

Can We Really Teach English As a Global Language?

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How different is English as a global language from English we teach every day? What kind of changes do we have to make, so that we can guide our students to learning an appropriate English as a global language? Today, teachers of English are confronted with impending questions such as follows: (1) what type of English should we teach our students in terms of English as a global language? (2) Is English as a global language good enough to be accepted as “good English”? My presentation will include those questions among others, and I hope it will stir up discussions on the topic of English as a global language.

I. Has English as a global language (EGL) established?

Professor Guy Cook, University of Reading, UK, gave a notion of English as a global language (EGL) in his presentation on “Teaching and Learning English as a Global Language” at the plenary symposium of the Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET) held in Sapporo, Hokkaido, in September 2001. The following is from its proceedings.

This contribution argues that the continuing growth of English in size and distribution, with a concomitant qualitative leap in the expertise and distinctiveness of many of its non-native speakers, means that its teaching and learning must now be approached quite differently from that of other languages.

- (1) Narrow criteria of conformity to native models must be abandoned, and replaced with new ones of expertise and effectiveness in international communication.
- (2) Standards of evaluation are needed which cut across the traditional native/non-native division.
- (3) Many millions of people use English on a daily basis as an additional

language, and many of them use it more effectively, articulately, and expressively than many native speakers.

(4) In addition, their bilingualism, or multilingualism, gives them a communicative edge over monolingual English speakers.

(5) These people should no longer be excluded as 'foreign' or second 'language' speakers of English, but rather held up as the best models for the contemporary learner. (The parenthesized numbers added by the writer)

Professor Cook mentions that the item (1) narrow criteria of conformity to native models must be abandoned. Then, what kind of criteria should we have as broad criteria? Are broad criteria good enough to make EGL excellent?

The item (2) refers to standards of evaluation, i.e., the standard to evaluate overall English language throughout the world. What kind of standard should we establish then? Can we really make standards to cut across native/non-native division? Professor Cook says the people who use English on a daily basis as an additional language use it more effectively, articulately, and expressively than many native speakers.

Professor Cook may be right, when he said the item (3). Indeed, some people can communicate with people in English very effectively, articulately, and expressively. However, native speakers will say, "Your English is good, but your English is only a tool for communication, but our English is more than a tool, i.e., it's our heart. Our English is innate. Sorry but you can't feel it." Probably you can say the same for your Korean or Japanese. Your Korean is something more than a communication tool.

To say the item (4), Professor Cook mentions that bilingual or multilingual English speakers are challenging native-speaking English speakers. It is certainly true that the number of speakers of English as a second or foreign language supersedes that of native speakers of English. As far as the number of speakers, native speakers of English is cornered in a wrong place.

Finally with the item (5), Professor Cook gives speakers of English as a second or foreign language as the best models for the contemporary learner. His view is generous indeed, but do you really believe that your English has acquired the same status that Professor Cook explained? Actually Professor Cook was talking about English as a second or foreign language, but is it really applicable to EGL, as he used for his presentation title, "Teaching and Learning English as a Global Language"? If we use broad criteria of conformity to native models, as Professor

Cook suggested, what kind of model should we established for EGL? This is a very interesting but difficult question to answer, because we don't know anything about EGL yet.

We are teaching English as a foreign language, but can we really teach EGL? What is the difference between English as a second or foreign language and EGL? Furthermore, what is the difference between English as an international language and EGL? It may be a good idea if we start questioning what EGL is.

II. English as an international language, Standard English, and EGL

David Graddol quotes Gus Hooke's comments (1) (made in 1996 when he was Director of Tertiary Studies at the Australian Academy, Sydney) in his *The future of English?* (1997:28) as follows :

“For those who don't like change, best either to be born before 1800 or hang on to about 2050. For those who love change, the ideal time to be alive is 1995 to 2010.”

This is of course one of the native speakers view. This means that we are right in the critical stage of its development, where English is changing into a real global language, and the state of English is in a sense very unstable. The point is that EGL has not been established. Everybody talks about EGL, but actually nobody knows about it. Actually everybody is guessing its form to appear in the future by trying to gather up all the features and images foreseeable to make the ideal form of English for the world.

Graddol discusses the gravity shift of the world population of English (1997:10), where the population of L1 speakers of English and that of L2 are coming closer to the same number, i.e., 375 million. (Note. 1: In 1985 Kachru indicated the world population of English by his three concentric circles of English, where the Inner circle (L1) had 320-380 million, the Outer circle (L2) 150-300, and the Expanding circle (L3) 100-1000.) This suggests that the global language will be definitely English (2), as David Crystal says in *his English as a Global Language*.

