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Rethinking Language Teaching Methods and Materials

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at SIT Graduate Institute,

Brattleboro, VT.

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Date: April 1, 2021

Abstract

With a vast number of people speaking and learning English all over the world, the English language has shifted from being a national language to an international language and finally into a global language. However, English is often taught in a very exclusive way in which English language learners are often times only introduced and exposed to the language practices of speakers who have historically held the most power and prestige in the English-speaking world. One result of this teaching methodology is that many English learners are being taught language practices that are not reflective of how various English speaking communities are actually using the language. Another result is that non-native English speakers are often viewed as deficient and are not capable of being effective English language teachers. This is not only a practical issue since many English learners are not being properly prepared to be competent global English speakers but also a social justice issue since classroom materials are creating the implication that certain forms of English are legitimate while other forms are not. In this paper I will explore ways to make English learning more authentic and inclusive so that English is taught as the global language that it is.

Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) Descriptors

Authentic materials, Linguistic practices, Linguistic imperialism, Diglossia, Translanguaging

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Introduction

Having taught English for several years in both Turkey and Japan respectively, I have found significant problems with the exposure and practice that the classroom materials and school curriculum provided to the students. In my teaching context in Turkey, I was required to teach with both a textbook as well as listening activities that focused exclusively on British English. While in my teaching context in Japan, the classroom materials focused exclusively on American English. The lessons in my Japanese context were also centered on teaching students rather scripted exchanges in which they would learn a question in English and then learn a narrow selection of responses and would spend the rest of the class time practicing and repeating the same question and responses numerous times without learning other common ways to form the previously learned question and responses. The materials and curriculum for both of my previous teaching experiences taught the English language in an exclusive and rigid manner.

In this paper I will first delve into the complex and fluid nature of authentic language in which lexical and grammatical features are constantly mixing and evolving which makes it impossible to be generalized in a single fixed set of rules. Next, I will investigate why certain varieties and accents of English are favored over various other varieties and accents and how this favoritism has more to do with the legacy of imperialism than it has to do with more practical considerations. I then plan to examine how nowadays with the English being a global language, the goal of learning English is not to communicate solely with native speakers but also to communicate with other non-native English speakers when there is a lack of a common first language. Even though it is more than plausible that today's English learners will use the English language to communicate with other non-native English speakers more often than with native

speakers, it is important to rethink previous attitudes that many educational institutions continue to have towards foreign non-native English speakers in that they are inefficient in teaching the English language and should be overlooked in the hiring process. Finally, I plan to explore activities and strategies that teachers can use in order to teach the English language in a more inclusive way even when they lack the adequate materials at their teaching context.

Teaching English in Turkey and Japan

My first teaching experience was working at a primary school in a small city in Southern Turkey. In this work context I was instructed to teach using a grammar textbook for the entire year alongside one storybook per semester. Both the textbook and the storybooks focused entirely on British English and were filled with vocabulary, phrases, and spellings that growing up in the United States I would never use. I found that instead of the materials complimenting my teaching, that there were many minor contradictions and the textbooks completely ignored commonly accepted alternatives. One example of this is that both the grammar textbook and my Turkish colleagues would teach the phrases “Have you got?” and “Yes, I have got/No, I haven’t got a” and this phrase was also reinforced in the storybooks. This is a phrase that I have never used and I believe is very old fashioned for most English speakers; instead I use the phrases “Do you have.....?” and “Yes, I have a/No, I don’t have a....” and yet this very common phrase was not even acknowledged in any of the materials. Although a native speaker would not have any trouble understanding both of the previously mentioned phrases, whenever I would ask my students questions using the “Do you have.....?” structure out of habit rather than the “Have you got?” structure; the noticed that the students would not understand the

question and therefore not be able to answer the question unless I changed the question using the “Have you got?” form. Students would not understand me if I said the word “eraser” instead of “rubber” or if I used words like “trash can” or “garbage can” rather than “bin”. Additionally, students would learn British spellings for the various words that have alternative standard spellings and I have even witnessed my Turkish colleagues penalize students on tests if they wrote “gray” instead of “grey” or “color” instead of “colour”. Even the listening activities would only feature standard British accents and as a result the students and even my Turkish colleagues had an easier time understanding standard British accents than my standard American accent. This is a problem because students were being taught that the way I speak and write English is wrong and rather than a little different but still accepted. By limiting the exposure to different ways of speaking English, my students were not being prepared to communicate in English as a diverse global language.

When I taught in Japan the materials I worked with focused on standard American English, which is more similar to how I naturally communicate in English. As a result, I have had a number of my Japanese colleagues mention that I have “a very good English accent”. My accent is a general American accent that lacks certain features that would attach me to a specific city or region in the United States but I do not think that my accent should be considered a golden standard to which students should be aspiring; accents are different, not better or worse. The curriculum, textbooks and the Japanese teachers would often teach English in a scripted way where students would learn one question phrase and one answer phrase. Students were taught the question phrase “How are you?” and then the response phrase of “I’m fine, thank you”, which is a good start but when teaching classes of students who have been learning English for over six

years I would ask “How are you?” in a variety of different ways and I found that most students in numerous different classes of the same level would understand the question “How are you?” but even if I changed the question to “How are you today?” the majority of students would not understand the question and would be unable to respond. Another issue is that the curriculum focused on making students learn outdated idioms such as “It’s raining cats and dogs” and very specific phrases such as “tossing and turning” which is fine; however I think it is problematic when students were tested on whether or not they knew those types of idioms and phrases when in reality they aren’t essential phrases to know and there are many other ways to say that it is raining heavily or describe the experience of not sleeping well. Again, students should be learning language as a complex and diverse means of communication where they are offered the skill set to adapt to speakers of different regions of origin, ethnic backgrounds and social-economic backgrounds.

