



Pre-service English teachers' attitudes towards English as a lingua franca



Jean E. Curran*, Chiou-lan Chern

Department of English, National Taiwan Normal University, 162 Heping East Road, Section 1, Taipei 106, Taiwan

HIGHLIGHTS

- Students in EFL settings need enhanced language skills to function in today's world.
- Pre-service English teachers in Taiwan surveyed about English as a lingua franca.
- Educational background a factor in how pre-service teachers view the role of English.
- Teacher training programs in EFL settings should address English as a lingua franca.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the attitudes pre-service English teachers—English majors, students minoring in English, graduate students, and interns—have towards English as a lingua franca. Results showed differences concerning the native speaker of English as a role model and the importance of exposure to a variety of Englishes. Interns and English majors expressed higher expectations for attaining native-like proficiency; English minors showed less reliance on a native-speaker model. To help future educators develop greater awareness of the role of English in today's world, teacher preparation programs in settings where English is a foreign language should reflect a global Englishes perspective.

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1. Introduction

In an English as a foreign language environment (EFL), proficiency in English can be the key to better opportunities in both educational and employment settings. In the past, students in many EFL countries in Asia began their study of English in the first year of junior high school and took English as a subject for a total of six years. The incorporation of English into the primary school curriculum in the past decade means that younger students today receive even more exposure to English education as they progress through their schooling.

While many Asian countries place great importance on English education and English language skills in general, it is unclear if the present educational system is preparing students for how English is being used in the 21st century (Graddol, 1997, 2006). Students and employees are likely to find themselves in situations where they

need to work with individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and they will often use English as a lingua franca to take part in these interactions. As students' and employees' requirements for language use evolve, it is thus necessary to reassess whether English language programs are preparing students for the range of communication needed in an increasingly globalized world.

Although students in Taiwan now have at least ten years of English education in school—four in primary school and three each in junior high and senior high—most of the instruction in English classrooms focuses on preparing students to take exams. Consequently, the emphasis is often on vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and answering reading comprehension questions. Despite the fact that students may be exposed to English through online sources or travel experiences, and university students may be using English textbooks in their courses, little emphasis is placed on teaching students how to use English other than to secure better educational opportunities.

Recently, in an effort to promote the use of English in classrooms, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan (MOE) has encouraged English teachers at primary and secondary schools to use English at

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: curran.jean@gmail.com (J.E. Curran), clchern@ntnu.edu.tw (C.-l. Chern).

least 70% of the time in class. In 2016, the MOE specifically stated that one of its key goals was to enhance students' language skills and their international outlook, thereby increasing young people's global mobility (Ministry of Education, 2016). Thus, similar to other countries worldwide, Taiwanese English teachers must face the fact that the needs of their students are changing. It is therefore important to explore whether teachers and teacher trainers are aware of these changes and if they are taking steps to prepare their students to use English for communication and not solely to pass exams.

The purpose of the present study was to learn more about the attitudes pre-service English teachers have towards English as a lingua franca (ELF). Because the group of participants was comprised of four different types—English majors, students minoring in English, graduate students, and interns—this study presented an opportunity to assess whether any differences in perceptions about English as a lingua franca were based on participant background. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What are the perceptions of different groups of pre-service English teachers regarding principles associated with English as a lingua franca?
- (2) Does academic background or current stage in the teacher training program affect participants' perceptions towards concepts associated with English as a lingua franca?

2. Literature review

The need for a language of communication, a lingua franca, for people who do not share the same linguistic background, has existed for thousands of years (Haberland, 2011). However, it is only more recently that English has played a role as a lingua franca. English began its spread around the globe as settlers left Britain for colonies in the Americas in the 17th century, and by the 19th century, Great Britain had established colonies around the world (Graddol, 1997). This period of colonization has resulted in a diverse group of individuals who speak English today. One of the earliest classification systems developed to describe the range of English speakers, and one that is often used in English language teaching, is comprised of three categories—English as a native language (ENL), English as a second language (ESL), and English as a foreign language (EFL) (Kirkpatrick, 2007). In an ENL setting, English is the mother tongue of most individuals who live there. ESL settings are usually former colonies of either the U.K. or the U.S., and English is often an official language. In countries classified as EFL, English is more often a subject studied at school. However, the language is rarely used in daily life. This ENL/ESL/EFL model makes the assumption that there is one variety of English spoken in ENL settings. It also assumes that there is a “standard” form of English that those in ESL and EFL contexts should strive to imitate.

