is international English?' is an incorrectly formulated question that can lead one to looking for some form of English. The correct question is, 'How does one speak English internationally?'" In other words, instead of looking for a new *form* of the language, one should focus on its *functions*.

On the same line of thought, Gnutzmann (1999:158) points out that due to its many uses and linguistic variability, EGL has no distinct phonological inventory, no specific lexis and no specific grammar, therefore, it is not a linguistic variety of English. Fundamentally, EGL "is not particularly a formal-linguistic phenomenon, it instead refers to contexts of use definable by extralinguistic factors such as the relationship between speaker and hearer, the time and place of communication, the purpose and topic of communication, etc."

5 Teaching EIL

Several authors have reported on significant changes to be introduced in teaching the language. Gnutzmann (1999:165-166) declares that "cultural topics relating to countries where English is spoken as a native language, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States, have to be complemented by topics dealing with other parts of the world in order to do justice to the global use of English in classroom teaching." Besides widening the scope of topics geographically, Gnutzmann thinks that a "stronger orientation towards social, economic, scientific and technological topics with an international or global dimension would seem an appropriate measure in view of the global dimension of English." Baxter (1991:67) seems to agree when he says that "teaching materials should be drawn from all the various English-using communities, not only L1 communities, so as to introduce students to the different manners of speaking English and to build an attitudinal base of acceptance."

6. Kachru's 'Six fallacies about the Users and Uses of English'

In an article about teaching world Englishes, Kachru (1992:357) calls attention to the implications of the sociolinguistic realities of English and some attitudes which "are nurtured by numerous fallacies about the users and uses of English across cultures." Kachru comments that "the fallacies are of several types; some based on unverified hypotheses, some based on partially valid hypotheses, and some due to ignorance of facts."

Fallacy 1: That in the Outer and Expanding Circles, English is essentially learned to interact with native speakers of the language.

This, of course, is only partially true. The reality is that in its localized varieties, English has become the main vehicle for interaction among its non-native users, with distinct linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In such interactions, the English English, or American English conventions of language use are not only irrelevant; these may even be considered inappropriate by the interlocutors. The culture-bound localized strategies of, for example, politeness, persuasion, and phatic communion "transcreated" in English are more effective and culturally significant.

Fallacy 2: That English is necessarily learned as a tool to understand and teach American or British cultural values, or what is generally termed the Judeo-Christian traditions.

This is again true only in a very restricted sense. In the pluralistic regions of the Outer Circle, English is used as an important tool to impart *local* traditions and cultural values.

Fallacy 3: That the goal of learning and teaching English is to adopt the native models of English (the Received Pronunciation or General American).

This claim has no empirical validity. The Inner Circle is a "model provider" in a very marginal sense. There is schizophrenia about the perceived model and actual linguistic

behaviour, but this is an issue of linguistic attitude. The concept "native speaker" is not always a valid yardstick for the global uses of English.

Fallacy 4: That the international non-native varieties of English are essentially "interlanguages" striving to achieve "native-like" character.

This hypothesis has several limitations. Whatever the validity of this hypothesis in second-language acquisition in general, its application to the institutionalized varieties of English in the Outer Circle needs reevaluation.

Fallacy 5: That the native speakers of English as teachers, academic administrators, and material developers provide a serious input in the global teaching of English, in policy formation and in determining the channels for the spread of the language.

In reality, the native speakers have an insignificant role in the global spread and teaching of English.

Fallacy 6: That the diversity and variation in English is necessarily an indicator of linguistic decay; that restricting the decay is the responsibility of the native scholars of English and ESL programs.

This fallacy has resulted in the position that "deviation" at any level from the native norm is an "error". This view ignores the functional appropriateness of language in sociolinguistic contexts distinctly different from the Inner Circle.

(adapted from Kachru, 1992:357-359)

Kachru's fallacies identify some common attitudes towards English which need to be re-assessed. Perhaps the first step to be taken is to examine the attitudes of students and teachers so that misconceptions about the use of English can be prevented.

7. <u>Thirteen fallacies about learning and using English as an international language</u>

Based on a study conducted at the University of Evora which investigated EFL students' and teachers' attitudes towards English as an international language (Guerra,

2009), the analysis of data from the interviews showed some interesting perspectives and beliefs about learning and teaching English which somehow do not correspond to the overall concept of international English. The following 'fallacies' were taken from some students' and teachers' responses:

Fallacy 1:	BrE is the correct variety of English

In a previous study with 65 EFL students in a teacher training course at the University of Évora, 60% said BrE was the correct variety while 40% said there was no correct variety. There is still a strong monolithic and linguacentred belief that does not fit into the needs and uses of our learners. Moreover, the belief that there is a correct variety has no linguistic grounds. We as educators cannot allow this belief to continue to exist. It is crucial to identify the source(s) of such belief: textbooks, teachers, society?

Fallacy 2:	It's important that students get as close as possible to a native-speaker accent

Having a native or near-native accent does not mean possessing the necessary skills to achieve communication. In fact, what native speaker are we talking about? (probably a British speaker, if we consider fallacy 1). Rather than dealing with the concept of native speakers, we should consider the idea of a competent speaker whose accent is intelligible even though it does not follow native norms.