Complex translingual communication

One of the main problems with current textbooks and other classroom materials is that it creates the implication that the lexical and grammatical features of the chosen standard apply to all groups of speakers as well as all individual speakers. In my teaching experience I have had numerous students who place higher importance on producing lexical and grammatical features correctly rather than fluently. The reality is that it is impossible to categorize all of the linguistic practices of a named language into a single set of norms (Ricardo Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 286). Named languages are social and political constructions used for the purpose of organizing and maintaining social and political groups rather than being constructions based solely on linguistic features (Ricardo Otheguy et al., 2015, pg. 286). In other words, the way in which classifications

are made as to what is a dialect of the same language and what is a separate language are often based on social and political demands than on linguistic realities. Ricardo Otheguy et al. (2015) uses the Iberian Peninsula as an example to make this point as the region, as with many other countries and regions in Europe, has a wide variety of similar regional linguistic practices that create more of a gradient in differences from region to region rather than clear separations (87). Named languages in the region such as Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan have a high level of similar lexical grammatical features that are shared by their various speakers and there is a degree of separation in linguistic features amongst different variations of the same named languages; for example, there are differences in the language practices in Castillian Spanish vs Mexican Spanish or in European Portuguese and Brazilian Portuguese (Ricardo Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 287). The separation of Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan as distinct languages have a lot to do with social motivations regarding the formation of distinct national identities rather than being a separation purely on linguistic features (Ricardo Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 287). As a result, when looking at lexical and grammatical features it can be difficult to determine which lexical and grammatical features belong to Spanish and which features belong to Portuguese or Catalan (Ricardo Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 287). With that being said it can be concluded that English like any other named language is not defined by a single set of linguistic practices but is a collection of a multitude of linguistic practices with a high degree of overlap in lexical and grammatical features and different varieties of English are not completely isolated from one another; therefore language learning in order to communicate with native speakers should not focus on teaching what is correct and incorrect and should focus on what is accepted and mutually intelligible.

Individuals speak in idiolects, which are the unique lexical and grammatical features that a person uses in their communication, rather than named languages (Ricardo Otheguy et al. 2015, p. 287). Thus, every individual's grammar and vocabulary will have both consistencies and deviations from the standard language. This happens because individuals navigate between different communities and as a result adapt to different language practices. It is natural for speakers to not always be aware of which words and grammatical structures belong to which of the named languages or named dialects that they transition between. The idea that speakers do not separate languages and dialects and instead learn and use language as a single repertoire is what is called translanguaging and is different than code-switching, which is when individuals are aware of distinct speech patterns among the different languages or dialects that they speak in and keep them separate in different social situations (Garcia, 2018, p. 16). In multilingual communities in South East Asia it is common for speakers to mix various languages to the extent that it is difficult to identify the native languages of speakers' and therefore it is difficult to classify interactions into a single language (Canagarajah, 2009, p. 9). It is also common in certain multilingual communities in Africa for individuals to not learn languages separately and sequentially and therefore concepts such as "first language", "second language" and "native language" are non-existent (Makaleka, 2014, p. 17). Although each person's idiolect is unique from other individuals, there is a high degree of overlap in the idiolects of people and people groups that frequently come into contact with each other such as friends, family and people who share a similar history, social class or geographical region (Ricardo Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 290). Suitably, when people interact with other languages they add lexical and grammatical features from those other languages into their linguistic repertoire creating a form of speech that is not

represented by a standardized named language. Since many textbooks like the ones that I have used in my past teaching are more selective about the lexical and grammatical features that are included, it is important to look at the social and political reasons that result in certain linguistic practices being taught to English learners as the correct practices while other practices end up being excluded.

Diglossia

Whereas translanguaging is the more natural and fluid way in which people communicate and language is not confined to social or political separations, diglossia is a system in which there is a regulated language favored for education and high-functions that is different from the language that is spoken by the majority of people outside of academic and professional contexts (Garcia, 2013, pg. 156). A clear example of diglossia occurred in the society of the early Modern Greece, where there was the form of Greek used by the common people known as Dhimotiki and the Greek of high-function known as Katharevousa (Garcia, 2013, p. 156). Since the classical period of Ancient Greece, the Greek language developed as the people were conquered by the Romans, Ottomans and Venetians and the Greek people were naturally translanguaging between their native language and the languages of the peoples they were in regular contact with through the centuries of foreign rule (Garcia, 2018, p. 16). By the time Greece became an independent state in the 1830s most people were using a form of Greek that had been influenced by Latin, Italian, French, Turkish and other languages and although most Greek speakers did not make the distinction between native Greek words and foreign Turkish and Italian words, the elites in Greek society wanted to purify what they considered a corrupted form of the Greek language (Garcia, 2018, p. 17). Consequentially, the educated in Greek society would speak the common

Dhimotiki version of the Greek language in all informal settings and were required to code-switch to the purified Katharevousa variety until the 1970s when the Katharevousa variety was abandoned and replaced with the language of the people as the official language of the state (Garcia, 2018, p. 16). Seeing how the Dhimotiki variety of Greek eventually took over and became the official language of Greece shows that the Katharevousa movement did not result in people changing their natural linguistic practices but ultimately creating a divide amongst the elites and common people while the movement was in place. Teaching language as it should be rather than as it is does not cause individuals to speak correctly but causes alienation between classroom and community.

There is also a system of diglossia within the Arab speaking world in which most Arab speakers speak a colloquial version of the Arabic language in informal contexts and the educated across the Arab speaking world are taught to speak in Modern Standard Arabic (Palmer, 2007, p. 111). These colloquial varieties can be quite different and mutually unintelligible the farther the geographical distance is between the varieties being compared. For example, Syrian Arabic and Jordanian Arabic have a high degree of mutual intelligibility, while when Syrian Arabic and Moroccan Arabic are compared, there is a lower degree of mutual intelligibility (Palmer, 2007, p. 113). Just as the previously mentioned language of prestige in Greece from the mid-19th Century until the mid-20th Century, Katharevousa was modeled after the Ancient Greek language bringing back archaic vocabulary and grammar, the language of prestige in the Arab world, Modern Standard Arabic is modeled after Classical Arabic which is the version of Arabic that the original Quran was written in. Since Modern Standard Arabic is that language of prestige

in the Arab speaking world, it is overwhelmingly the language that is taught when foreigners learn Arabic as a second language (Palmer, 2007, p. 113). As a result, there is a significant disconnect between what Arab language learners are learning and the diverse language practices that Arab speakers in their every-day lives. This both creates the implication that colloquial Arabic varieties are less prestigious and less valuable than Modern Standard Arabic and it significantly limits Arabic learners who attempt to speak Arabic outside of a formal context. The result for learners is that they feel unprepared when speaking to Arab speakers in informal settings only having the knowledge of the formal language, which often leaves learners frustrated and embarrassed when trying to understand individuals speaking in a colloquial variety (Palmer, 2007, p. 112).