Kachru (1985) offered an alternative to the previous classification system and introduced the concept of three concentric circles—the *inner circle*, the *outer circle*, and the *expanding circle*—to describe how English is used by individuals of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The inner circle is used to represent places where English is the primary language of most of the individuals who live there and includes countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.K. and the U.S. The outer circle refers to places where English has also spread as a result of colonization, but in these cases, English is used by individuals who are bilingual or multilingual. In outer circle contexts, such as India, Nigeria, and Singapore, English is often designated an official language and is used for particular purposes such as in government offices or in the

educational system. It is also in the outer circle that much of the research in World Englishes has taken place (Jenkins, 2006). The remaining circle, or the *expanding circle*, refers to settings where English is a foreign language, and includes countries such as Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. While the citizens of expanding circle countries do not have a connection to English as either a mother tongue or via colonization, English is viewed as important because it allows for international communication in either speaking or writing (Breiteneder, 2009; Quirk, 1985; Seidlhofer, 2004).

The appeal of Kachru's model is that it is a more accurate representation of the state of English in the world today (Kachru, 1990). The model recognizes there are many varieties of English, and one variety is not favored over another (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Moreover, this model accounts for the cultural diversity that has accompanied greater linguistic diversity (Kachru, 1990). As Kachru (1996) has noted in response to a question about why the term World Englishes was used, “the term stresses the WE-ness among the users of English, as opposed to us vs. them (native and non-native)” (p. 135). Kachru's model also better reflects the range of individuals who use English. It is currently thought that those residing in the expanding circle make up the world's largest number of English speakers (Jenkins, 2006). In 2003, Crystal estimated that there were 320–380 million speakers of English in the inner circle, 300 to 500 million in the outer circle, and 500 million to one billion speakers in the expanding circle. Reasons for the increasing number of English speakers, especially in the expanding circle, has to do with population growth and the fact that English is the language of science, technology, politics, the media, education, and international travel (Crystal, 2003). It is these users of English who reside in the expanding circle, where English is a foreign language, that are making a profound impact on how English is evolving today (Seidlhofer, 2005).

The concept of English as a lingua franca wasn't discussed in the literature until the 1980s. It was the seminal publications by Jenkins (2000) and Seidlhofer (2001) in the early part of this century that served as the stimulus for research in this area (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011). As the English used by non-native speakers was recognized as worthy of study, there was interest amongst language researchers in describing the features of these interactions and the strategies non-native speakers employ when using English to communicate (Graddol, 1997). The goal of these studies has been to inform teachers and students of how communication using English as a lingua franca might be different from the way English is taught as a foreign language. Researchers have examined phonology, lexis, grammar, pragmatics, and spoken academic ELF (Jenkins, 2011; Jenkins et al., 2011; Mauranen, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2004) and thus a number of principles characteristic of an ELF perspective towards English teaching and learning have been identified. In an ELF framework, the native speaker is no longer held up as the standard for students to emulate and be measured against, and all varieties of English are considered to have equal value (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2011; Mauranen, 2012). While the traditional model of English as a foreign language views learner language that differs from the native-speaker norm as an error, an ELF orientation sees this as part of the natural process of language learning, and learners are not made to feel that the local variety of English should be avoided (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2011). In addition, code-switching is perceived as a useful technique for the language learner as a way to compensate for new language that is still in the process of being learned (Jenkins et al., 2011). Researchers have also sought to identify which lexical and grammatical features of ELF communication may not be native-like, but do not present difficulties for interlocutors (Seidlhofer, 2004). Repetition, paraphrasing, and an avoidance of idiomatic language have been identified as useful strategies for users of ELF to make

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