

World Englishes and the Teaching of Writing

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■ English has become the dominant language around the world. This statement hardly requires a justification, but it does warrant some

qualifications. The English language is not a monolith but a catchall category for all its varieties—linguistic and functional—hence the term *World Englishes* (WE). A majority of English language users today have acquired English as an additional language (Graddol, 1997), and they use it as a medium of intranational and international communication, often in tandem with other languages. With the growing understanding of the complexity of English, there has been an increasing interest in considering the pedagogical implications of WE, defined inclusively to encompass not only the linguistic varieties but also the functional varieties of English today. In this brief article, we explore implications of WE for the teaching of writing, especially with an eye toward expanding circle contexts, where English is neither dominant nor institutionalized. We then discuss some principles that may help teachers consider how and to what extent they can incorporate insights from WE research into their own teaching contexts.

Considering the pedagogical implications of WE in general is complex. Although some have argued the need to teach a variety appropriate for the local context (e.g., A. Matsuda, 2006), determining an appropriate target variety in expanding circle contexts is difficult. The use of English among shopkeepers at the market in Singapore is quite different from how Singaporean scientists use English at an international conference in Berlin. The sociolinguistic context of an urban metropolis like Tokyo is unlike the situation in farming communities in Hokkaido, where the number of English users may be small or nonexistent. Predicting when and how students will be using English in the future is also a challenge: Korean managers of auto manufacturing plants in Chennai use English daily to supervise local assembly-line workers, but when they were high school students in Seoul, they might never have imagined that they would be using English at all, especially with users of Indian English. In addition, given the international flow of people and the recognition of ethnic and linguistic diversity in many countries, it is not unusual to find residents of the same country communicating in a local variety of English. Because English in expanding circle contexts includes a wide array of international and intranational uses, the traditional model of setting a single target variety has become problematic, and the suggestion to consider intelligibility (i.e., word or utterance recognition) and comprehensibility (i.e., word or utterance understanding) as appropriate goals for English instruction (Smith, 1992) no longer seems farfetched, especially in teaching spoken English.

If the pedagogical implications of WE are complicated for spoken English, the difficulty is even more pronounced in the context of writing. Although students making an oral presentation in a sociology seminar are not likely to be marked down just because they speak with a “foreign accent” or misuse a few articles and prepositions, some teachers

would lower the student's grade for a writing assignment if it includes features that deviate markedly from the perceived norm. In addition, readers of written texts, especially in asynchronous communication, seem to find it less problematic to comment on what they consider to be errors at any level of language. In language classrooms, corrective feedback on student writing is even expected; students may complain if the teacher does not correct grammar errors, and teachers can and do comment on various linguistic features without disrupting the flow of communication. As a result, legibility (the written equivalent of intelligibility) and comprehensibility are often not considered satisfactory goals in the context of writing instruction, and the traditional focus on formal academic writing makes this expectation seem justifiable.

Further complicating the situation for writing instruction is the historical role of writing in the codification process. From early grammar books and dictionaries to contemporary writing handbooks and academic style manuals, writing has long contributed to attempts to stabilize certain aspects of language (see Howatt, 2004). Even descriptive grammars serve prescriptive functions as soon as they find their way into grammar textbooks and writing handbooks, inadvertently reifying the dominant variety while ignoring less common but effective usage. Although corpus-based descriptions are particularly useful in identifying common features, they can also amplify the homogenizing effect, especially as the size of the corpus grows and as the sample becomes diverse. To avoid this bias, corpus analyses need to be complemented by detailed qualitative investigation of when and how writers deviate from the perceived norm and to what effect.

The impact of the traditional focus on normative features is particularly serious for English, which is one of the most extensively described languages. Although the textbook industry is becoming increasingly aware of issues surrounding WE, the development of specific strategies for addressing language differences is only beginning to happen. The dominance of codified varieties of English is constantly being reified by well-intended teachers and editors who try to help students and authors learn features of standardized written English. (The authors of this article are not immune to this charge.)