A system of diglossia is simply an issue of language power since it is the result of the powerful having control over what society considers the proper way to speak and conduct formal and business affairs. Before public education, the right to go to school was reserved for people who could afford it, mainly the elites and as a result the language of education in many societies matched that of the upper class (Garcia, 2013, p. 157). When schools became public and a right to everyone, the language of instruction often still matched with the language of the elite and as a result the language of school and home were very different (Garcia, 2013, p. 157). Even though education in many countries was given as a right to all the right for many students to use their home language in education has not. It is important to think about the standardized varieties of languages that are ultimately chosen to be included in textbooks and are taught to international learners and consider whether or not the variety chosen is actually going to be beneficial to the learner in every-day communication or if these decisions are based solely on prestige. By

teaching English as a British language or an American language, many English language materials are creating a globalized system of diglossia in which certain varieties of English are considered correct while other varieties that have developed naturally are considered either improper English or broken English.

Imperialism, colonialism and the linguistic impact

English is unique in its status as a global language, which differs from an international language such as Arabic or Spanish, in that the goal of learning an international language is often to speak with native speakers of that language (Rohmah, 2005, p. 107). However, today it is common for individuals around the world to learn English not only to speak with native English speakers from various English speaking countries around the world, but to also learn English for the purpose of using English as a common language when communicating with other non-native English speakers who have a different first language than the other speaker (Rohmah, 2005, p. 107). English has never been made the official language of the world and yet with the English language being the most commonly studied foreign language around the world it seems that countries both English speaking and non-English speaking have unanimously recognized English to be the global lingua-franca (Rohmah, 2005, p. 108). This unofficial recognition of English as a global language is very much the result of linguistic imperialism and continued influence the English language has around the world.

Linguistic imperialism occurs when certain languages become more dominant over other languages (Phillipson, 1992). Throughout history dominant peoples have continuously given their cultural and linguistic practices the status of being the cultural and linguistic practices of a

civilized person which led to the stigmatization of peoples with differing cultural and linguistic practices (Phillipson, 1992, p. 2). The word barbarian, the antithesis of being civilized was originally used by the Ancient Greek people in order to stigmatize all non-Greek speakers as not being speakers of a real language. Additionally, the term the English have and continue to refer to the minority group who call themselves as the Cymry, as Welsh which is a term derived from the Old English meaning stranger, which was a way to stigmatize the Welsh people for speaking a different language (Phillipson, 1992, p. 2). Throughout history dominant peoples have created a number of justifications for placing their languages on the top of language hierarchies that they themselves have created. Some languages have been given the status of being holy languages to languages of god, and other languages have been seen as languages of reason, logic and progress (Phillipson, 1992, p. 2). This thinking creates the implication that instills the idea that less dominant languages lack the same spiritual and intellectual capabilities that are possessed by the dominant language. These baseless language hierarchy justifications are the reasons behind language suppression and language diglossia.

When European powers began colonizing and building their empires in the Americas, Australia, Asia and Africa, they implemented systems of language hierarchies that favored dominant European languages and discriminated against local languages throughout the world (Phillipson, 1992, p. 2). The British implemented linguistic policies across their empire that devastated many languages across the empire. A classic example is the suppression of the Celtic languages in the British Isles which shifted from being majority languages in Wales, Scotland and Ireland, to minority languages amongst historical speakers due to a long history of these

languages being associated with poverty and inferiority. As with many suppressed language many Celtic language speakers felt they had to abandon their language practices in order to elevate their social status and avoid further prejudice and discrimination (Phillipson, 1992, p. 3). The practice of language dominance and language suppression was continued by the United States shortly after gaining independence from the British. As the United States expanded its territory west, the United States implemented boarding schools for the Native American populations to learn English, adopt “civilized” manners and convert to Christianity (Phillipson, 1992, p. 3). President Theodore Roosevelt had even written in 1919 “We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language” (Phillipson, 1992, p. 3). English did not peacefully become a world language and there were many casualties that resulted in the rise in English as a globally accepted lingua-franca. This dominance has not only made English the dominant world language but also determines which varieties of the English language are acceptable and which ones are not legitimized. Additionally, the legacy of linguistic imperialism also impacts which languages prioritize learning and learners often want to focus on languages and language varieties that they believe have more prestige and economic and cultural value. For example, in South Africa there are many native African languages spoken and yet there are “negative attitudes and stereotypes associated with these languages” and as a result, native African languages are often not taught as second or other languages in schools (Makalela, 2014, p. 20).

Whereas in the past schools would often teach only in dominant languages and not allow the minority languages to be spoken, nowadays many schools in areas around the world where there are significant speakers of minority languages have been offering bilingual education. In

theory bilingual education served the purpose of making education more inclusive; however, most bilingual schools still keep and teach the languages separate as two separate wholes.

Bilingual schools have come up with several different systems of separating languages which include: time-determined separation, which involves speaking different languages at different parts of the day, teacher-determined separation, in which students use different languages for different teachers, place-determined separation, in which different classrooms and physical spaces are dedicated to each of the separate languages and subject-determined separation in which some subjects are taught in one of the students' languages and the remaining subjects are taught in the students other language (Garcia, 2013, p. 157). This system of education still follows the same imperial mind-set that desires languages to remain separate and pure. Rather than being reflective, of the authentic linguistic practices of bilingual and multilingual students, these bilingual schools force students to code-switch between two standard forms of the two languages. This code-switching deepens the disconnect between authentic language use and language taught in school (Garcia, 2013, p. 158). In the Americas since many Indigenous American languages have been suppressed by the Western educational system, many of these languages had not developed standard forms in the same way European languages have.

