THE SPREAD OF ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

The current spread of English as a lingua franca can best be described as a process that has involved the colonial powers’ extending the use of the language worldwide for their political and economic interests (Phillipson, 1992); the colonized people's appropriation and utilization of the language in their quest for freedom and independence (Brutt-Griffler, 2002); and the social and economic trends of globalization, especially in their connections to Anglo-American dominance in technology, science, business, academia, and leisure.

At present, English has become a lingua franca of an unprecedented scope. Nonnative speakers of English outnumber native speakers three to one (Crystal, 1997). According to a recent British Council study reported in The Guardian ("Forked Tongues," 2005), 2 billion people are expected to start learning English within the next 10 years, and 3 billion will be able to speak it. Currently, 80% of the users of English, or about 2 billion users, are said to be bilingual (Brutt-Griffler, 2002, p. 12), thereby creating the impetus for "English-knowing bilingualism" (Jenkins, 2003, p. 141) to become the recognized world norm in lieu of the traditional paradigm of monolingualism. Furthermore, bilinguals for whom English is not their first language do not passively absorb the language but mould it to fit with their indigenous realities. As such, local varieties of English have emerged, each manifesting various characteristics of localization that ostensibly may resemble attempts at de-Anglicizing or de-Americanizing the language. In addition to the more familiar varieties found in Outer Circle countries (Kachru, 2001), such as what is referred to as Hinglish (in India) and Taglish (in the Philippines), one observes the rise of Japlish, Spanglish, and Franglais among others in Expanding Circle countries, not to mention the significant emergence of Euro-English within the European Union. With its multitude of users and its increasing varieties, English has become the world's primary vehicle for storing and transmitting information. In fact, an estimated 75% of the world's mail, 80% of computer data, and 85% of all information is reportedly stored or abstracted in English (Thomas, 1996). Moreover, English is an official language in over 50 countries, and out of the roughly 12,500 international organizations, about 85% use it as an official language. For example, English is the official language of the European Central Bank even though the bank is in Frankfurt, Germany, and no predominantly English-speaking country is a member of the European Monetary Union.

ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA AND ITS WORLDWIDE IMPLICATIONS

As a lingua franca, English is believed to open doors that local languages do not. In Mongolia, for example, where there is a major drive to make English the primary foreign language in schools, the language is seen as “hip and universal” and the prime minister states that aside from its communicative functions English is actually “a way of opening windows on the wider world” (Brooke, 2005, n.p.). In Germany, where English is regarded among other things as the language

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1 Phillipson (2005) reports that 127 varieties of English currently exist, with 42 in Europe.
of science and technology, 98% of all physicists claim it as their working language (Van Essen, 2004). Scholars who work in Expanding Circle countries, like Germany, are said to be under increasing pressure to publish in English, particularly in what are deemed to be high-status journals such as those listed in the *Science Citation Index* and *Social Sciences Citation Index* (Curry & Lillis, 2004, p. 674). Young people in Europe consider the language “cool,” as they believe it stands for all “great” things in life such as music, TV, mobiles, computers, or the Internet (Extra & Yagmur, 2004, p. 400). In general, even though Europeans want to safeguard their native languages, 70% of them think that English should be spoken by everyone in the European Union, this ratio rising to 77% in Denmark, 75% in Sweden, and 71% in the Netherlands (Anderman & Rogers, 2005, p. 9).

Obviously, English in its present role as the lingua franca of the world is beginning to create an impact on English language teaching programs in terms of both objectives and content. No longer does any prominent educationist in the field give credence to the traditional idea of learning English solely in order to be able to communicate with native speakers of the language. The native speaker-based notion of communicative competence is described as utopian, unrealistic, and constraining (Alptekin, 2002). It is utopian because a lingua franca cannot by definition have native speakers. It is unrealistic because achieving nativelike competence in a language without native speakers would be an anomaly. It is constraining because it circumscribes learner and teacher autonomy by focusing on the parochial confines of native speaker-based authenticity rather than the authenticity of a language of wider communication used chiefly by English-speaking bilinguals in the context of cross-cultural encounters. The new pedagogy takes into consideration the increasing number of bilingual users of English and puts forth successful bilinguals with multicultural insights and knowledge as educational models (Alptekin, 2002; McKay, 2003b).