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As Professor Crystal clearly said EGL is a global lingua franca, and it **will** become in

reality, although it takes a little more time to be developed into a genuine one. It hasn't been established yet.

What about the situation of English as an international language (EIL)? The term EIL first of all reminds me of P. Trudgill and J. Hannah's book (3). This model is actually very close to the model which Professor Randolph Quirk suggested in his excellent grammar book published in 1985. He must have referred to the Trudgill and Hannah book published three years before. (4) Their standard is the national standard of English, and the models are British English, American English, Scots English, Irish English, Canadian English, south African English, Australian English, New Zealand English, and finally adds Caribbean English to them. The point is that this national standard, namely, the International English is not EGL at all. EGL should be a kind of international English, but the international English is not EGL, since the term "International English" has been established as Trudgill referred to.

Professor Kachru's idea is not really the same as EGL. As you all know professor Kachru created his concentric circles of L1, L2, and L3 speakers of English. He clearly made distinction among all the speakers of English into three different categories. He claims the independence of L2 and L3 from L1 (5). He says as follows:

One can easily demonstrate that the linguistic and contextual reasons for declaring independence from Mother English (British English) are identical for American English, Australian English and Canadian English, and also for the well-established non-native varieties such as Indian English or Singaporean English.

And then, he adds,

Generalizations from an American or British standpoint are dangerous, and to a large degree irrelevant. The uses have to be perceived from the consumer's vantage point, not that of the native speaker's linguistically secure perch.

The concept Professor Kachru holds in mind is not a human-made, artificial global language but a real living language. He claims the independence of L2 and L3 from L1, since those different varieties have exactly the same value for communication.

Professor Yano modified Kachru's concentric model, and called the Inner circle

“generic English as a native language,” the Outer circle “functional English as a native language” and the Expanding circle “English as a foreign language.” He strongly claims the communicative function of the language is vital, and called the English as a second language “functional native speakers (6).”

I should add another model which modified the Kachru model. It is a model structured by Dr. Ho Wa Kam, a Singaporean linguist. He drew up the Concentric Circles of English Users in the Asia-Pacific Region by putting Australia and New Zealand in the Inner Circle. Both South Korea and Japan are still in the Expanding Circle (7).

Getting back to the topic of EGL, those model samples do not seem to work out well in the model of EGL. EGL is some kind of language which does not belong to any specific languages. Is it really possible for such a language to exist as a global language? One important point we have to notice is that all the popular languages are living languages.

All the artificial languages failed to exist. This can be said to artificial languages including Esperanto, Quirk’s Nuclear English, and others.

III EGL and School Education

Here we can raise such questions as follows:

- (1) What does “English as a global language” mean to us?
- (2) How different is “English as a global language” from English we have been teaching to our students every day?
- (3) What kind of English is “good English” for us?

Is EGL good enough for school education? This is one of the vital questions we teachers of English have to ask for ourselves.

What does “global” mean? The new edition of *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines as follows: “covering or affecting the whole world.” *The Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* explains “taking account of or including (almost) all possible considerations. Example: The report takes a global view of the company’s problems.” *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* says exactly the same as the above dictionary. The Random House College Dictionary, one of the American dictionaries says “Global means ‘comprehensive’.” The word “comprehensive” means “of large scope, or inclusive.” All these ideas show the word “global” clearly.

Here I tried to show the comprehensible meaning of “global” by indicating words which stand opposite to “global” to widen our interpretation. You might call them

antonyms.

How should we interpret the word “Global” then?

The term GLOBAL is one of the most popular and prevailing terms the Japanese use recently in many diverse respects. It seems that it is interpreted differently depending on the cultures people have developed. In the process of finding synonyms of the adjective “global” I thought we might be able to focus on the hidden meaning of the word and find out the ideas, concepts, or feeling that the Japanese develop with it.

In fact, the concept the Japanese will have with the word is not very appealing. This doesn't mean that the meaning of “global” is bad. The opposite terms to the synonyms of “global” reveals better impressions to the Japanese mind. It is worth noting these sets of words.

- (1) Global vs. Local
- (2) International vs. National/Identified
- (3) Open vs. Closed
- (4) External/International vs. Internal/Intranational
- (5) General/Universal vs. Specific/Professional/Academic
- (6) Holistic vs. Analytic
- (7) Common vs. Special
- (8) Practical vs. Sophisticated/Artistic
- (9) (Uneducated) vs. Educated

Let me try to interpret “global” through its synonyms.

