Globalization and English Language Pedagogy

Nichole M. Oberheu

Colorado State University
Abstract

English is largely considered the language of globalization and international development; as such, the English language has been widely disseminated across the globe. The adoption of English by diverse peoples has evolved multiple varieties, called World Englishes. While these adaptations of English should constitute a paradigm shift in English language pedagogy, educational policies continue to favor native speaker norms. These phenomena are explored, and the notion of the postmethod is discussed as a possible path to decolonizing English language pedagogy.

*Keywords*: development, English as a *lingua franca*, globalization, postmethod, World Englishes
Globalization and English Language Pedagogy

Situated within a historical framework of imperialism, and a current framework of globalization, TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) professionals cannot ignore the ideological load of teaching English as a second or foreign language. As stated by Edge, “[w]e know there is no easy answer, but a decision to deny the political implications of what we do for a living no longer seems credible” (2006, p. xiv).

In less than a year, I will likely procure employment abroad as an English language teacher. I am aware that many view TESOL as an arm of American hegemony. However, I am also aware of the discursive power of English in the global arena. Non-English speakers want to learn English for a multitude of reasons; perhaps the most predominant being the economic and educational opportunities it provides them. Indeed, the English language is not only perceived as beneficial to individuals but to the society in which they reside (Appleby, Copley, Sithirajvongsa, & Pennycook, 2002). International agencies—such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund—and national governments alike advocate for English language education for development purposes (Appleby et al., 2002). Because English is seen as the language of globalization, it is also seen as the language of and for development; as such, the English language has proliferated across the world.

Through this global dissemination, English has been adapted for local purposes by local peoples. Language, like culture, is dynamic. For the past several decades, linguists have been mapping the phenomena of global Englishes. That is, the use of English on an international scale is so diverse and varied that it is now no longer considered a single language. Non-native English speakers are beginning to adopt the language as their own,
shedding the dominance of the native speaker. This should have profound implications on the pedagogy of English; however, English language education and language policy continue to be disseminated from and informed by native-speaking populations that uphold the dominance of native speaker norms.

The following paper will outline the mechanisms that propelled English into a global language, the effects of the widespread dissemination of English (i.e. the development of World Englishes and English as a *lingua franca*), and the misguided maintenance of English language pedagogy by native speakers and its effect on national language policies throughout the world. I will conclude with a discussion of the postmethod as a possible path to decolonizing English pedagogy. While the concept of the postmethod remains on the periphery of TESOL, it provides a thoughtful framework for teachers who wish to empower learners and their communities.

**English and Globalization**

Globalization is a complex and contentious topic that has been worked into the discourse of many different academic fields. As Jameson (1998, p. xi) explains, globalization is “the modern or postmodern version of the proverbial elephant, described by its blind observers in so many diverse ways.” Its subject matter is so disparate that there is no one single agreed upon theoretical framework to explain it in its entirety; subsequently, it is difficult, at best, to accurately and completely provide a holistic definition of the phenomenon. However, for the purposes of this particular paper, a basic definition is necessary. The United Nations Report on Human Development (2004) states that the current phase of globalization is defined in three ways. The first is shrinking
space: People’s lives (their jobs, social relations, health, etc.) are affected not only by their local environment, but also by events and decisions that are made thousands of miles away. The second is shrinking time: Change, particularly technological change and market change, occurs quickly and has reaching effects. The final phase is disappearing borders: National borders are becoming more and more permeable not only for economic transactions, but also for ideological, cultural, and social exchanges. Currently, globalization is seen as both a driving force for, and a result of, increased global interconnectiveness.

The shrinking space and time, and the dissolution of rigid national borders is fundamentally changing human social interaction. Technology, in particular, has facilitated the acceleration of this change. As Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 4) states, “in a development that is unprecedented in human history, the internet has become a unique source that instantly connects millions of individuals with other individuals…making interaction at a distance and in real time possible. And in large measure, the language of global communication is English.” The increased interconnection of individuals necessitates a shared symbolic code; this code is English.

English did not arise as the language of globalization by any aesthetic or pragmatic virtue; it is not a phonological resonance or morpho-syntactic utility that spread English to the far ends of the world. The English language was, and continues to be, primarily propagated through economic, political, and military power. The development of English as the language of globalization began with what Robertson (2003) deemed the second wave of globalization. Robertson describes the process of globalization in three stages. The first stage began about 500 years ago with the
expansion of Spanish and Portuguese empires to the New World in search for a shorter sea route to the East. According to Robertson (2003), the first wave established the foundation for an interconnected global trade and finance system that primarily benefited the European empires.

