

# Promoting English as a Lingua Franca: ELF Awareness in a University World Englishes Course

リンガフランカとしての英語へ：  
World Englishes Courseを通してELFを学ぶ

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## ABSTRACT

*Substantial evidence has shown that Japanese English learners continue to have high admiration for the Inner Circle English varieties (Kubota, 2004; Fukuda, 2010). Many university students demonstrate this belief in the quest for a 'high price tag' goal, set as a yardstick, in learning English: to sound like First Language (L1) English speakers. According to Cook (2002; cited in Kirkpatrick, 2013), only a few can achieve it. The failure to attain such an objective has misled many English learners to disliking English, not only as a subject but also as a tool for communication with people from the same or different cultures. Also, the very high regard for L1 English varieties has resulted in the marginalization of many English users and experts from Outer, and even more so, the Expanding Circle; it has stereotyped their use of English as substandard. Studies revealed that through the concept of "World Englishes" (WEs), English learners could lessen their negative feeling toward their own English (Horie & Long, 2007). This report will discuss how a university course focusing on World Englishes (WEs) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), has led EFL learners to re-evaluate their views of English.*

**KEYWORDS:** World Englishes, Higher Education, English as a Lingua Franca, Language Awareness

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Why bring the issues of WEs and ELF into the Japanese classroom? The most recent English education reform programs for globalization by MEXT (2014) have obligated schools to respond to the call for globalization. As a consequence, this has brought about changes in the English programs at many schools. The fact is that

when globalization is mentioned, English is associated with it (Jenkins, 2014b), and as such, educators are destined to play a vital role in helping the students understand some of the linguistic implications of globalization. Suzuki (2015) mentioned that teachers have to be “global educators” to respond to the current changes in English status. Teachers are the “key factors” to raise awareness and to educate English learners on how WEs and ELF are shaping the future of English itself and influencing its users. Considering that more English users are coming from the Outer and Expanding Circles than the Inner Circle, ELF will undoubtedly dominate the global communication. Likewise, with the different cultural backgrounds of its users, English, like other languages, will be reshaped by English speakers to fit their situations. Therefore, we can agree with Graddol (1997) that it is the users outside the Inner Circle countries that will eventually determine the future of English.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As globalization and English are interconnected, so are WEs and ELF. Kirkpatrick, (2013, p. 5) defines ‘World Englishes’—“those indigenous, nativized varieties [of English] that have developed around the world and that reflect the cultural and pragmatic norms of their speakers.” Many linguistics scholars consider Kachru’s Model (1992, p. 356) with inner, outer and expanding circles as the most “influential illustrations” to describe the spread of World Englishes. Kachru’s model identifies English as a Native Language (ENL) speakers in the Inner Circle, the ESL speakers or ‘New’ Englishes in the Outer Circle, and the EFL speakers in the Expanding Circle (Jenkins, 2009). The ‘New’ Englishes include the countries of India, Philippines, Nigeria, Singapore, Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Zambia (Kachru, 1992). However, the role of English has been increasing in the Expanding Circle, and ‘New’ Englishes are developing, resulting in the new nativized varieties, i.e., in the case of China, Chinese-English (Kirkpatrick, 2013).

The births of ‘New’ Englishes have significantly influenced the rise of ELF. Seidlhofer (2011, p. 7) defines ELF as “any use of English among speakers of different first language for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option.” Prominent ELF proponent, Jenkins, (2014a, p. 40) advocates that “ELF is the primary lingua franca of globalization.” And “the globalization of English has highlighted the extensive role of ELF in intercultural communications” (Wang, 2013; in Jenkins, 2014b, p. 230).

Crystal (2003, p. 22) pointed out that for ELF users to be successful, there is “the need for mutual intelligibility and identity.” Identity according to Joseph (2004, p. 224) ‘is at the heart of what language is about, how it operates, why and how it came into existence and evolved as it did, how it is learned, and it is used, everyday, by every user, every time it is used.’ In Japan, the pursuit of [English] language is a means to express one’s identity (Seargeant, 2009, p. 131), and pronouncing like a native is associated with high status (Horie & Long, 2012). With the global spread

of English language, the identities of English users are becoming more complex as they make a choice to use their own local variety or shift to follow the ENL norms. How English speakers view their identity and how they regard themselves when communicating with others is important in international communication (Jenkins, 2007).