(1) GLOBAL vs. LOCAL

The term GLOBAL is used in contrast with LOCAL, where a geographical image is clearly expressed. As professor Yano of Waseda University indicated in his “World Englishes in 2000 and beyond”, Professor Okushima, Former President of Waseda University, coined the word “glocal” to mean “having openness and internationality and at the same time having local self-identity as well.” This is actually a very unique concept that we urge general public including our students to grasp, because we think GLOBALISM is not good enough to make our world perfect as well as complete. We also need LOCALISM. We need both expansion and integration.

(2) INTERNATIONAL vs. NATIONAL/IDENTIFIED

The word “International” can be a synonym for “Global”. This set of terms, or International and National, was used by Professor Randolph Quirk, when he classified the English language of the world by his “National Standards” (8). This is also a set of terminology that Professor David Crystal used to explain “Standard English”, and it leads to another similar set of terms “internationalism vs. identity”. It goes as follows:

“Internationalism implies intelligibility. In short, internationalism demands an agreed standard – in grammar, vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and conventions of use”. Whereas, identity implies individuality. In short, in the context of English, identity demands linguistic distinctiveness – in grammar, vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, or conventions of language use.”

This is what Professor Crystal said about internationalism (9).

(3) OPEN vs. CLOSED

The term OPEN can be synonymous with the term GLOBAL. The term “internationalism” certainly implied factual openness of English, while “identity” implies pinning English down somewhere specific. Professor Suzuki Takao used to argue the closedness of Japanese in contrast with the openness of English in his book (10).

“I feel somewhere in my mind that The Japanese might intrinsically appreciate the artistic sense of closedness in their culture rather than openness.

That’s probably one of the reasons why it is hard for us to be open and frank in public. It may be hard for them to be GLOBAL, too.

(4) EXTERNAL/*INTERNATIONAL* vs. INTERNAL/*INTRANATIONAL*

The term EXTERNAL or INTERNATIONAL can be a synonym for GLOBAL. Professor Kachru used the set of terms “external” and “internal” when he mentioned the statement resulted at the Honolulu conference in 1981 as follows (11):

“This distinction recognizes that, while the teaching of English should reflect in all cases the sociocultural contexts and the educational policies of the countries concerned, there is a need to distinguish between (a) those countries (e.g. Japan) whose requirements focus upon international comprehensibility and (b) those countries (e.g. India) which in addition must take account of English as it is used for their own intranational purposes.”

(5) GENERAL/UNIVERSAL vs. SPECIFIC/PROFESSIONAL/ACADEMIC

The term GENERAL or UNIVERSAL can be a synonym for GLOBAL in contrast with specificity. This reminds us of the set: General Purpose English(GPE) and English for Specific Purposes(ESP). This set gives us a similar idea about wideness and narrowness of a concept. Tony Dudley-Evans explains GPE as follows (12):

“GEP has grown considerably and the British Council and the American Information Services both run very successful institutes in many countries of the world,” while ESP “aims to teach specific language and skills related to different activities in academic or business life.”

It seems to me the Japanese world of management appreciates anything specific and concrete highly, and disdain anything general as is interpreted as something rough, because anything rough can be done very easily by anybody. You have to be specific. They might not appreciate something GLOBAL either.

(6) HOLISTIC vs. ANALYTIC

The term HOLISTIC can be a synonym for GLOBAL, when it is used by Professor Rebecca Oxford in the methodology of teaching, and the theory of strategies for teachers and learners in particular. She explained as follows (13):

“Global style prefers big ideas, fewer details, and does not need accuracy, can guess or predict easily. Analytic style likes detailed information, precision, accuracy, and does not like to guess unless fairly sure of being correct.”

This pair of words may lead to a set of concepts such as abstract vs. concrete, emic vs. etic, or langue vs. parole, etc.

So far the concept of the terminology GLOBAL has been examined from several different points of view with reference to the ideas given by some noted researchers, and it seems the scholars and researchers I cited have clear ideas about GLOBAL and nothing emotional has existed there. However, people in different cultures might take the meaning of it slight differently.

(7) COMMON vs. SPECIAL

The Term COMMON can be synonymous with GLOBAL. When cultural value is added to the terminology, however, a certain negative or unfavorable connotation happens to be included in it, and consequently it influences the people’s manner toward using foreign languages. As English is a very common language that everybody knows in Japan, the Japanese think that it should be spoken and written very well, especially when it is used in public. For them the English language that

they use in public should not be a common English. It is never just a tool. Instead, it has to be a special and selected English. It has to be an excellent English with great fluency. In other words, you have to be brave enough to use English when you speak English (as I am doing now), because everybody is assessing my English. Your English has to be artistically excellent when it is displayed in public. Native speakers' English is supposed to be perfect as a good model, and you have to be like them if you want to be artistically really good. Believe it or not, speaking English in public is observed as an artistic performance like piano or violin performances, artistic masterpieces at art exhibitions, elegant actions in tea ceremonies and flower arrangements, etc. The learners of English believe they have to acquire excellent skills to make their performance of English esthetically exquisite.