The second wave was an extension of the first (Robertson, 2003). It began shortly after 1800 with the rise of industrial revolution in Europe. The British Empire extended across the globe, sowing the seeds of the industrial revolution and the English language. British colonialism was treated as a civilizing mission; according to Robertson (2003, p. 141), “[s]chools, churches and mass circulation newspapers and magazines spread the word far and wide. So too music, theatre, literature, the visual arts, even postcards. Imperialism became part of the popular culture.” It was part and parcel of the British colonial imperative to assimilate their colonial subjects into the British cultural paradigm; an important part of this imperative was the proliferation of the English language (Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

The third wave of globalization, as described by Roberts (2003), began in the post-World War Two era with the invention of the rhetoric of international development. The divide between American capitalism and Soviet communism created a panicked drive to secure political and economic control in the former colonies. The mission, for the West, was modernization and development. As Roberts (2003, p. 182) states, “the ‘civilizing’ zeal of former imperialism was far from dead. In Britain and the United States a new mantra emerged. Western values, Western institutions, Western capital, and Western technology. Only by Westernizing could former colonies hope to achieve a modern future.” It was during this era that the world’s three foremost financial
institutions arose: The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). These organizations assisted in the creation of a global money exchange system in which “most nations’ currency was pegged to the value of the U.S. dollar” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 35). These financial intuitions enabled an American free-market style economy to rein supreme and made English the language of economic development and modernization (Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007).

As can be seen, the spread of English has well-developed historical roots in colonialism and has continued into the current era with the rise of American-style free-market economy and the technology boom. The status of English as the language of and for development has created a lucrative industry for TESOL. English education is seen as an essential element for developing economic viability in the international community; subsequently, incorporating English education into national language policies is a popular action by many states around the world (Appleby et al., 2002). While many may view this process as linguistic homogenization, there is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates the dynamic use of English across cultures and indicates the increased hybridization and nativization of the English language.

**World Englishes**

The global spread of English, described above, has initiated the development of different linguistic varieties of the language that are embedded into particular geographical and cultural contexts. As Nihalani (2010, p. 25) describes, “[t]he new-English speakers are not just passively absorbing the language; they are *shaping* it”
(italics in the original). Language is dynamic. People are not just passive receptacles when learning a new language; they shape the language to fit their own needs. The language is adapted to fit the episteme of the local culture and society.

Kachru (1986) described the manifestations of English through the terms inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle. The inner circle encompasses the original population of English speakers (i.e. from England) as well as the “neo-local diaspora Englishes who have relocated from an English speaking homeland or nation” (Saxena & Omoniyi, 2008, p. 4). That is, British nationals conquered and displaced the aboriginal inhabitants of these areas and repopulated them with an English speaking population. These are speakers from nations whose de facto language is English (such as, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand). The Inner Circle is comprised primarily of what linguists would call native speakers of English (NS). The outer circle and expanding circle speakers of English are generally referred to as non-native speakers of English (NNS).

The outer circle is primarily comprised of former British and American colonies (Kachru, 1986). English was established in these countries as the language of the colonial government. It was incorporated into public institutions and educational systems. English remained important even after decolonization due to its institutionalization. It is often found in the country’s language policies and is taught in tandem with local languages (Kachru, 1986). An example of an outer circle variety is Singlish, or the non-standard variety of English predominately used in the nation of Singapore.
Singapore has a history of English use spanning more than 145 years (Deterding, 2007). Like other former colonies, English was introduced to the population of Singapore via schools established by Britain. The use of English expanded and evolved in Singapore, adapting to the various native languages of the region (such as Malay, Hokkien, and Cantonese) (Deterding, 2007). Singlish differs from Standard English phonologically, syntactically, and lexically. Singlish has a unique pattern of intonation. For example, it is syllable timed rather than stress timed, thus giving the language a staccato feel (Deterding, 2007). The consonant and vowel systems of Singlish also differ from Standard English; for example, Singlish vowels tend to be tenser (Deterding, 2007). Syntactically, Singlish is a subject-prominent language (similar to Cantonese). In addition, the copular *be* is often omitted as well as the definite and indefinite article (Deterding, 2007). The lexicon of Singlish incorporates a variety of Malay, Hokkien, Cantonese, and Mandarin lexemes and code-switching between languages is quite common (Deterding, 2007). Like most outer circle varieties, Singlish is considered a low-status, colloquial language in Singapore and its use is discouraged in favor of Standard English (Deterding, 2007).