Quechua for example had been spoken predominantly in homes and due to hundreds of years of exposure to the Spanish language many Quechua speakers adopted lexical and grammatical features of Spanish into their home language (Garcia, 2013, pg. 159). When Quechua was accepted and used as a language of instruction in bilingual schools, rather than allowing students to make full use of their linguistic repertoire, students were forced to speak a standardized

version of their native language which was different from the way they spoke Quechua at home (Garcia, 2013, p. 159). Although it is a step in the right direction that schools are allowing students the native named language of the students to be used in the educational system, students were still denied from using the language practices that they have developed as part of their idiolect as those practices did not fall in realm of either “proper Spanish” or now “proper Quechua”. In this example not only has linguistic imperialism led to a strict set of rules in the dominant language of Spanish but also resulted in a rigid set of norms being forced into the minority language and caused a disconnect between standard rules learned in the classroom and the authentic practices of native speakers at home.

English in being a global language is wide-spread and incredibly diverse with varieties in dialects and accents around the world. Some varieties developed as native English speakers left England to colonize different parts of the globe (Quirk, 1990, p. 18). Other varieties developed from non-native speakers who found themselves under the influence or control of the British Empire and mixed elements of their native languages with the English language as they began to learn and communicate in English (Quirk 1990, p. 17). In South East Asia people had been mixing languages in their speech for centuries and added English into their fluid translangual practices while the British colonialists tried to keep the languages separate in order to preserve the purity of their language (Canagarajah, 2009, p.11). African American Vernacular English is another variety of the English language that developed as a result of African peoples, who were brought over to the Americas as slaves, learned English while still retaining grammatical features of native African languages in their speech (Filmer, 2003, p. 225). Due to the linguistic hierarchy that was implemented by the British and continued by the United States, African American

Vernacular English is delegitimized as a distinct variety of the English language and is often dismissed as “bad English” even today in the twenty first century (Filmer, 2003, p. 226).

In addition to making the distinction between native and non-native varieties of English, Quirk (1990) also classifies English varieties into institutionalized and non-institutionalized. The institutionalized varieties are the varieties “that are institutionalised in the sense of being fully described and with defined standards observed by the institutions of state” (Quirk, 1990, p. 18).

The standard American and British varieties are two varieties of the English language that have been globally institutionalized and some varieties such as Australian English are nationally institutionalized but lack the same global acceptance as British and American English (Quirk, 1990, p. 18). However, even most natively developed varieties of English are not institutionalized. For example, more localized varieties such as New York English and Yorkshire English are not institutionalized, mainly because the features that make these varieties unique tend to disappear when moving up the social class (Quirk, 1990, p. 18). In other words, the vast majority of English varieties are excluded from being taught since they are perceived as being “low-class”. By limiting the exposure that English learners have to even native varieties of the English language indicates that the goal of many English language textbooks and institutions is for learners to learn what they consider “perfect English” rather than native English proficiency.

Making language learning more inclusive

The problem with many textbooks is that they imply ownership of the English language to a single country or a single group of speakers. In the past powers like the British and the

United States have used their dominance to claim ownership of the language to decide which linguistic features are accepted in the language and which ones are not. As the world transitions from an age of imperialism to a world of globalism it becomes less clear who gets to claim ownership to the English language and dictate what linguistic features belong to the language. This uncertainty poses as a challenge for language teaching as teachers try to navigate between a global world and a narrow view of the goals of language learners. The goal of language teaching is for the learner to acquire “native like” fluency (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 2). The goal of becoming a “native like” speaker is more of an idealized speaker than a realistic goal. The first problem with this model is that with a variation in linguistic practices amongst groups of people who speak English as a first language, the definition of “native-like” fluency is in reality is complicated and generalizations of “native-like” linguistic practices in the English language are only loosely based on how native speakers are using the language (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 2). The second problem with this goal is that with over a billion people learning English as a second language and about 350 million people speaking English as their first language there is a much higher number of non-native English speakers than native English speakers. The number of English learners is expected to increase rapidly over the next several decades while the number of native English speakers is expected to stay relatively the same (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 2). This means that the majority of English communication is and will continue to be conducted by non-native speakers rather than native speakers. This also indicates that the English language will continue to change and evolve as a result of language practices of non-native speakers. This makes learning the linguistic practices of former imperial powers less practical for new English language learners (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 3).

Despite native English speakers being a minority of global English speakers the model of teaching English as a native language model is still the norm globally and this is a result of what Jenkins calls the “gatekeepers” which includes: government institutions, examination boards, universities, publishers and other powerful organizations that control English policy decisions (2007a, p. 239). In other words, language education still has more to do with power and how language should be spoken as opposed to the reality of how language is spoken. The gatekeepers that control curriculums for English learners use their control to promote the notion of “good English” and “good English speakers” which leads to linguistic insecurity amongst English learners (Jenkins, 2007a, p. 246). This results in students often focusing more on having correct grammar and correct pronunciation rather than focusing on their conversational fluency.

In the article “Which English? Who’s English”, Young (2010) interviews twenty-six non-native English teachers from various countries in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, South East Asia and East Asia, and asked them several questions pertaining to their prior experience and beliefs regarding teaching and learning with the English native speaker model or English as a lingua franca English as an international language. When the group of teachers were asked which variety of English they had learned when they were students, all of the teachers in the group had stated that they did not know which variety of English they had learned in their home countries. When asked to speculate almost all of the participants felt that in the lower levels of English studies they were taught the localized variety spoken by their teachers, which tries to be as close to the English native speaker model as possible and in the higher levels they were taught either Standard American English or Standard British English depending on the materials and the

teacher. Interestingly none of the participants were ever made aware of the variety of English that they were learning (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 8). In the study teachers from Taiwan have speculated that in the lower levels of their studies, the materials were locally made and thus taught ‘Taiwanese English in terms of pronunciation and grammar’ but then at a higher level their English education transitioned to either Standard American English or Standard British English (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 8). Teachers from China stated that their knowledge of English varieties grew as they became more advanced in their English level. In their response to the same question, teachers from both South Korea and Japan stated, ‘exams dictated which English is taught’ and they believe that in their education, they were disproportionately exposed to Standard American English in order to perform well on standardized English language proficiency exams in their respective countries (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 8). In all cases students felt that their exposure to different English varieties was limited to either Standard American English or Standard British English as their only reference for native varieties and to local non-native varieties from their own countries which are influenced by their own native language.

