

Global Education and Language: Proposing a Universal Variety of English as Medium of Instruction

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Abstract

Global Education begins with raising an awareness of global challenges, creating an in-depth understanding of what the challenges entail with the goal of changing people's thoughts and attitudes, encouraging them to live out their lives to the fullest and play their special parts effectively. To this end, in order to enhance these goals, communication is crucial especially being that it entails making use of an acceptable and intelligible language variety. How can Global Education attain its goals if it does not begin to prescribe and describe for itself, a Global variety of the English language developed just for instructional purpose in the delivery of Global Education? This paper therefore proposes a move towards the prescription and description of a mutually intelligible variety of the English language, to be used just for Global Education. This proposal is born out of our experience during our first collaboration with three other Universities in taking the course 'Global English Varieties'. One of the major challenges that impeded our flow was the variety barrier. This paper will also ascertain the percentage of Covenant University students confronted with this same challenge by the use of questionnaire. A hundred questionnaires was distributed and analyzed.

Introduction

The Maastricht Global Education Declaration (2002) states that Global Education is the education that opens people's eyes and minds to the realities of the globalized world and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all. It is understood to encompass development education, human rights education, education

for sustainability, education for peace and conflict prevention and inter-cultural education - being the global dimension for education for citizenship. Wilk (1998) claims that 'everything today is becoming "global"', as the word is a catchphrase in both business and academia.

A global language is a language used and accepted across the world. Toolan (1997) especially shares this enthusiasm when he uses the term *Global* on its own to refer to the English used worldwide by people of any ethnicity in any kind of international setting. Among the languages of the world, the English language passes for being referred to as the global language. According to Ajani (2007) the global spread of the English language is one of the most far-reaching linguistic phenomena of our time. English is spoken in virtually every country of the world and has varying statuses as is gleamed from Kachru's (1992) concentric circles. It is the language that accommodates features of every other language with the evidence of the existence of several varieties resulting from language contact, variation and change.

Technological advancement has had great impact on global education, giving it a far reaching scope. In order to advance global education goals and understanding, academic collaborations between and among nations have become a key feature in world class education delivery; with English as the language of instruction. Consequently, the English language has acquired a new status for itself as the language of Global education delivery. However, a major challenge with this novel status is the existence of several varieties which poses the question of intelligibility across regions during collaborations. There have been situations where various English students have come together from different places for conferences and forums and find it difficult to understand each other when communicating in English.

This work seeks to propose the need for linguists and global education curriculum planners to develop a global English variety that can be used as a medium of instruction for collaborative learning. It looks at the various factors that need to be put into consideration before arriving at a particular variety.

English as a Global Language

There is no official definition of "global" or "world" language, but it essentially refers to a language that is learned and spoken internationally, and it is characterized by the number of its native and second language speakers, by its geographical distribution, and its use in international organizations and for international interactions (Crystal, 2012). A global language acts as a "lingua franca", a common language that enables people from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities to communicate on a more or less equitable basis.

Why the search for a global language? The world is a global village and it is often argued that the modern "global village" needs a "global language" and that (particularly in a world of modern communications, globalized trade and easy international travel) a single lingua franca has never been more important. As just one example of why a lingua franca is useful, consider that up to one-third of the administrative costs of the United Nations are taken up by translations into the various member languages.

For centuries, there has been a search for a Global language since the diversity of language of man after the Tower of Babel. English, can be said to have put an end to this quest. English is the language of International Diplomacy, Law, Administration, Government, Air Traffic Control, International Travels, Music, Religion, Education, Trade, etc. For more effective communication there has to be mutual understanding; where there is no understanding, communication cannot take place. What English does in a world of cultural diversity is to bring members of different countries, cultures and tribe under one linguistic umbrella and by doing this, globalization is aided.

The influence of any language is a combination of three main things: the number of countries using it as their first language or mother-tongue, the number of countries adopting it as their official language, and the number of countries teaching it as their foreign language of choice in schools. Kachru (1985) captures this assertion in his illustration using the three concentric circles: The Inner Circle comprises the native speakers of English which include America, Britain, Canada, South Africa, Australia, etc. They are the norm providers for the use of English. They use English as first or native language (ENL). The total number of speakers in the inner circle is as high as about 350million, with about 120million outside the United States. The Outer Circle are the norm developers; those in this category use English as second language (ESL), a useful lingua franca between ethnic and language groups. Countries that were colonised by Britain are in this category. They Include Nigeria, Malaysia, Ghana, etc. The total number of speakers in this category is estimated to range from 150-130 million people. The Third circle is the Expanding Circle which comprises countries where English plays no historical or governmental role. It is widely used as a medium of international communication. Those in this circle use English as Foreign Language (EFL). They are norm dependent. Countries in this category try to attain near-native competence in English for the sake of foreign interaction and international diplomacy. This includes countries like China, Russia, Japan, Korea, etc. The total number of speakers in this circle is the most difficult to estimate, especially because English is employed for specific purposes. The estimate from this region ranges from 100million to 1billion people.