Kirkpatrick (2010, p. 80) stated that “a lingua franca needs to be intelligible across linguistic and cultural boundaries.” Due to the distinct phonological features of English varieties spoken in ELF situations, intelligibility should be addressed to avoid miscommunications (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Smith (1992: see also Smith & Nelson, 1985 in Kachru & Nelson, 2006, p. 67) analyzed intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability. Smith and Rafiqzad (1979, in Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 80) defines intelligibility as the “ability to recognize words and utterances; comprehensibility is the ability to understand the meaning of utterances; and interpretability is an ability to understand the pragmatic meaning of an utterance”. In their study of intelligibility, Smith and Rafiqzad (1979, cited in both Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 80-81 and Kachru & Nelson 2006, p. 70-71) found that “the native speaker was always the least intelligible speakers [sic]”. Jenkins, (2007, p. 237-238) also echoed that a NS is not the most internationally intelligible.

In another investigation on intelligibility it was reported in the studies on the conversations of Singaporean English speakers (Kirkpatrick & Saunders, 2005 in Kirkpatrick 2010, p. 81) and Hong Kong English speakers (Kirkpatrick, Deterding & Wong, 2008, in Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 81) with a native speaker, that the Singaporean and Hong Kongers were comprehensible and interpretable. Thus, generally intelligible. In Japan, Matsuura, Chiba and Fujieda (1999, in Kachru & Nelson, 2006, p. 72-73) investigated the intelligibility and comprehensibility of American and Irish English speakers. The results revealed that “there is a likelihood of mismatch between what speakers think they are understanding, their ‘perceived comprehensibility’ and their actual measurable intelligibility and comprehensibility.” Factors such as “clarity, intonations, familiarity and exposure” can assist “achieve successful communication.” The study also urged the Japanese institutions to hire non-Japanese teachers from places other than North America to expose students to more varieties of accents.

As the English language continues to play a part in globalization, it has become the language of others so that whoever speaks it, owns it. Widdowson (2003, p. 35) remarked that English is “seeded”, and so as Crystal (2003, p.172) points out, its owners who adapt it “add to it, modify it, play with it, and create in it.” Considering the innovations of English, educational institutions should put into practice the consciousness of WEs and ELF concepts in the learning environment, so that students will understand the transformations of English, its history and movement. Thus, learners will be enlightened of their perceptions of English and their own English as well. Students should be informed that aiming for the native-like model “is both unattainable and inappropriate” (Kirkpatrick,

2013, p. 189). At present, it is no longer practical to be confined to ENL norms, as ELF users would creatively exploit the English language to make use of it in their own situations (Seidlhofer, 2011). Hence, by not exposing the English learners to the reality that there exist many varieties of English, they will continue to uphold the L1 varieties as the only point of reference.

In Japan, there are at least a few institutions that enthusiastically promote the practices of WEs and ELF. A couple of examples include The Department of World Englishes at Chukyo University (Yoshikawa, 2005 in Kirkpatrick, 2013), and the Center for English as a Lingua Franca of Tamagawa University in 2013 (CELJ Journal, 2015). Many institutions are also supporting WEs and ELF in their respective teaching environment. However, the schools mentioned have made the significant moves to step out from the traditional ELT practices of not advocating the Inner Circle English varieties only, but rather recognizing the experience and expertise of the teachers no matter what their nationalities are.

### 3. BACKGROUND AND METHODS

The subject “World Englishes” was introduced in an elective course at a university in Tokyo with the adoption of the course textbook “World Englishes—A Resource Book for Students, Second Edition” by Jennifer Jenkins (2009). The course was taught once a week for ninety minutes in the spring semester of 2015 to a class of eighteen university students: sixteen Japanese, a Korean, and a Chinese.