In the same study teachers were also asked which variety of English they were currently teaching and if they had any thoughts as to which variety they believed they should teach to their students. Most participants stated both a desire and a need to teach a standard variety of the English language, however there was debate over which variety of English is and should be the standard (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 9). A teacher from Turkey in the study showed a strong preference for teaching British English as the standard variety stating ‘Standard English is

British English. Its linguistic basis is standard. American English is a variety' (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 9). Many teachers stated that they focus more on Standard American English since textbooks and materials focusing on American English are more available in their countries and students have more exposure to the American variety due to the popularity of American movies, TV shows and music in non-English speaking countries (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 9). Some participants in the study have even expressed that they believed American English is 'the most widely understood by the majority of people' (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 11). Interestingly, while the participants have overwhelmingly stated interest in teaching a standard English they almost all gravitate towards the traditional the English native speaker model choosing either American English or British English as their preferred standard. In the study some teachers felt that focusing on a native variety of English rather than a global standard would better prepare students to pursue higher education in a native English speaking country or to work in an international context and some teachers felt that American English is more 'modern and practical' while other teachers felt that British English had a higher level of prestige (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 10). However, most teachers in the study expressed not having much of a choice over which variety of English they teach and that what variety is taught is determined by the materials that they have access to in the local markets. Ultimately what students are learning is impacted more by the decisions of publishing companies regarding which variety they highlight in their materials and where in the the world they sell their materials than by individual teacher beliefs (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 9).

When asked whether or not they were interested in the idea of teaching English as a

lingua-franca instead focusing on a particular variety of the language, most of the participants in the study expressed a positive view on the concept (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 11). One of the participants from Japan believed that accepting either American English or British English as a default standard due to those varieties being pushed by international publishing companies as the global standards is problematic and stated that ‘It is better to be real than standard’ (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 11). Many participants in the study who shared a positive view towards teaching English as a lingua-franca felt that this way of teaching English had less to do with resisting varieties that have been promoted through centuries linguistic imperialism and more to do with giving local varieties the validation that they deserve. One of the participants from Nigeria stated that even in her own country, local varieties of English are stigmatized and not seen as proper English (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 11). There was a minority of participants in the study that did not agree with teaching English as a lingua franca as they felt that it promoted ‘broken’, ‘simplified’ and ‘non-standard’ English with one participant from Saudi Arabia stating that ‘It is ok for ordering drinks on holiday, but not for doing business’ (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 11). Out of the majority that viewed the concept of teaching English as a lingua franca as appealing, only one of the participants, who was from Japan, was interested in actually implementing it into the classroom. One of biggest obstacles, according to many of the teachers in the study, is that most English learners are unaware of what English as a lingua franca actually is while native English varieties such as American and British English have higher prestige among students, teachers and schools alike due to their historical dominance in the world (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 11). Even the one participant from Japan that was interested in teaching English as a lingua franca rather than either American English or British English also stated that it would be

challenging to ‘persuade’ her learners of the usefulness of learning English as a global language rather than a British or American language (Tony Young et al. 2010, p. 11).

In the previously mentioned study, many of the teachers believed that it was important to focus on a standard variety of the English language and teach a standard set of rules. Although it is easier to teach languages as a standard fixed set of rules, it just isn’t realistic. According to Schulzke (2014), “Languages differ dramatically in their grammatical structure, word order, and the size of their vocabulary” (p. 230). Languages are constantly evolving to adapt to changes that occur in different environments and over different periods of time and thus groups of speakers will always adapt their linguistic practices to overcome any limitations in expressing new ideas (Schulzke, 2014, p. 230). This means that no individual language or dialect is more linguistically sophisticated or expressive when compared to other languages and dialects. However, according to Quirk (1990) having a standardized version of the target language is essential for maintaining the language and keeping other varieties from becoming mutually unintelligible. On the other hand, Schulzke (2014) argues that there does not have to be a choice between teaching a universal standard of English and allowing English varieties to lose their mutual intelligibility (p. 234). Language varieties do not need to be identical in vocabulary, spelling, grammar, or pronunciation in order to be understood and native speakers of a language are often able to understand other speakers who speak the same language but uses a slightly different set of lexical and grammatical features (Schulzke, 2014, p. 230). Teaching English as a uniform language is misleading and does not educate learners about the diversity of English both in native and non-native varieties and how different variations of speech are a reflection on peoples’ cultural and sociological identities (Mesthrie and Bhatt, 2008, as cited in Schulzke, 2014, p. 234). Teaching standard

languages focuses more on the idea of how language should be spoken rather than how language is actually spoken and judges deviations from the accepted standards rather than accepting cultural and linguistic character of each of the differing varieties (Schulzke, 2014, p. 234). Language practices that are preferred are not favored because they are linguistically more superior but because of social values that are shaped cultural attitudes and biases (Alptekin, 2002, p. 59). Although there are minor differences in vocabulary, pronunciation and idioms in the English language that reflect cultural identities, there is still an ability for speakers of different varieties to communicate very easily with perhaps rare moments of confusion when an unfamiliar words, unfamiliar pronunciations and words that are used differently are encountered while communicating with someone speaking a different variety (Schulzke, 2014, p. 235). In different parts of the United States people may use different terms for the same item for example, where I would use the word “soda” in some regions in the United States people would use the word “pop” instead and there are people who use the word “coke” to refer to all sodas regardless of whether or not it is part of the Coca-Cola brand. Despite this reality I have never had any significant difficulties communicating with English speakers in different regions of the United States or around the world. In multilingually complex societies in which individuals build unique linguistic repertoires from a mixture of different named languages, mutually intelligibility is obtained through use, practice and working out gaps in communication rather than using a standard language (Canagarajah, 2009, p. 17).