Another area that has been influenced by the emergence of English as a lingua franca has been instructional content. In general, there is a trend away from the conventional idea of teaching culture as an essential part of teaching the language, which rested on the premise that a language could only be fully understood if it was connected to its culture. Given the lingua franca status of English, there are actually objections to the teaching of Inner Circle cultures to the exclusion of Outer Circle cultures (Wandel, 2002), and there are even demands to omit the teaching of Inner Circle cultures altogether (Van Essen, 2004), including courses dealing with English literature and cultural studies (Edmondson & House, 2003). Others favor the use of relevant international topics and themes (Alptekin, 1993) and, in addition, even topics and themes from the local culture (McKay, 2003a, 2003b). These perceived needs for change all stem from the fundamental irrelevance of Inner Circle contexts, individuals, values, and assumptions in the instruction of a lingua franca. The current pedagogic focus seems to be on developing learners’ communication skills and strategies in cross-cultural settings and on raising their multicultural awareness.

Thus, it is not surprising nowadays to encounter proposals to replace English as a foreign language (EFL) with English as a lingua franca (ELF) on the grounds that whereas the former emphasizes the principal role of English as a means of communication between native and nonnative speakers of English, the latter capitalizes upon its essential role as an international
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As such, as English becomes more global, it is eventually bound to lose its domestic character and will be open to all kinds of innovations, which may be deemed odd or wrong by its native speakers who still adhere to Inner Circle standards of use and usage. Yet, as Widdowson (2003) indicates, no nation can have custody over an international language, for a language is international only to the degree it is not the property of its native speakers (p. 43). Besides, the norms of native speakers of English can be said to make no sense if interlocutors seldom interact with them (McKay, 2002).

In addition, the complacency of native speakers of English in learning other languages challenges the authoritative centrality of the native speaker-based paradigm in pedagogy. Speakers of English as a domestic language are known to be typically monolingual, showing little interest in learning foreign languages. This attitude is clearly reflected in Edwards’ (1995) account of an Arkansas school superintendent who refused a request to have foreign languages taught at the secondary level by saying that if English was good enough for Jesus, it was good enough for everyone (p. 204). On a more academic level, Widdowson (1994) argues that the native-English-speaking world has not much to offer to foreign language pedagogy in that the dominance of its own language does it a disservice. Referring strictly to the British scene, he has the following to say:

The British are not noted for their ready acquisition of any language other than their own. The record of foreign language instruction in their schools has, generally speaking, been one of dismal failure. And yet there is this pervasive assumption that they are naturally expert in the teaching of a foreign language to other people. … But why should the British claim any authority to advise on foreign language teaching, in which they have no credible credentials at all? It seems perverse. And yet authority is claimed. And furthermore, it is conceded. Why? . . . Because there is this persistent confusion, I suggest, between the phenomenon English as a native language, and the subject English as a foreign language, and the invalid assumption that arises from it that experience in the one readily transfers to an expertise in the other (pp. 1.10-1.13).

In the same vein, Brumfit (2002) bemoans the lack of interest shown by the largely monolingual mother-tongue English speech communities in acquiring other languages and concludes that in the absence of serious efforts for bilingualism, “citizens of the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and other largely English-speaking countries” will not be able “to avoid being the monolingual dinosaurs in a multilingual world” (p. 11). Despite such valid arguments for bilingualism, a recent report on the issue, prepared by the Centre for Information on Language Teaching in the United Kingdom and published in The Independent, suggests that Britain is the foreign languages “dunce” of Europe (Garner, 2004). Based on data from 28 European countries,

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2 The term English as an international language (EIL) is sometimes used to refer to the English used only in Inner Circle and Outer Circle countries (Seidlhofer, 2001, p. 153), to the exclusion of English used in Expanding Circle countries, while at other times it is used to describe the English of countries in all three categories. To avoid this ambiguity, I use ELF instead, referring to a language of wider communication used in cross-cultural contexts, irrespective of where those contexts are. Moreover, unlike Jenkins (2005), who focuses on nonnative speaker-nonnative speaker interactions in ELF, I view ELF as including nonnative speaker-nonnative speaker interactions as well as native speaker-nonnative speaker interactions.
the report shows that fewer people in Britain can speak another language than anywhere else on the Continent. The findings, the report claims, are not surprising in view of the steep decline witnessed in British schools in foreign language course enrolments since these courses were officially removed from the compulsory national curriculum for 14- to 16-year-old students. At present, the report adds, two thirds of state schools in Britain no longer offer foreign languages as a compulsory subject.³

FROM MONOLINGUALISM TO BILINGUALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