The spread of English across the globe has yielded a wider umbrella than Kachru's Expanding Circle; this is the use of English as International Language. According to Widdowson (1997), this spread of English is not the spread of English in its actual form; it is the spread of a virtual language. The spread of English in other words, brings about varieties of the language and so the concern of English as an International Language is to produce "unifying English" by bringing all varieties of English together, creating a common standard among varieties and achieving mutual intelligibility and acceptability. When this is achieved, globalisation is aided and boosted rapidly without any form of language barrier. English is the only language that has served this global purpose. According to Yano (2001), English as International Language is used with specific purposes, for international business negotiations, collaborative researches, academic discussions and not for everyday life nor for social events. From Yano's words, we see globalisation markers like international business, collaborative research and academic discussions. As global communication (Globalisation) expands throughout the world, so does a need for global varieties for specific purposes. A global economic and political structure needs a common tongue (with English as the only language serving the

purpose). Today, we talk of advancement in Technology, Science, Law, Medicine, Business, etc. Meanwhile, the first advancement to be recognised is the advancement in English marked by its spread and growth because without it, there is no globalisation.

One third of international organizations including Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) use English only and this figure rise to almost 90% among Asian international organizations Mastin (2011). The International Olympic Committee, International Monetary Fund and so on, also make use of English for most international interactions.

Over time, the essential factor for the establishment of a global language is that it is spoken by those who wield power. An example is Latin which was the lingua franca of its time, although it was only ever a minority language within the Roman Empire as a whole. It was a language for powerful leaders and administrators and of the Roman military and later of the Roman Catholic Church; this brought about its rise to a global status. Thus, language can be said to have no independent existence of its own, and a particular language only dominates when its speakers dominate and, by extension, fails when the people who speak it fail (Mastin, *ibid*)

“A language becomes an international language for one chief reason: the political power of its people – especially their military power. ...” (Crystal 1997: 7-8)

With America having world power, most countries have to interact with her for economic support, military support and so on and so there is need for the knowledge of English in order for these aids to be made available to them and like Crystal said, English is the language behind the dollar.

English is tagged a global language because it is the language of Information Technology. English is the language of computerization, language of information management and the language used in most web sites. Information Technology has helped to foster international interaction and therefore, the need for a unifying language cannot be over-emphasized. English has also been used for academic exchanges like fellowships, international conferences, international collaborative classes, international seminars and workshops and so on. Although other languages are used in these gatherings, there is always the need for interpreters for general understanding. Also, English is the recommended language for the publication of research papers being the language of global education or medium of instruction. In addition, English is the language of the press or mass media at the international level. Most international media houses make use of English for news broadcasting and publication. Media houses such as the Cable News Network (CNN), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Al-Jazeera, Russia Today, China Central Television (CCTV) and many others across the world. It is no longer debatable that there is indeed a Global Language. The use of English in the world for international, educational and professional purposes has been described differently by various scholars, in order to express diverse concepts and shades of its usage.

Drawing from Erling's (2005) observations on the names of English, scholars refer to the global use of English as;

- English as an International Language (EIL): This is used to describe the restricted use of English as just a tool to access certain occupational or functional domains (Widdowson, 1997), and as a tool which provides users an avenue where they can be culturally, politically and socially neutral (Modiano, 2001).
- English as a Lingua Franca: this is use by Jenkins (2000) and Seidlhofer (2001) to refer to the global use of English, noting that communication in English does not always involve first language speakers thus, English norms should not be based on any particular national linguistic standard but should have its goal on mutual intelligibility.
- Global: This is used by Toolan (1997) to describe the variety that even first language speakers must equally acquire to enable them to communicate on neutral linguistic ground.
- General English: To account for the wide range of users outside its native domain, Ahulu (1997) refers to the use of English in the world as General English.
- Literate English: In the same vain as Ahulu (1997), Wallace (2002) refers to global English usage as Literate English; which is used to embrace a range of settings and to bind diverse varieties in order to reflect the new identity of English in the globe.

Following Erling (2005:42), it is observed that the need by these scholars to rename English emanates from the observation that

1. Second language speakers of English outnumber first language speakers three to one (Graddol, 1997);
2. English is increasingly used to communicate across international boundaries;
3. The term 'English' appears too narrow to account for all the varieties of English that have emerged across the globe (Kachru, 1982);
4. The language is too far reaching in its influence and use to be restricted to only British and American norms;
5. The need to protect local values, cultures and languages in the face of a global language.