As an English speaker who grew up speaking what would be classified as Standard American English, I do not have difficulty understanding other English speakers from different regions of the United States as well as other native English-speaking countries such as the U.K.

or Australia but from my experience teaching English overseas I found that English learners have more difficulty understanding minor differences from the standardized form of the language that they are learning. The difference is I did not learn English from a textbook that taught me a standardized form of the English language. Rather, I learned English by growing up communicating with English speakers of different socioeconomic, regional and cultural backgrounds and I have been exposed to an array of different English varieties and accents of both native English speakers and non-native English speakers through different forms of media including music, films and television shows. When I was teaching in Turkey I would have to teach pronunciation lessons where I would go over the so called correct phonology and phonotactics of new vocabulary words. The problem is that the curriculum taught Standard British pronunciations and the textbooks would show an IPA spelling of new vocabulary words according to British pronunciation which would tell students to pronounce the word “park” with the following set of phonemes “pa:k”, while I would pronounce the same word using this set of phonemes “park”. Although native English speakers can recognize the two different ways of saying the word “park”, my beginner students in Turkey would often be confused by the slight phonetic variations that occur in the mentioned example as well as in many other words. I often found that if I said a word in my normal accent and my Turkish students did not understand, if instead I said the same word mimicking a British accent that they would have an easier time understanding. With a wide range of English accents that span various continents, I have often found it counterproductive to focus heavily on pronunciation to the point that students are being told which sets of phonemes are correct to use when producing a word because both native and non-native speakers can produce the same words with slightly different sets of phonemes and the

mutual intelligibility is often not lost when communicating with other native English speakers. In addition, focusing so much on correct pronunciation creates the implication that speakers who use a slightly different phonology from the standard are not competent English speakers. In my work context in Turkey, it was very common for the Turkish English teachers to constantly correct students when they failed to correctly produce the dental fricatives “θ” and “ð”, also known as the “th” sounds. Although dental fricatives are used in Standard American English and standard British English, even in non-standard native English varieties the dental fricatives “θ” and “ð” can be pronounced as “f” and “v” sounds respectively in some regional varieties of the U.K. and pronounced as “t” and “d” sounds in native English varieties including Irish English and African American Vernacular English (Jekiel, 2014, p. 62). This is one of several examples in which English learners are held to standards that not all native speakers meet and that does not make such native varieties incorrect or unintelligible with other English varieties. Both the materials that I worked with in Turkey and in Japan included stories and conversation listening practices in which every speaker had a “perfect” British accent or American accent respectively and that is not realistic. For example, one of my lessons in Japan I played a conversation for a listening activity for an upper intermediate class and the setting of the conversation took place in an international school in which a Korean student and a Mexican student were discussing their classes. In that conversation, despite coming from two different countries on different sides of the world and having two different native languages, the two speakers spoke with the same standard slow pace English accent. This is very unrealistic and it is not productive to teach students that everyone should sound the same when speaking in English instead it would be more productive to teach students how to adapt to differences in speech and

negotiate meaning when communicating with diverse speakers. With that being said, publishing companies, school administrations and teachers should do what they can to work towards expanding the amount of exposure to different English accents and varieties for students to have access.

Non-native English speakers can teach English

When I have looked for international English teaching jobs in the past I have found that the overwhelming majority require candidates to be a native English speaker from a native speaking country. Many job postings will state that they will only look at applications of candidates who are from the following seven countries: The United States, Canada, The United Kingdom, Ireland, South Africa, Australia or New Zealand. The assumption is that is made is that by having such requirements for potential English teachers is that non-native English speakers are always destined to be inefficient English teachers. Its rather contradictory to have the goal of English learners attaining native-like fluency and implies that non-native speakers are always too deficient to be considered for a foreign English teaching position. As a result of Standard American English and Standard British English being pushed as the uniform English varieties of instruction around the world, English learners often have difficulty distinguishing native English speakers speaking a regional or socioeconomic variety of English from actual non-speakers (Kelch & Williamson, 2002, p. 62). In a study that tested the ability of native English speakers and English learners to identify out of several spoken samples of native and non-native accents, native English speakers had an accuracy rate of 97% while English learners had an accuracy rate of 45% (Kelch & Williamson, 2002, p. 62). The Standard American audio used in the study was by far the variety of English that English learners were most accurately

able to distinguish as a native variety. On the other hand, English learners were more likely to choose an audio sample of a person from Brazil as being a native speaker than they were with an audio sample of someone from the Southern United States (Kelch & Williamson, 2002, p. 62). This study indicates that English learners have a narrow scope of what they consider correct English and more times than not consider Standard American English as correct and unstandardized varieties such as Southern American American accents or African American Vernacular as incorrect English. There is no linguistic or educational reason for favoring native English speakers over competent non-native English speakers and the distinction is really made for marketing purposes (Walkinshaw & Duong 2012, p. 3). When I worked in both Turkey and Japan, the fact that myself and my international colleagues were native speakers was a major selling point because it allowed both of my work contexts to make a claim that they were exposing the students to the teachers who had the best accents. Although my context in Turkey was more flexible and actually a few hired non-native teachers while I was employed, the administration would tell students and parents that those teachers grew up bilingual, which for all of my non-native colleagues in the context was completely false. Similarly, my work context in Japan only hired teachers from their narrow list of seven native English-speaking countries. However, some of my colleagues who had non-standard English accents or regionally or socioeconomically distinct accents would periodically receive complaints for not having a “good” accent. According to Canagarajah (1999a), due to extensive study instead of copying family and community shared linguistic practices, non-native English speakers have a greater knowledge of grammar rules and prove to be more effective in teaching grammar rules than

some native English speakers (p. 80). In some cases, due to formal instruction some non-native English teachers even use pronunciation norms when speaking English that resemble standardized forms of English more so than native English speakers with regionally or socioeconomically distinct accents and features in their language (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012, p. 11). However, non-native English speakers often lack what many would consider an ideal accent and they themselves feel deficient in their pronunciation and as a result avoid using resources such as videos or audio samples to teach a variety of accents and pronunciations (Mydgyes 1992, as cited in Al-Nawrasy, 2013, p. 9). Given that there are so many native and non-native English speakers around the world, it is unrealistic to view non-native English speakers as deficient in any way. English speakers who speak a non-standard variety of English, whether they are native speakers or not, should be viewed as simply different for their exposure to multiple varieties of English, and this exposure should be celebrated for its authenticity, especially in teaching English.