Expanding circle varieties also tend to be frowned upon in their national discourses (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Expanding circle varieties emerged from the current phase of globalization through American technological and economic expansion (Kachru, 1986). In these contexts, English has been incorporated into the national language policies due to international pressure (e.g. economic competition). While the expanding circle does not have the same deep historical roots of English roots of the outer circle, English in the expanding circle is also undergoing mutation (Kirkpatrick, 2007). These
mutations are reminiscent of a *lingua franca* in that English is typically used as a contact code for communication between people with different first languages (Dewey & Jenkins, 2010).

As defined by Dewey and Jenkins (2010, p. 72), a *lingua franca* is “a contact language used among people who come from different first language groups and for this reason, it has normally been someone’s second or subsequent language.” Linguistic research in English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) is still in its infancy; however, in recent decades there has been an increasing level of interest in understanding and documenting ELF. Recent corpus studies have illuminated particular linguistic systems in English that appear to be predisposed to change. These changes tend to go in certain directions that make for some generalizable characteristics of ELF (Dewey & Jenkins, 2010). The lexiogrammar of ELF tends to exploit redundancy, enhance subject prominence, increase explicitness, and reinforce preposition. One of the most predominate universal features of ELF is the use of the zero article in situations in which a NS would require the definite article. This phenomenon is widespread throughout most NNS communities (Dewey & Jenkins, 2010). The function of these features is to enhance the efficiency of communication.

Historically, a *lingua franca* had no native speakers. They were contact languages that contained features from multiple languages (Dewey & Jenkins, 2010). ELF is different in this respect, as English has a large population of native speakers; subsequently control over the standards of English is constantly contested. The amount of individuals who learn English as an additional language has surmounted the number of individuals who learn it as a first language (Kirkpatrick, 2007). According to Dewey and
Jenkins (2010, p. 72), this phenomenon coupled with the increased research into ELF has “the potential to bring about a paradigm shift in the way the English of its NNS is perceived.” That is, with the growing numbers of NNS, the dominance of NS norms and the utility of native dialects in the international community are being challenged. As Warschauer (2002, p. 107) states, “in the 21st century there will be a growing basis for learners around the world to view English as their own language of additional communication rather than as a foreign language controlled by the ‘Other.’” English speakers in the outer and expanding circles are increasingly taking ownership of the language.

**Language Policy and Pedagogy**

That NNS are adopting English as their own language should seemingly induce a shift in the policies and methods that dictate language pedagogy; however this is not yet the case. The primary pedagogical methods that inform language and educational policy around the world continue to be developed by native English speaking scholars in the inner circle. While these methods are marketed to be universally applicable, there are some individuals in the field of applied linguistics who disagree. As Canagarajah (2002, p. 135) describes, “[m]ethods are cultural and ideological constructs with politico-economic consequences. Methods embody social relations, forms of thinking and strategies of learning that are preferred by the circles that construct them.” Methods are not value-free instruments validated by empirical research for purely practical teaching functions; they are created by individuals who come from particular social, economic, and cultural backgrounds and subsequently reflect a particular value system.
The dominant driving force of English language pedagogy is communicative language teaching (CLT). CLT was initiated in the 1970s by Brumfit and Johnson; it spurred a revolutionary change in the way that language, particularly English, was taught. The approach of CLT diverged from a primary focus of the formal aspects of a language and moved toward the social functions of language use (Leung, 2005). While this approach has greatly benefitted a formerly dry and teacher-centered pedagogy it has also meant the increased inclusion of NS culture in the classroom and the teaching of NS pragmatics; indeed, the idealization of NS norms “has proved to be a remarkably resilient concept, and is still part of the bedrock of transnationalized English language teaching” (Leung, 2005, p. 128). CLT textbooks are a hallmark of such features. Wallace (2002, p. 109) describes the standard global CLT textbook offers what might be described of as “the three Ds…dinner parties, dieting and dating, and [reflect] the preoccupations of the textbook writers rather than their likely readers” (italics in the original).

The prevalence of British and American culture in TESOL materials is widespread and highly inappropriate in many TESOL contexts (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). In a study of English language learning in eastern Botswana, Magogwe (2009) describes the inherent cultural biases contained in English language learning textbooks in Khoe primary schools. Life in these textbooks is illustrated by a typical urban landscape and maintains foreign ideas of traditional food and familial relationships. Magogwe (2009, p. 7) argues, “none of these illustrations represents the cultural identity of the Khoe.” In addition the activities provided in the book, such as writing thank you letters, in no way reflect the cultural practices of the Khoe; rather, the activities are representative of Western cultural practices (Magogwe, 2009). Kumaravadivelu (2003) explains that the
pervasiveness of Anglo culture in English language learning textbooks contributes to the continuance of cultural teaching in TESOL. He argues that, “[t]he overall object of culture teaching…is to help learners develop the ability to use the target language in appropriate ways for the specific purpose of culturally empathizing, if not culturally assimilating, with native speakers of English” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 543). The inclusion of Anglo culture in TESOL textbooks maintains the dominance of the inner circle by inextricably linking Anglo culture with the English language, subsequently diminishing the ability of NNS to take ownership of the language.