However, when discussing the need for Global Education to fulfill its goals, there arises the need to re-examine ways in which communication in English can effectively be utilized for instructional purpose, such that there is mutual intelligibility across virtual classrooms. This is necessary because in the end, it is what is effectively communicated that is actually learnt. Erling (2005) therefore, suggests that ELT professionals around the world should move their focus away from inner circle varieties and approach English as a means of intercultural communication involving speakers from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

A Case Study at Covenant University

From our observation during class collaborations, one of the major impediments to wholesome participation by students was a variety barrier, evident in low comprehension.

In order to identify the challenges more specifically, a questionnaire was designed to identify the dominant problems encountered during collaborative classes. The questionnaire was issued to Nigerian students, thus the challenges identified are peculiar to the Nigerian society.

Tabular Analysis

Table 1 shows a tabular representation of each item as regards to the level of participation, their challenge and their perception towards the idea of the development of a unified variety.

Question 4

<i>Have you been a participant in an International Collaborative learning situation?</i>		
	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	88	88
No	12	12
TOTAL	100	100%

Question 5

<i>From the range of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how would you grade your level of participation?</i>		
	Frequency	Percentage
1	12	12
4	4	4
5	16	16
6	16	16
7	20	20
8	28	28
9	4	4
10	0	0
TOTAL	100	100%

Question 7

<i>With Reference to the language of communication during the class(es), what would you say was your greatest challenge in understanding your international partners?</i>		
	Frequency	Percentage
Accent	32	32
Comprehension	16	16
Lexical Choice	48	48
Others	4	4
TOTAL	100	100%

Question 8

<i>What would be your perception of the use of a unified variety just for the purpose of Collaborative teaching among English speaking countries?</i>		
	Frequency	Percentage
Fine	0	0
Good	8	8
Very Good	52	52
Excellent	24	24
Undecided	16	16
TOTAL	100	100%

Table 1: Sample questions from questionnaire

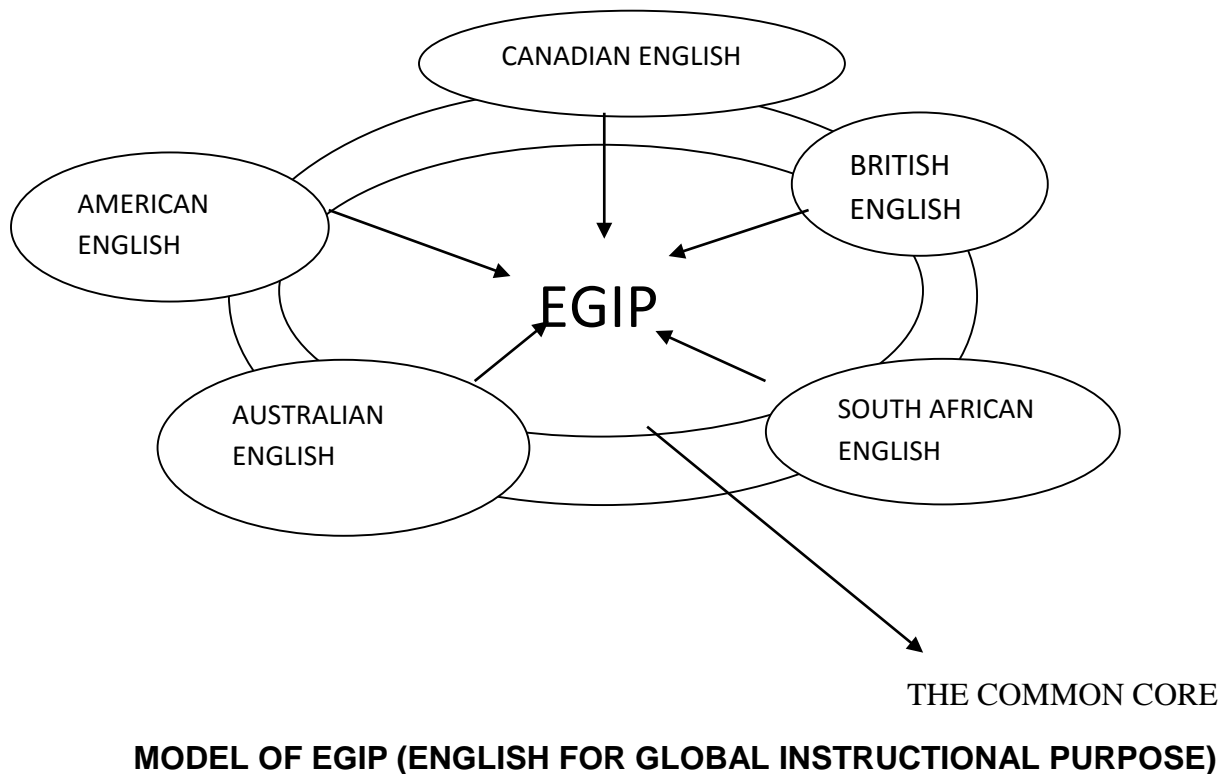
From the case study discussed above, it is deduced that a lot of students (88%) had at one point engaged in a collaborative learning situation and the major challenge these participants faced during the collaborative teaching was the problem of lexical choice. The problem of lexical choice grossed 48%. This shows that the lexical items utilized by partners are not mutually intelligible. For instance, if there is a collaborative project between students from Nigeria and the United States of America and the Nigerians utilize words commonly used in Nigeria, like okada (motor bike), go slow (heavy traffic), agbada (flowing gown), danfo (mini bus), keke Napep (tricycle), iroko (a type of tree), fufu (cassava balls) etc., there would be the problem of understanding as these words are not mutually intelligible to the partner institution. In turn, this problem will also affect Nigerians if Americans utilize words that are peculiar to the American environment.