Language as an art not an exact science

Since languages are not defined by fixed rules it can be difficult for educators to find the balance between teaching a set of mutually intelligible norms as well as unique linguistic practices of individual speakers and communities within named languages. Language is not a subject like math or science in which there is only one way of self-expression and yet the way that language is taught in a way that suggests that there is a finite standard of lexical, grammatical and pronunciation norms that must be followed and deviations from standard forms are both deficient and broken forms of speak. In my experience as a long time art student, I find that there are more similarities to creating art and creating language. Having studied art in both

my high school and college career I would hear various teachers and professors use the phrase “You need to know the rules in order to break the rules”, in order to explain to the class why they had to learn how to draw and paint objects as they appear in life rather than painting like Van Gogh, Picasso or Pollock. Since language speakers are constantly expressing themselves in new ways, borrowing and using different linguistic features from different communities that they interact with and are constantly innovating and reinventing the rules of language, I believe that language should be taught more like how art is taught and less like subjects such as math and science. Throughout my years of taking art courses concepts such as anatomy or perspective were taught in order for students to learn to make figures or landscapes look realistic and believable while at the same time the works of the Impressionists, Expressionists, Cubists or even Surrealists are discussed in art history courses and are given legitimacy in the art world. The reason why there is the focus on drawing objects from life is important because it allows artists to build on their repertoire of skills which they can use or omit from consciously rather than randomly to accurately depict what it is that they are attempting to express. A language curriculum that implies that there is only one correct way to speak is like an art curriculum only teaches students that there is one acceptable style of art or a music curriculum that teaches students that there is only one proper style of music. Teachers should focus more on lexical, grammatical and pronunciation norms that are universally mutually intelligible by English speakers around the world while offering authentic example of more regionally specific linguistic practices and pronunciations.

Authentic English Practice

Although some textbooks are much better at teaching English as an inclusive global

language, many textbooks are still lacking in this area. As many of the participants mentioned in the study described in the article by Tony Young et al (2010), not every school has access to textbooks that teach English as a lingua franca and teachers are forced to work with whichever textbooks are available in the local markets as well as what materials the school budget will allow. Regardless of whether or not the textbook in use focuses on English as a global language or focuses more on regional standards, teachers do have the ability to bring supplementary materials into the classroom in order to expose students to and have them practice authentic, diverse communication. Authentic materials are samples of language that are spoken or written for realistic communication rather than being specifically crafted for the purpose of language teaching (Nunan 1999, as cited in Oura, 2001, p. 67). When I worked in Japan all of the listening activities and reading activities involved the students listening to conversations or reading texts that were clearly designed to cram as much of the unit vocabulary as possible. Such listenings and texts are the antithesis of authentic materials and the listening conversations were made even less authentic with every speaker using a very standard American accent regardless of ethnic, cultural, regional or socioeconomic background. Although in theory creating materials that are simplified and limited in its structure and vocabulary would be easier for students to understand, such materials, due to their sometimes extreme disconnect from real language use, trap learners into relying mostly on vocabulary rather than allowing students to have context behind the reading or listening to use in addition to known vocabulary as a tool to create meaning (Brosnan et al. 1984, as cited in Oura, 2001, p. 70). According to the findings of Mackenzie (1997), who studied how learners with lower levels of English proficiency cope with

faster paced authentic listening materials, when simple scaffolding techniques are implemented, listening materials such as news reports, movie scenes or cartoons can be used even with elementary and intermediate level students (Bahrani & Sim, p. 58). Using authentic materials also creates a stronger connection between classroom learning and the outside world and allows learners “to focus more on content and meaning rather than the language itself” (Oura, 2001, p. 68). While authentic materials are a great way to expose students to more realistic input, task-based activities are a great method in which students can practice language that prepares them for real world situations. Students who receive input through authentic materials and practice output with task-based activities tend to both be more motivated, engaged and feel more confident in their language learning as they are able to see where they are proficient and where they have gaps in their ability to accomplish important real life tasks in the target language (Oura 2001, p. 69). On the other hand, for students that are only learning language that is unnatural in the classroom often feel unprepared and demoralized when they encounter realistic situations outside the classroom (Hedge 2003, as cited in Ahmed, 2017, p. 194). Authentic language material can actually be quite easy to find especially with how globalized the world is and given that English is the default global lingua franca. Teachers can either find authentic materials or create task-based activities in real life, if the classroom is located in a part of the world where the target language is widely spoken, or teachers can find authentic materials with the internet and can create in classroom task-based writing assignments and speaking role-plays to replicate real life situations in the classroom. Additionally, teachers who teaching in a country where the target language is not regularly spoken can also bring back authentic reading texts while visiting a country where the target language is more widely spoken. Also, students are able to bring in

authentic language sources themselves that they encounter either in the form of printed text or video and audio materials.

If the classroom is located in a country in which the target language is dominant and students are either immigrants or exchange students, the teacher can easily create tasks for students to accomplish outside of the classroom. When I was in university I studied abroad in Greece and took a Greek language course, the professor would often have students for homework do activities such as ordering food at a restaurant in Greek or making a deposit or withdrawal from a bank in Greek or even mailing a post card back home at a Greek post office and then recording the conversation to bring to class. This type of activity offered an opportunity to speak with real speakers in realistic situations and afterwards in class it was an opportunity to listen to the recordings and get feedback and clarification in areas where there was confusion or misunderstandings in the conversation. In addition to recording conversations revolving around completing every-day tasks, students could also interview local people and conduct surveys about a number of topics. If the classroom is located in a country where English is not dominant but is near a tourist attraction, students can also conduct interviews and surveys with tourists both from English speaking countries and non-English speaking countries. For example, when I worked in Japan, I lived in a small city about forty minutes from Hiroshima and when I would visit Hiroshima and was near tourist attractions like the Atomic Bomb Dome or Peace Park, often times school children would interview myself and other foreigners and ask questions about traveling in Japan or their thoughts and feelings and ideas towards achieving world peace. While classrooms that are in English speaking countries also have the advantage of having students with different native languages use English as a common language to communicate, practice and