The centrality of the NS in this type of pedagogical approach is also imparted by the notion that English should be the dominant language in the classroom. The ideology maintains that speaking solely in the target language better facilitates acquisition. Use of other languages in the classroom is to be discouraged or banned completely (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). This type of practice allows for the preference for monolingual NS in educational contexts throughout the world and devalues NNS English teachers (Kachru, 1996). The monolingual tenet is perpetuated by second language acquisition (SLA) theories emanating from America and Britain, politically both monolingual societies (Kachru, 1996). SLA theories and CLT that place preference on NS norms are highly influential in informing language policies and English language teaching in the international community; these types of policies not only marginalize native languages within a given country, but also nativized forms of English (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

An example of such a policy can be seen in the context of Singapore. Singapore, as described previously, is part of the outer circle. A former colony of Britain, Singapore adapted the English language to fit the particular linguistic and cultural makeup of the
area; the result was an amalgamation of English, Malay, Cantonese, and Hokkien called Singlish. Singlish is juxtaposed by Standard Singaporean English, a formal version of English that is similar to Standard British English (Chew, 2007). In 2000, the Singaporean government implemented the Speak Good English Movement to promote the use of Standard Singaporean English and marginalize the use of Singlish. Part of this campaign was the elimination of Singlish in Singaporean schools; teachers were to be reprimanded for using or allowing the use of Singlish in their classrooms (Chew, 2007). The official argument for the removal of Singlish in classroom discourse is that it impedes the acquisition of the standard variety (Chew, 2007).

However, subsequent case studies in Singaporean classrooms depict a different picture. Singlish continues to be used in the classroom by both students and teachers (Rubdy, 2007; Farrell & Kun, 2007). Indeed, teachers and students find that the use of Singlish in classroom discourse does not impede the acquisition of Standard Singaporean English; rather it facilitates acquisition of the standard variety (Rubdy, 2007). Singaporean teachers argue that Singlish lowers affect (anxiety) in the classrooms, builds teacher-student rapport, expedites understanding (particularly for beginning level learners), and imbues register awareness (Rubdy, 2007; Farrell & Kun, 2007). Rubdy (2007) notes that a productive technique for using Singlish in the classroom involves contrastive analysis; that is, the linguistic comparison of Singlish and Standard Singaporean English in lessons. The practice of contrastive analysis would include using Singlish to:

- highlight important points or salient vocabulary;
- to draw students’ attention to what they already know;
- to make students aware of new rules and items in the
standard variety; to help students…make comparisons; and, to draw students’
attention to the appropriate contexts of use for each variety. (Rubdy, 2007, p. 321)

In particular, the development of contextual use and register awareness are important for
the appropriation of English by non-native speakers; it allows learners to separate the
target language from the so-called target culture and adapt the language for their own
purposes (Canagarajah, 2002).

The top-down approach implemented by the Singaporean government is fairly
standard throughout the outer and expanding circles (Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007),
particularly in developing countries that largely depend on Western educational research
to inform their decisions for English language education (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Rather
than acknowledging the contextual nature of teaching and learning, these policies
constitute a “cookie cutter approach” that perpetuates the cult of the native speaker
(Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 544; Warschauer, 2000). In order to move away from such
top-down approaches and the dominance of teaching methodologies from the Inner
Circle, a new methodology must be adopted in TESOL.

Postmethod

In 1994, B. Kumaravadivelu introduced the concept of the postmethod into
TESOL discourse. Described as an alternative to the traditional pedagogical method, the
postmethod was developed to account for the diverse teaching and learning situations
inherent in TESOL practice and to decentralize and decolonize English language
pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). The postmethod consists of three parameters:
Particularity, practicality, and possibility. The parameter of particularity acknowledges
the contextual nature of teaching and learning and rejects the utility of a one-size-fits-all approach to English pedagogy. This notion places a greater responsibility on teachers to develop an intimate knowledge about the community and culture they practice in. It requires the incorporation of local ideologies and languages in the classroom (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). The parameter of practicality addresses the unbalanced relationship between theory and practice. According to Kumaravadivelu (2003, p. 544) there is an “unfortunate and unproductive division of labor” in applied linguistics. That is, the theorist dictates the classroom practices of the teacher. This dichotomy marginalizes the ability of the teacher to create their own personal theories of classroom practice based on their own unique experience and contexts. In postmethod pedagogy, theory is developed from the field rather than the armchair.