Fallacy 3:	It's not important to know the differences between AmE and BrE

As AmE and BrE are the most common norms used in ELT worldwide, it is vital that language users produce and understand both varieties. Knowledge of just one variety certainly limits the speaker's ability to understand others and be understood.

Fallacy 4:	We can only refer to the differences between AmE and BrE in advanced levels

Knowledge of the differences between AmE and BrE should not be regarded as advanced materials. Many of the differences are found in basic vocabulary (e.g. cinema/movies, football/soccer), spelling (e.g. colour/color, grey/gray) and grammar

(e.g. use of Simple Past and Present Perfect). The differences between AmE and BrE can be introduced as soon as the first lesson (e.g. 'z', /zɪ/ or /zɛd/)

| *Fallacy 5*: | Students are expected to be consistent in one variety |

Research has proved that a great number of ESL and EFL learners mix both varieties. Moreover, some ENL and ESL varieties also display features of both AmE and BrE. The aim towards consistency generally leads to teachers 'punishing' students for using both varieties when writing. However, many times teachers consider those different spellings, vocabulary or syntactic structures wrong due to their own lack of knowledge about the differences between AmE and BrE.

| *Fallacy 6*: | BrE is formal English; AmE is informal English |

There is a misconception that AmE is a substandard variety which is usually a deviation from the British norms. Many students believe that the use of 'wanna', 'gonna' or 'ain't' is associated with AmE. There seems to be some confusion between the concepts of geographical varieties and register (*informal* and *formal* language).

| *Fallacy 7*: | It's not important to spend time with EFL accents and cultures |

The Portuguese secondary education English syllabus gives English-speaking communities (World Englishes) a significant role in ELT. However, from the standpoint of EIL, this is a limited approach to learning and using the language since English is to be used with native and non-native speakers alike, regardless of their origin and first language.

| *Fallacy 8*: | The English language belongs to the English people |

The idea of ownership has a very restricted sense if we consider English as the world's *lingua franca*. English today has achieved a status which sets it aside from any other language. While it seems clear that Italian might be seen by some as 'belonging' to Italians or German to the Germans, we cannot say the same about English.

Fallacy 9:	There's no room or time for other native varieties and cultures other than British and American

It is a fact that teachers struggle with limited classroom time. There is always a feeling that we cannot fulfil our goals due to the several constraints we come across in and out of the classroom. However, it seems that there is always the possibility of including materials from other native varieties and cultures if enough time is devoted to the preparation of classes. Is it really a problem of lack of time or materials or are these varieties/cultures seen as secondary in English learning?

Fallacy 10:	It's more important to include cultural aspects of native countries than of non-native countries

This belief usually comes together with the idea that students should only contact native English.

Fallacy 11:	Students can only gain if they spend time in a native country

There is no doubt that intensive and total exposure to the language in native environments is highly positive to language practice and acquisition (especially because the learner will contact with a diversity of Englishes – ENL and EFL alike – in these environments). However, we should also consider that being in a non-native context where English is used as a _lingua franca_ is also beneficial as students are faced with situations of real language use. In this case the situation is conducive of the acquisition of receptive skills.

Fallacy 12:	Students will learn to make mistakes if they contact with ESL or EFL varieties

The fear of making mistakes cannot be a sound argument to prevent students from dealing with ESL and even EFL varieties. There is no guarantee that by contacting native varieties students will acquire error-free standard norms. Also, it is important to distinguish practice in productive skills (usually norm-oriented) and practice in receptive skills, which would be the focus of activities centred on non-native cultures and varieties.

Fallacy 13:   It's easier to understand a native speaker than a non-native speaker

The acquired status of native speakers led to the belief that they are the models of language acquisition and intelligibility. However, many times it is easier to understand a fluent non-native speaker (ESL or EFL) than a native speaker of a regionally marked variety. Again, instead of considering the native speaker we should refer to a competent speaker of standard English.

8. Conclusion

In the absence of any description of a single variety or varieties of EIL, it seems to be more appropriate to approach the present state of the international role of English as a matter of attitudes. As early as in 1981, Trifonovitch called attention to the maintenance of old attitudes in a new model of teaching and learning English. He stated that the attitudes that had been adopted in learning English to communicate with native speakers, such as native English as the norm and native speakers as norm providers, were being transferred to the idea of English as a language of international communication.

Such prevalent **linguacentric** and **ethnocentric** attitudes of many native and non-native speakers are central to the EIL debate.

According to Modiano (1999:6), "A linguistic chauvinism, or if you will, ethnocentricity, is so deeply rooted, not only in British culture, but also in the minds and hearts of a large number of language teachers working abroad, that many of the people who embrace such bias find it difficult to accept that other varieties of English, for some learners, are better choices for the educational model in the teaching of English as a foreign or second language." What Modiano means is that even though many language teachers all over the world believe that English language learning and teaching are based on British, and to a certain extent, American standards and their cultural representations, many students would profit from a non-ethnocentred and linguacentred approach to English.

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