With English being the lingua franca of this age, its native speakers find little incentive to learn foreign languages, as the evidence presented so far suggests. Thus, we have the paradox of a language going international while its native speakers remain resolutely monolingual and parochial. On the other hand, ELF users are on their way to achieving the recognized world norm of being English-knowing bilinguals. This new status enables them to develop an understanding and appreciation of what it means to communicate in a language other than their own. Yet it is unable to foster a new cultural identity that incorporates perceptual and conceptual elements of both constituent languages in a synthetic way such that it is essentially different from them. The primary reason for this failure lies in the obvious fact that ELF has no proper culture of its own to speak of. As an international medium of communication it belongs to no single cultural context. Given that culture as socially acquired knowledge plays a vital role in cognition, the absence of a cultural context renders irrelevant another perspective on reality developed from the ability to perceive physical distinctions (e.g., cross-cultural interpretations of colors) and to generate conceptual distinctions (e.g., cross-cultural interpretations of tone of voice). Another reason stems from the fact that ELF, as a culturally deracinated language, would be devoid of idioms, puns, connotations, slang, humor, and grammatical subtleties or, for that matter, culture-specific pragmatic norms and values. As such, it would not enable interlocutors to use both languages and their norms and values flexibly and eclectically depending on the sociocultural context and the individual speaker—acts that a bilingual would be expected to perform. A third reason comes from ELF being used basically as a medium of communication rather than a means of identification. Edmondson and House (2003), for example, point out that ELF users, as nonnative speakers from different nationalities, communicate with each other as “individual ELF speakers belonging to … ‘the community of ELF speakers’, who use the language not necessarily as a means of identification but as a means of communication.” Hence, they conclude, ELF “does not provide a cultural identity, though it may, presumably, be used by the individual to establish his or her cultural identity in ELF communication” (pp. 327-328).⁴ In sum, the conventional notion that bilingualism will pave the way to biculturalism and a new cultural identity is not necessarily tenable in the ELF context.

³ These findings stand in sharp contrast to the results of a recent opinion poll taken by Eurobarometer in continental Europe, in which 50% of the participants said they could speak a foreign language, the ratio being close to 100% in Luxembourg and less than 30% in Hungary. The same poll shows that 90% of students at the upper secondary level in 13 European countries learned English regardless of whether it was compulsory or optional (Delmoly, 2005).

⁴ The absence of a cultural identity fosters the spread and use of ELF because interlocutors do not feel that the language threatens their mother tongue-related identity.
ELF users do have, however, the potential to use the language as a conduit for fostering a multicultural identity, surprising as this may sound at first. To begin with, when they communicate among themselves, they are not necessarily familiar with each other’s languages and cultures. Consequently, in order to understand the interlocutor’s message fully and to be reasonably intelligible, they need to develop some degree of cross-cultural versatility, which would involve a gradual accumulation of insights into other cultures’ norms, values, and behavior patterns. This will, out of necessity, develop to avoid the high potential for miscommunication caused by the fluidity of emerging linguistic criteria as well as the paucity of pragmatic guidelines of ELF, not to mention the English proficiency level of the interlocutors involved. In due course, as users contribute to ELF through their own regional or national identity, the communication pressure to expand the scope of cultural versatility for interlocutors will inevitably increase, eventually giving rise to the formation of a multicultural identity. Furthermore, in any given second language communication, interlocutors are known to add to the cultural content of the exchange and, simultaneously, gain cultural insights from the interaction. As such, each cross-cultural encounter is bound to enrich the interlocutor’s cultural versatility by way of intercultural awareness and pave the way to multiculturalism.

This type of multiculturalism is also the natural outcome of the wide use of ELF in politics, business, academia, leisure, science, technology, and, in particular, communication technologies, as mentioned previously. Getting to know about a multitude of cultures through ELF is nowadays a reality for English-knowing bilinguals, a reality they would be deprived of if they simply remained monolingual or became bilingual in a local (as opposed to international) language. In either case, they would still have very limited access to the kind of data available to those who know English.

The new educational focus on raising multicultural awareness and ELF-oriented communication skills and strategies among learners, combined with the selection of successful English-knowing bilinguals as pedagogic models and the emphasis given to the international and local cultural contexts, will likely foster the development of English-knowing bilinguals with multicultural traits. These people will, it is hoped, use the kind of English that is separated from its original culture and ideology, yet one that manifests the distinct linguistic and conceptual flavors of a variety of cultures. Dual-language educational programs in those Expanding Circle countries that promote bilingualism through ELF and the native language from an early age are the natural habitats of developing bilingual individuals with multicultural identities.

Critics of ELF are concerned about the loss of one’s cultural identity as a result of what they refer to as McDonaldization (Phillipson, 2003, p. 12), that is, the permeation of North American (or British) norms and values in indigenous life-styles, which eventually pave the way to cultural homogenization or, worse, capitulation to the forces of North American (or British) imperialism. What this highly political stance overlooks is the fact that a language can be used separately from its original culture and its dominant ideology, without compromising one’s own cultural and ideological perspective (Llurda, 2004, p. 321). In fact, a survey conducted by Eurobarometer (2001) among residents of the European Union shows that Europeans, in general, believe in adopting English as an international means of communication without adopting the customs and traditions specific to the United States, the United Kingdom, and other major English-speaking countries.
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