The future of teaching English language in Romania and globalization

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Abstract

Information I have gathered from my own students (many of them are from Italy) and other personal contacts indicates that students are making use of new technology on their own to improve their English skills when they are motivated and when they are able to do so. The goal of this study was to examine the future of teaching English in Romanian higher education as a second language and the effect of globalization upon it.

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1. Introduction

This article tries to find some evidence in the current teaching of English in Romania and the effect globalization has upon the country and its higher education. The world seems to be getting smaller for quite a few reasons; this is led by the argument of society moving fast, far and comfortable in just a very short time to cities or even countries. For the reason that people can travel all over the world in short time, it seems the world is small. Additionally, there are mass media such as TV, internet and newspapers. We use any of them or in combination and we can be acquainted with facts all over the world by watching, reading and searching for them; even when the rice sack is dropping in a far country, we know that more or less straightaway. In addition, Europeans in particular have increasing contact with each other as more and more countries join the European Union. Nevertheless, all of these changes call for proficiency in

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English. Especially for getting a decent job, or studying at higher education, travelling the world and being well-informed of news, having access to literature or music and other cultural trends, as the language is often used as a lingua franca in all these fields. Students, therefore, attribute the dominant role of English in the world today to a phenomenon called globalization. Additionally the article is looking to address the tension between the need for Romania to be able to communicate with its neighbors’ through the medium of English.

Weaver (2003) believed “Globalization appears to be the key distinguishing factor of the epoch in which we are living in” and the regionalization tendencies are its consequences. Graddol (2006) claimed that “…the aim of professors of English should be to prepare students with the awareness of worldwide and global literateness.”

Consequently, professors of English and teachers of English need to envision the subject of English within the contexts of global mass mediation. Chirimbu (2011) assumed “...we can say that during his higher education studies, a student needs the acquisition of more competences. The general ones are the same for any graduate who studies English at a certain level, while the specific ones have to characterize the future specialized English teacher. This is indeed more difficult, but gives the graduates a double chance in their profession's mobility and a larger possibility to become successful, and nowadays, this huge tendency towards globalization imposes the English language as a language of communication and peace.”

2. The possible influence of the European Union

The European Union helps Romania in substantially reforming its own organization system Romania, which became on 1st January 2007 member of the European Union, having a population of nearly 22 million and an area of 237,000 km² is the second largest country in Central and East Europe. Romania had long been attached to and influenced by the French culture. The teaching of English, however has taken over and a vast majority of students study English nowadays as a first foreign language. The reason is that mastery of English is perceived as an asset in the ever faster growing together world, in which English is a must. Romania has always tried along its existence to keep an alert eye on the all the countries belonging to European Union, and not only, and from a geographical strategically point of view, it has and will have an important and significant influence in South East Europe.

In the meantime an increasingly globalized society, empowered individuals communicate across cultural and national boundaries as Holliday (2005) asserts “…citizens of the world, where globalization brings up the growing connectivity”, interdependence, and integration of several facets of a modern society, besides it cannot really function without people speaking the same language. English has been taught all over the world as a foreign language and a lot of people already speak it as a second language, so this is a decent basis for using it as a world language.

Robertson (2003a) claims that “globalization as a human dynamic has always been with us, even if we have been unaware of its embrace until recently”. He then argues that the third phase of globalization is currently going on: “the first, after 1500, centered on the globalization of regional trade; the second, after 1800, gained impetus from industrialization; the third derived from the architecture of a new world order after 1945” (Robertson 2003b). This most recent stage of globalization is partly attributable to outcomes of World War II and has been enhanced by the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is markedly different from what has come before, as modern technology has allowed people from all over the world to be more
connected and mobile than ever before. It is also during this time frame that the term ‘globalization’ has come into common use.