Even with the difficulties we have mentioned above, there are a few principles that can guide teachers who wish to help students negotiate the complex push-pull relationship between standardization and diversification. Here are some of them (see P. K. Matsuda, 2002, for more details):

Teach the Dominant Language Forms and Functions

In today's increasingly global world, the pervasive attitude underlying writing instruction, which often appeals to the standardized written

English as if it is a monolithic entity, is far from adequate. Yet, as long as the dominant varieties prevail in public perception and teaching materials, we as language teachers have the obligation to make those discursive resources available to students so students can appropriate them for their own purposes, if they so choose. It is also important to help students understand the privileged status that certain dominant varieties of English (and their users) enjoy, as well as some of the possible consequences of not using those varieties—and to do so without valorizing the privileged varieties. To not make the dominant codes available to students who seek them would be doing disservice to students, leading to their economic and social marginalization.

Teach the Nondominant Language Forms and Functions

Does the principle just mentioned mean teachers are left with no choice but to impose dominant varieties? Not necessarily. While teaching the dominant codes and conventions, teachers can also help students understand that language users naturally deviate from the perceived norm, that some deviations are more marked than others, and that some deviations create important social meaning (P. K. Matsuda, 2001). To overlook alternative uses of English can actually work against the goal of helping students develop an accurate understanding of how the English language works and how it changes over time.

Teach the Boundary Between What Works and What Does Not

Exposing students to nondominant varieties and usage is a good start, but it would not be enough. Teachers also need to help students understand the perceived boundary—a fuzzy and negotiable one—between what works (variations) and what does not (errors) in the particular communicative context. Specifically, teachers might strive to provide examples that meet the conventional expectations, those that diverge from the conventions but are effective in the particular context, and those that deviate in ways that are distracting to the readers to the extent that the overall effectiveness of the text is compromised.

Teach the Principles and Strategies of Discourse Negotiation

Beyond the traditional notion of correctness, there are a number of factors that affect the readers' judgments about the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable variations in a given context. First, the appropriateness of usage is judged according to the readers' perception of the rhetorical situation—purpose, audience, writer positionality and

available discursive resources (i.e., genre). Writers can learn to frame their text to affect the perceived rhetorical situation and even add new words and phrases to the socially available repertoire (P. K. Matsuda, 1997). Second, marked forms that deviate from the conventional usage would be judged based on the reader's perception of the writer's credibility. Writers can build their credibility by, for example, demonstrating the knowledge of the subject or by constructing sound arguments. Third, the perceived intentionality of the variation also plays a role in the reader's decision to accept it as a variation or dismiss it as an error. Intentionality can be established in a number of ways: by using the same marked feature consistently to establish a pattern, by making the intention explicit through the uses of typographical features (e.g., quotation marks, italics) and metadiscourse (e.g., parenthetical notes, endnotes, embedded clauses), and by referring to a precedent (e.g., "Following Suresh Canagarajah's usage, . . .").

Teach the Risks Involved in Using Deviational Features

Finally, it is important to emphasize the issue of power. For second language (L2) writers, negotiating or challenging the dominant discourse is a daunting task partly because of their positionality as students and nonnative English users, among other identity positions that are available to or imposed on them. While encouraging students to understand the complexity of real-life writing—academic or otherwise—teachers also need to realize that students, not teachers, are the ones who often have to face the consequences. For that reason, it is important for teachers not to overly valorize either the dominant discourses or alternative discourses. Furthermore, we as teachers and researchers need to play a greater role in challenging the undue privileging of the dominant discourses that have been institutionalized as the status quo.

The diversity of Englishes owes much to the ongoing contact among diverse users of Englishes with users of other Englishes and languages. Every time L2 writers write in English, they are engaging in a language-contact situation. To prepare students adequately in the era of globalization, we as teachers need to fully embrace the complexity of English and facilitate the development of global literacy.

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