build upon English skills and to build classroom community, it can be difficult to keep students from communicating in their native language when all of the students share the same native language in a class. Both my students in Turkey and my students in Japan have mentioned that they find it very unnatural to communicate with other Turkish and Japanese speakers respectively, in English and therefore it is inauthentic to expect speakers that share a common native language to completely abandon their native linguistic practices and only speak in a language that they are less proficient in. Since the internet allows people to send messages to the other side of the world in seconds or have video calls with people in different regions of the world, teachers and schools could try to arrange for their classes to have international pen-pals where students in a classroom for example in Japan could be connected to students in another country such as South Korea or China. This would allow students to have a more interesting and engaging conversation about their pen-pal's countries, cultures, every-day lives and they could even teach each other words and common phrases their native languages using English a vehicle to do so.

Both movies and television are great sources of authentic listening materials which can expose learners to an unlimited amount of accents, regional varieties, different levels of formality as well as listening to people speaking in different emotions which affect the volume, pace and clarity of their language. I often like to use news segments in the classroom because I find that it can be a great juxtaposition between more controlled language and uncontrolled language. Typically, reporters speak in a formal controlled way of speaking which is more similar to the standard language that is taught in textbooks. However, learners can still get practice listening to less controlled language when reporters travel to different areas and interview local people who

might have regional accents and dialects, may not speak as formally and may also speak with higher levels of emotion in response to the event they had experienced. News segments also provide photos or video of the event being discussed which can give students additional context to piece together what had occurred so they can practice using contextual information as a tool to understand what is occurring in the segment if they struggle with the language. Students also have the ability to try to notice different linguistic patterns and practices that occur in more regional accents and varieties and can bring up localized vocabulary they heard but are unfamiliar with for classroom discussion. Additionally, news segments can lead to interesting discussions regarding current issues and students can share their ideas, opinions and potential solutions to problems that are happening in the world.

Movies are also a great source for students to gain exposure to different speech patterns with different characters speaking differently based on the setting of the movie, the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of different characters as well as the social classes of various characters. Teachers can show a scene from a movie and have students watch and afterwards make educated guesses about what is happening in the story, who the characters are, and what might happen next in the story. Movie trailers can also be a way to get students to discuss and make educated guess about what an upcoming movie is going to be about and whether it looks like an interesting movie based on what is said or shown in the trailer. I also find that having students write short summaries recommending movies that they have seen in English is a useful task-based activity in which students have to practice listening to authentic, complex communication to understand what is happening in the story and write a brief overview in their own words. I also find it an interesting challenge to have students describe important scenes that

are more action based than dialogue based since they are able to see exactly what is occurring but may find significant language gaps to overcome in order to effectively communicate that they observed.

Television advertisements are another excellent source for authentic language that again are also complimented with important visual cues for context. What I think is most useful about television advertisements is that they tend to move away from using basic adjectives that students may be more familiar with and instead use adjectives that are better at appealing to the viewers senses. For example, many of my intermediate students would know adjectives such as “good”, “great” or “delicious” but are not familiar with words like “crispy”, “juicy”, “mouth-watering” which are quite common in advertisements. Using language to appeal to other people’s senses is a very valuable skill not just for creating advertisements but also for good writing in general. I also like to have students do an activity in which after studying various kinds of television advertisements, they would be put in groups and have to think of a new product and create their own advertisement that they can perform as a role-play in class. This type of activity can push students outside of just simply describing something but using new vocabulary that is persuasive.

Written texts can also be beneficial to students and can come in the form of newspapers, advertisements, informative labels on products, signs, books, or even informative brochures. Many of the previously mentioned activities that can be done with visual/auditory authentic materials can also be done with written materials such as newspapers, movie posters and billboards, books, and visual advertisements. Using authentic texts from different parts of the world is a way to expose learners to the different written standards of English and learners can

see materials with both typical American spellings and typical British/Australian spellings. When introducing written materials teachers can start out by having students make educated guesses as to where the material was written based on spelling and other contextual information. In contexts such as in Japan where the native language of Japanese is written with a different orthography than English and students have to learn the English writing system, authentic written texts can also be useful in exposing students to different writing fonts or different hand-writing samples. Just as students in many contexts are taught a detached standardized form of spoken language, my students were mainly exposed to standardized writing and both the Japanese English teachers and native English teachers were instructed during training to write on the board as close to the standard Times New Roman font as possible. Again in an attempt to control and simplify language in the classroom, a lack of diversity in writing exposure can lead to more problems outside of the classroom. These are just a handful of activities and sources that teachers can implement into their classrooms so that learners can observe, discuss and practice authentic language use, however with creativity and the willingness to not be limited to classroom textbooks the possibilities are unlimited.

Conclusion

In this paper I have looked at various ways in which there is a disconnect between complex, authentic language practices and what is being taught in the classroom as well as the historical reasons why certain languages and dialects are favored in the classroom over others. I also discussed the shift that should occur in all classrooms so that less favored but equally important linguistic practices of marginalized communities are given the legitimacy they

deserve, and English learners are better prepared to effectively communicate with a diversity of English speakers around the world. I even discussed how there needs to be an acceptance that non-native English are not deficient English teachers and practice with different English speakers is beneficial English practice regardless of whether the teacher is native or not. Although some textbooks that teach English as a global language are being made and used in some classrooms, many schools still favor textbooks that teach a select few standardized varieties of English. However, I discussed there are various ways to overcome the barrier that certain classroom materials create between language that is taught and language that is spoken and bring authentic language into the classroom. English as well as any other language should be taught as a complex means of communication and expression and not a set of rigid grammar and pronunciation rules. The importance of this paper is to make teachers aware of the ways in which many textbooks still maintain linguistic hierarchies and fail to teach students language as it is used across diverse communities. Hopefully with the knowledge from this paper teachers will be able to identify potential limitations in the textbooks and materials that they are given to work with and think of creative ways to overcome those limitations.

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