The concept of possibility is more difficult define. It is derived from Paulo Freire’s notion of critical pedagogy and critical literacy. Freire’s seminal work, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, advocates for fostering student ability to critically reflect on the political, social, economic, and historical factors that affect their lives. Freire (1970) argues that this practice will lead to student empowerment. Kumaravadivelu (2003, p. 544) states that the ability to critically reflect on their lived situations will help students “appropriate the English language and use it in their own terms according to their own values and visions.” By placing pedagogical focus on the localized experience of learners rather than the culture of a distant Other (the NS), critical pedagogy allows learners to strip the English language of its neocolonial baggage.

Included into the notion of possibility in postmethod is the need to teach a certain variety of English. While theoretically interesting, the plurality of Englishes, and the
postmodern notions of cultural hybridity and fluidic identities tend to depreciate real life disparities. As Canagarajah (2002, p. 135) describes:

That identities are fluid doesn’t mean that societies and nations don’t fix certain negative identities on minority students and discriminate against them accordingly. That cultures are mixed doesn’t mean that certain values and practices aren’t defined as the cultural capital required for success in mainstream institutions, including schools. That languages are hybrid doesn’t mean that certain codes don’t function as the linguistic capital (with a clear hierarchy of valued registers, dialects, and discourses) to obtain social and educational rewards.

In order to compete in globalized world in which the predominate language of business, international trade, and education is English, individuals need to acquire the type of English that has the most linguistic capital, or economic value associated with it. The type of English that holds the most linguistic capital is academic English (Canagarajah, 2003).

Proficiency in academic English is the key to obtaining a university degree from the West, an extremely valuable asset to procuring gainful employment anywhere in the world (Block & Cameron, 2002). In addition to individual development, tertiary education is positively correlated to a better economy and is therefore an important aspect of national development. In a study conducted for the World Bank on the role of tertiary education on economic growth and poverty reduction in Africa, Bloom, Canning and Chan (2006) found that the attainment of a higher education not only assists individuals,
but also nations as a whole. The authors argue, “in a knowledge economy, tertiary education can help economies gain ground on more technologically advanced societies, as graduates are likely to be more aware of and better able to use new technologies” (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006, p. iii). Higher education is linked to better health, higher tax revenue, increased savings and investment, a lower birth rate, and even a stronger government (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006). In order for a nation to compete in a world economy that is highly dependent on technological and scientific knowledge, proficiency in academic English is paramount.

Even if an individual or population obtains a tertiary education in their native language, access to new technological and scientific information are restricted by proficiency in academic English. Academic English is the medium in which the majority of the world’s knowledge is constructed (Canagarajah, 2002a). Eighty-percent of the world’s scientific journals are written in English; even in highly specialized fields pertaining to developing eco-regions (such as the tropics), 75% of academic journals are published in English only (Canagarajah, 2002a). Subsequently, access to this information, quintessential to economic and educational development, is dependent on a highly sophisticated knowledge of English.

Beyond the consumption of knowledge, the ability to contribute to global knowledge is precedent on an individual’s ability to write in academic English. As argued by Canagarajah (2002a, p. 6), “for discursive and material reasons, Third World scholars experience exclusion from academic publishing and communication; therefore the knowledge of Third World communities is marginalized or appropriated by the West, while the knowledge of Western communities is legitimized and reproduced.” To
challenge this power structure, to elevate and promote non-Western epistemes, NNSs must have access to an education that supplies them with the linguistic capital to contribute in global academic discourse.

Conclusions

Teaching English has political implications; English is intertwined with neoliberalism and neocolonialism. English pedagogy is predominantly controlled by native speaking SLA researchers in the U.S.A. and U.K.; this pedagogy informs language and educational policies concerning English across the globe and serves to continue the elevated status of the NS. In order to begin to reverse these power structures, Kumaravadivelu (2003) suggests the pedagogical adoption of the postmethod. Postmethod pedagogy is predicated on contextualizing English language learning, elevating the status of the teacher as theorist, and empowering learners. The parameter of possibility in postmethod pedagogy necessitates the teaching of academic English; through academic English and access to tertiary education, individuals within developing nations have access to a global knowledge base. Additionally, by appropriating the language with the most linguistic capital, NNSs will be provided with a powerful means to communicate in the global arena.

While postmethod pedagogy remains on the periphery of TESOL, it provides a valuable framework for teachers. English is one of the fastest growing language in the world; it is the language of globalization and development, of economic and academic opportunity. As teachers we have a responsibility to our students: to give them the
resources they need to succeed. As English language teachers this resource is academic English.
References