This concept, right or wrong, leads to the idea that general, holistic, and common English will never provide learners with skills good enough to make their English impressive. In other words, in their assessment, a "global" English will never accomplish their aim to learn a "good" English. Therefore, they think they have to study some special, educated, sophisticated English so that they can learn English good enough to be praised. It is kind of pity, but I feel rather strongly that, as far as 'learning of English' is concerned, the general public in our country does not assess GLOBALISM very highly.

I believe this explains the contents of the sets (8) PRACTICAL vs. SOPHISTICATED/ARTISTIC and (9) UNEDUCATED vs. EDUCATED, where to some learners GLOBAL English is a kind of English that very common people learn, and it is not good enough for educated people. It has to be a SOPHISTICATED and ARTISTIC English.

(8) PRACTICAL vs. SOPHISTICATED/ARTISTIC

A global language should be practical and used throughout the world, whereas a sophisticated language has to be learned carefully so that sophistication should be expressed appropriately in the user's speech. A sophisticated language can be a practical language too, but it has to be learned in the conscious manner so that it works at least differently from a truly practical one. An artistic language can be somewhat like a sophisticated language.

(9) UNEDUCATED vs. EDUCATED

Furthermore, they think that English has to be an EDUCATED English, since

PRACTICAL English is not sophisticated or artistic/esthetic enough. English has to be learned well enough to show one's education. And this is the kind of English our teachers were trying to teach me. You had to build sentences grammatically using a good size of vocabulary. You had to memorize a lot of examples from British and American literary works and be able to read them without accent. This kind of English was the English I had to learn. People call this type of English very good and educated English.

But, wait! Isn't this a kind of English that Professor Kachru and followers of World Englishes? Isn't this a kind of English that is affected by the idea of linguistic imperialism? Does this mean that we should learn BAD English if we learn EGL?

This is in a sense true. This is the reason why I wanted to suggest that a few sets of contrastive terminologies might give quite different impressions depending on the cultures you live in. We should realize that the term GLOBAL can mean something inferior. This happens because any term can be woven into various kinds of connotation which mistakenly bothers people with wrong concepts. The term GLOBAL is also destined to be in trouble with connotative interpretations.

As everybody agrees, the term GLOBAL has actually a good and favorable meaning. This is apparently a matter of interpretation. The crucial issue to be pointed out here is that the concept GLOBAL can be interpreted differently depending on the people with different cultures. We have to be careful that some people do not like the outgoing concepts such as being international, open, external, holistic, common, and even practical. They might interpret it as uneducated, too. Remember that many people like the proverb which goes "Silence is golden," where GLOBAL openness suggests stupidity.

It seems to me this extended concept of the term GLOBAL is challenging us. This is the conflict between pragmatism/practicism and esthetics. This is one of the very difficult problems that we have to solve, because the cultural esthetics is THE concept that our people keep deep in their hearts. Consequently, the challenge we have to meet is to find a good EGL that is international, open, external, holistic, common, and practical for all of our people, and teach it.

Here, we have to come back to the original question. Can we really teach EGL? Yes, we can definitely teach EGL, and we have to be confident about it.

(Concluding remarks)

We have to draw up a clear image about what practical/EGL is. And at the same time, we have to tell our people that the practical/FGL is GOOD and SOPHISTICATED enough to communicate with people overseas. And the EGL

should actually be General-Purpose English, and it should be taught by the time when people finish their senior high schools. We have to seek for the idea so that we can establish that kind of social/ educational system in this country by cooperating with all the teachers of English in Japan, getting strongly supported by the government, business world, and all the people in general. That kind of English should be our Standard/EGL. And then, university and college students should learn their SPECIFIC, PROFESSIONAL, or ACADEMIC Purposes of English, so that they can discuss all their matters with people overseas for their common interests.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest the following four points that make EGL good English to be taught at school. (1) The EGL has to be international. It has to be intelligible and used by all the people throughout the world. (2) The EGL has to be used by educated people throughout the world. (3) Accent is no problem unless it hinders understanding. Accent is the symbol of identity to be understood worldwide. (4) The EGL must not be strongly identified Pidgin. This kind of English never works as an English as a global Language.

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