On the other hand, globalization is also a word that is commonly heard currently in academic circles. This sensation has been the topic of many present investigations, in humanities, in social sciences and most important the sciences including medicine. English Language Teaching (ELT) does not build an exception and references to this phenomenon have been made in several works (e.g. Block and Cameron’s Globalization and Language Teaching (2002), Wright’s Language Policy and Language Planning: From Nationalism to Globalization (2003) and Jenkins’s Current Perspectives on Teaching World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca. (2006)). In addition, the term “global English” is used with attributes to the contemporary state of the English language to developments, which has occurred as a result of globalization. “This term further implies that English is not a language of one particular country or people, but a code which links people from all over the world”.

Although the most obvious impact English has on European life is undoubtedly its existence in the public domains of the media, including the Internet, advertising, many forms of popular youth culture and popular entertainment. This is also why in Romania is a noticeable presence of English in the media. English can be heard daily on the radio, in music, in film and on television. The presence of English as a language used for the enjoyment of cinema, since the dubbing is not very common in Romania, as up to now most films are rather subtitled. English at the present time is even being used increasingly by Romanian authors.

As pointed out globalization arises not only through language, also through a convergence of mass mediated symbols, words, images, sounds, objects, or activities. While “mass” states the recurring and expanding distribution of these materialistic signs in human collaborations beyond a local social context. Not unexpectedly, “globalization and the status of English as the world number one language is affecting the teaching and learning of English worldwide” Țirban (2010b), even if English is in consequently just a second language in Europe for most citizens, there ought to be also an amplified acknowledgement of localized variability of English.

A lot of countries including Romania are adopting national education policies which order curricular changes meant to refine the teaching of English through the adoption of teaching approaches are likely to help students accomplish communicative competence rather than just having the kind of knowledge about the language that is useful in test taking situations. There are three kinds of English speaker: those who speak English as a first language, those for whom it is a second or additional language and those who learn it as a foreign language. Native speakers may feel the language belongs to them, but it will be those who speak English as a second or foreign language who will determine its world future. However, the efforts at educational reform sometimes run into implementation difficulties. People learn languages for different reasons, and it is important when discussing student motivations, especially when talking about international students.

The two approaches, instrumental and integrative shall be highlighted in the following, where an instrumental orientation means learning a language as tool, a means to an end such as job-development, whereas an integrative orientation refers to learning a language in order to take part in the culture collectively by people, who make use and communicate in that language. “Even though there is a concern in numerous countries in improving the quality of ELT, and a swelling level of motivation among students to become proficient in English” Luke (2002, 2003). The part that culture learning should play in
language learning should be increased, as Luke (2007) extended his argument “especially if many different cultures meet and might help learners to develop a global cultural awareness” and aggravate discussion from that.

Ever since English is used for more purposes than ever before, it is at the leading edge of technological and scientific development, new thinking in economics and management, new literatures and entertainment genres. These give rise to new vocabularies, grammatical forms and ways of speaking and writing. Also the access to new technologies that afford them unprecedented ways to reinterpret, appropriate, contest, and negotiate mass distributed texts in multiple forms. These global interactions force a heightened sensitivity to audiences with different interpretive positions, and necessitate an examination of underlying cultural assumptions and beliefs that frame intercultural communications. Nowhere is the effect of this expansion of English into new domains seen more clearly than in communication on the Internet and the development of ‘net-English’.

English is remarkable for its diversity, its propensity to change and be changed. English is adapting and changing itself, like other foreign languages. “Über Sprachverderb spricht man heutzutage sehr oft. Das gilt nicht nur für Deutsch, sondern auch für etliche europäische Sprachen. Wissenschaftler überwachen mit Besorgnis, die Tendenz der Menschen immer mehr die eigene Sprache mit englischen Wörtern zu vermischen.“ (Translation: Nowadays one talks often about the downfall of languages. This is not only available in German, but also for other European languages. Linguists are concerned that there is a tendency that people destroy more and more their own language with English words), Biriş (2011). This leads to and results in both a variety of forms of English, but also a diversity of cultural contexts within which English is used in daily life. The main areas of development in the use and form of English will undoubtedly come from nonnative speakers. How many are there and where are they located? And when and why do they use English instead of their first language? We need to be aware of the different place that English has in the lives of native speakers, second-language users and those who learn it as a foreign language.