During the course, students’ responses on the advanced tasks in the textbook were gathered through group discussions, narrative inquiries, and in-class interviews. One alternative for gathering data in classroom research is a narrative inquiry. In this study, there was an overlapping use of “narrative analysis” and “analysis of narratives.” In the narrative analysis, the students told their stories. Meanwhile, in the analysis of narratives, students’ written reports were used as data and were analyzed (Polkinghorne 1995; in Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014).

In class discussions, students shared their learning experiences and discussed their arguments and tasks. Information relevant to the issues being studied was collected (narrative analysis). Students’ written tasks were used for the analysis of narratives. Questions were raised to the class in order to follow up on students’ responses.

Issues: The following questions were selected for this report.

1. What are the students’ perceptions of English before and after taking up the course?
2. How do students view intelligibility and identity?
3. What do students say about English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)?
4. Does the knowledge of the subject, ‘World Englishes,’ influence the students’ views of learning English?

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Perceptions of English before and after taking the course

A summary of my general understanding of students' perceptions of English before the course: British and American varieties are more highly favored than other L1 varieties. These types are also seen as prestigious among other Inner Circle varieties. English is viewed positively as strong, powerful, influential, useful, and perfect—an international language, the world's standard language—and it has the highest authority in the world. Simultaneously, students found it a difficult language and even believed that there is only a single variety. Moreover, students recognize the importance of English as an essential language for society. It is a tool for communication and an instrument by which one can enjoy life (reading books, watching movies, traveling, using the Internet-SNS) and being able to use it is a skill that is necessary for finding a job in the future.

A summary of my general understanding of students' perceptions of English after the course: After taking up the course, students view English as a dynamic, a changing, an unfixed, a complex, and a diverse language. Due to its global status, it can be freely spoken by anyone. Students pointed out that it is also a “troublemaker,” resulting in too many mother tongues becoming endangered. The many varieties are perceived as widely varying in status, such as ESL, EFL, EIL, ELF, make it hierarchic. Students have recognized the existence of indigenous and “New Englishes” such as Singlish and Singapore English, Chinglish and Chinese-English, Taglish and Filipino English, and Indian English, among others. Students have discovered the answers to their unanswered questions. One student reported, “Now I found the unknown reasons why English is strange and challenging.” Another student envisioned the possibilities that countries will have closer relationships due to one language (English). Most students admitted that it is less important to communicate in English with Native English Speakers (NES) only, and more important to communicate with people worldwide. Furthermore, students became aware that English is not the only language of the future. Despite all the changes and additions to students' views, it remains that students uphold British and American varieties among other varieties.

A summary of my general understanding of students' proposed action plan: Students have proposed that it would be better to learn another language along with English (e.g., Chinese or Spanish). They agreed that they should not fix their goals to communicate using only the Inner Circle varieties, but should also communicate in English with Outer and Expanding Circle speakers; they should not be afraid to communicate in English with Inner Circle speakers; they should develop their confidence to speak English in their own L1 accent by communicating in English with fellow Japanese individuals. They approved the respect of foreign cultures and languages to avoid misunderstandings and acknowledge the importance of learning the educated or standard English to be intelligible to both non-native speakers

(NNS) and native speakers (NS) of English.

#### 4.2 Views on Intelligibility and Identity

The students discussed and responded to the suggested task from the textbook.

Have you ever given thought to retaining your L1 identity in English? Is it important to you to retain your L1 identity in English? Are you more concerned with being intelligible to NS or NNS of English, or do you not distinguish between the two groups of listeners? Do you believe it is appropriate to retain your L1 accent in your English or that you should attempt to sound like a native speaker? Do you believe it is possible to retain your L1 accent in English and still be intelligible to NS/NNS? (Prodromou, 1997, as cited in Jenkins, 2009, p. 43)

The results showed that 75% of the students have given thought to retaining their L1 identity in English, while 25% said they had not. There were 62.5% who claimed that it is not important to retain one's identity in English, in contrast with 37.5% who said it is important. There were 12.5% of the students who were mainly concerned with being intelligible to NS, 50% with NNS, and 37.5% who do not try to distinguish between the two groups of listeners. There were 12.5% that believed that it was appropriate to retain one's L1 accent, and 87.5% agreed that they should attempt to sound 'native-like.' Lastly, 75% of the class agreed that it is possible to retain an L1 accent in English and still be intelligible to NS and NNS while 12.5% replied that it is not feasible, and 12.5% answered that they do not know.