3. What is the level of English of teachers and students in Romania?

The above point notwithstanding, both teachers and students of English in Romania have an impressively high level of English. We were told by foreigners, how often they have been amazed at the fact how easy it is for Romanians to pick up new languages and English is no exception. By the time they are in high school students are already using upper intermediate and advanced books. It is one of the only countries that they know that has what they call “super-advanced” course books. We were told that the reasons for this were as follows:

Romanian teachers and their students are said to be the best among the European speakers of English, with the least country-specific accent. One reason we are so good at this: before 1989, English was studied in very few schools in Romania, the main modern languages studied at the time being Russian, French and German (French and German being obviously preferred, but Russian being almost compulsory); after the Romanian Revolution in 1989, English gradually became the first modern language in schools, while the interest for Russian dropped so drastically that now there are very few schools studying it. The interest for German has never been too high and French lost lots of ground to English.
A second reason might be the sudden burst of alternative textbooks, most of them written by native speakers, which provided access to genuine materials. These, combined with the enthusiasm of the English teachers, resulted in intensive-study or even bilingual classes. To avoid any misunderstandings, a regular class has 2 English classes/hours per week, an intensive class has 4 English classes/hours and a bilingual class has 6-7 English classes/hours per week. Intensive and bilingual classes are divided into groups (usually 2 per class) and are generally taught by 2 teachers.

A third reason is that the conferences held in Romania and the scholarships offered to Romanian teachers. Both these meant an important turn point in many Romanian teachers of English careers. Also millions of nonnative speakers in periphery countries are shaping the English language teaching profession substantively as they learn English in response to the economic and cultural pressures associated with globalization. English is a global language and as such is used in an extraordinarily broad range of contexts. The world’s speakers of English are diverse, as are its socioeconomic and political facets of teaching and learning.

Information we have gathered from our students (many of whom are from Italy) and other personal contacts indicates that students are making use of new technology on their own to improve their English skills when they are motivated and when they are able to do so. Some of the sites are: pedagogical, non-pedagogical or entertainment sites. More than a few of our students declare that they speak a variety of English, which might not be Oxford English but as their professors and colleagues understand them, they just follow their own rules and norms.

Culture remains an integral part of language learning, but our approach toward culture must become multi-faceted, taking into account the diverse cultures of the many people who speak English around the world. There is no single formula for how to handle issues of culture in teaching. Teachers will need to vary their approach depending on the particular audiences being taught and their purposes in learning English.

The growing prominence of regional and local varieties of English has several implications for English teaching in the 21st century. First, English teachers will need to reconceptualize how they conceive of the link between language and culture. It is outdated to teach students to speak and make up using a single, standardized English grammar. Activities in the English classroom in the past focused on a particular dialog, a standardized and homogenous cultural identity. Now since we arrived in the 21st century the professors must widen their curricular perspectives and bring into line their teaching with the real-life multi-cultural and multi-modal communication needs of their students who more and more live and work in a globalized society. By means of such critical literateness, students can interconnect and cooperate with each other across cultural and national boundaries through technologies that give them extraordinary means to reinterpret texts in order to participate more fully in a global village we live nowadays.

4. Conclusion

In our time English becomes more popular and also regionalizes, it is evolving into a new kind of English that is mounting its own norms and standards which will vary from place to place and which will not always be the same as the standards, norms and values of English as a native language, spoken by native speakers. This article seems to approve the conclusions of schoolwork by other authors that a lingua franca variety is arising in Europe. The ownership of English is shifting or even broadening. The
language attitudes of students and usages in the lingua franca cluster reinforce the suggestion that in addition to teaching native speaker norms.

References