The results reveal that 75% of the students have given thought to whether or not to retain their L1 identity. However, it is not important for 62.5% of them. That is why 87.5% of them attempt to sound 'native-like'. The students have also seen the importance of intelligibility, in communicating with fellow NNS, as the speakers have different L1 backgrounds.

#### 4.3 Views on ELF

Question: If ELF does become accepted and widespread in intercultural communication, do you predict any problems for NS of English? (Jenkins 2009, p. 150). The students' responded that NES will have difficulty in understanding ELF users; received pronunciation (RP) English and culture will slowly disappear; NES identity will fade, and grammar and pronunciation will be confusing. Students held the view that NES should recognize that English is diverse and therefore should accommodate ELF users.

The result shows that students acknowledged the importance of accommodation strategies to become intelligible English speakers in an international communication setting. Students' observations support previous research findings that NES being



the least intelligible in an international communication setting will have difficulty in understanding ELF users, and therefore, have to assess their identity in ELF setting.

#### 4.4 Views on 'World Englishes.'

Question: Does your knowledge of the subject of World Englishes change your views about learning English? Does it change your preference of which model to adopt or adapt? It was found that sixteen students agreed that gaining knowledge of WEs has increased their confidence in the use of an L1 accent. One student, Mayu (pseudonym), iterated that "I am not going to aim for 'native-like.' I want to have confidence in my own English." At least two students, Ai and Waka, (pseudonyms) did not change their views. Ai said, "I have prior knowledge of English, its history, and distribution...I know it is not a completed language...I want to research more." Waka pointed out that her brother worked in a particular country and that he would come back on his trips and tell them about communication problems in English in that country. Therefore, she had decided to go to America or Britain to learn English further.

It appeared that students keep their preferences for British and American varieties. They argued that "English is a subject in Japan. Therefore, it is practical to aim for the educated English." One student, in particular, mentioned that "I recognize other varieties, but I have to be aware of correct pronunciation and grammar." During the discussion, it was revealed that students' prior contacts with British and American English teachers in elementary schools, cram schools (Juku), high schools, family trips, and study/travel abroad programs have also contributed to their decisions. Similarly, students who were taught by local teachers in earlier years preferred to learn only British and American varieties.

### 5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

One result of research into World Englishes is that students may now be more aware of how English is used in the world. The students' lack of knowledge of how English has phenomenally spread has caused them to believe that the English language is limited to the Inner Circle varieties only. Thus, the course has resulted in students' deliberately reevaluating their experiences of learning the English language. On the other hand, despite the fact that students claimed the WEs subject has brought more awareness of ELF, they still note the practical benefits of knowing standard English and becoming intelligible to all speakers of English when preparing for their future.

As mentioned earlier, educators have vital roles to play in raising awareness of the ideologies of WEs and ELF. Hence, they should respond adequately to the changing global status of English. Although many institutions are still adhering to NES with their hiring policy, some schools are responding to the global linguistic environments by employing teachers from the Outer and Expanding Circles. However, as what Kirkpatrick (2013) mentioned, it is through the efforts of local

educators, that the concepts of WEs and ELF can thrive because [only] the locals can legitimize their own variety or model. Also, the hiring of local teachers can increase students' confidence and self-esteem as they see their teachers as role models. Taking into account that most universities conduct study-abroad programs, students should have opportunities to engage with English speakers from the Outer and Expanding Circle countries to help them to realize that ELF is the global lingua franca.

Even though a change in attitude is not the focus of this investigation, it has surfaced in the study that the awareness brought by the subject WEs has provided an opportunity for the students to reconsider their attitudes toward English learning. However, according to Widdowson (2015), awareness does not guarantee a change in a learner's attitude. Nonetheless, changes in students' attitude toward English will help determine if this awareness has influenced their beliefs. Since this study is limited to the teacher's experience in the classroom for only one semester, further study is recommended to verify the current results. A further investigation into whether a learner's awareness of WEs and ELF leads to a change of attitude in learning English is also recommended.

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