The next challenge the respondents identified was that of the challenge of understanding accent with 32% of the students citing this as being an issue. The problem of audio and comprehension in these collaborative projects is also grounded in the accent of partners. The different accents for example; British accent, Nigerian accent, American accent, Australian accent, Indian accent etc. which are utilized in collaborative projects interfere with comprehension. Though there is little or no solution for the problem of accent because it is culture-based, it still remains one of the major challenges encountered during these collaborative projects. As regards to the development of a universal variety, the idea was appealing as 24% of the respondents saw the idea as an Excellent one while 52% saw the idea as a very good one. Therefore, this reinforces the essence of this proposal and this idea should be pursued.

Recommendation

It is being recommended that a universal variety of English for instructional purposes during global academic collaborations be developed. This may be achieved by borrowing from major and other varieties of English such as American English, British English, South Africa English, New Zealand English, Canadian English and Australian English, Nigerian English, etc. (Figure 1). The variety that would emerge would be one that has features derived from other varieties of English especially at the lexical level.

Figure 1: The diagram below illustrates this possibility.



Proposing a Distinct Variety as the Medium of Instruction for Global Education

Global Education begins with raising an awareness of the global challenges, creating an in-depth understanding of what the challenges entail, with the goal of changing people's thoughts and attitudes, encouraging them to live out their lives to the fullest and play their special parts effectively. Communication in a mutually intelligible language variety is very important in order to achieve all of these.

To this end, in order to enhance these goals, communication is important and the way in which it is carried out, whether it fosters or discourages co-operation, it is a veritable tool for boosting globalization. Language gives an explicit verbal expression of feelings, ideas and thought, thereby, enhancing communication. For countries to come together on whatever level of interaction there has to be a universal language or variety without which any form of advancement can occur. The list of English varieties from Wikipedia shows that there are over 186 varieties of the English language (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). These varieties, also known as dialects of English are regional and societal based, for this reason, the incorporation of local words and meaning that created the varieties of English, would make the dialects virtually unintelligible to some English speakers in other regions.

Imagine a Nigerian telling a Briton, ‘Hei man, you would have to see me before I do that job for you.’ It is plain English that has been spoken here, but then, it is not void of that cultural uniqueness that makes it stand out. The British here would certainly be confused, because the Nigerian is right before him and is at the same moment asking to be seen. ‘How else does he want to be seen?’ *That’s if he understands that there are other ways of seeing.* ‘What insanity!’ *The Briton might think.* But for the Nigerian, the verb ‘see’ means a whole lot of things depending on the context in which he chooses to use it. In this context, he is expecting a tip, reinforcement, or an incentive, but it must be something in any form, that would encourage him and spur him into action, in doing the job for the Briton, and without it the job would remain undone. Again, in Nigeria, we would be highly embarrassed if people saw our ‘pants’. Yes! Imagine also a Briton telling a Chinese to drive slowly over the ‘sleeping policemen’ on the road. To the Chinese, that would be ridiculous. Observe the conflicts that would arise if we continue to communicate in this way during Global Education interactions.

The variety of English being proposed therefore would be use under the umbrella of ESP – English for Specific Purposes (Figure 2). The goal would be that individuals would use a distinct variety of English for the purpose of interaction during international academic exchange.

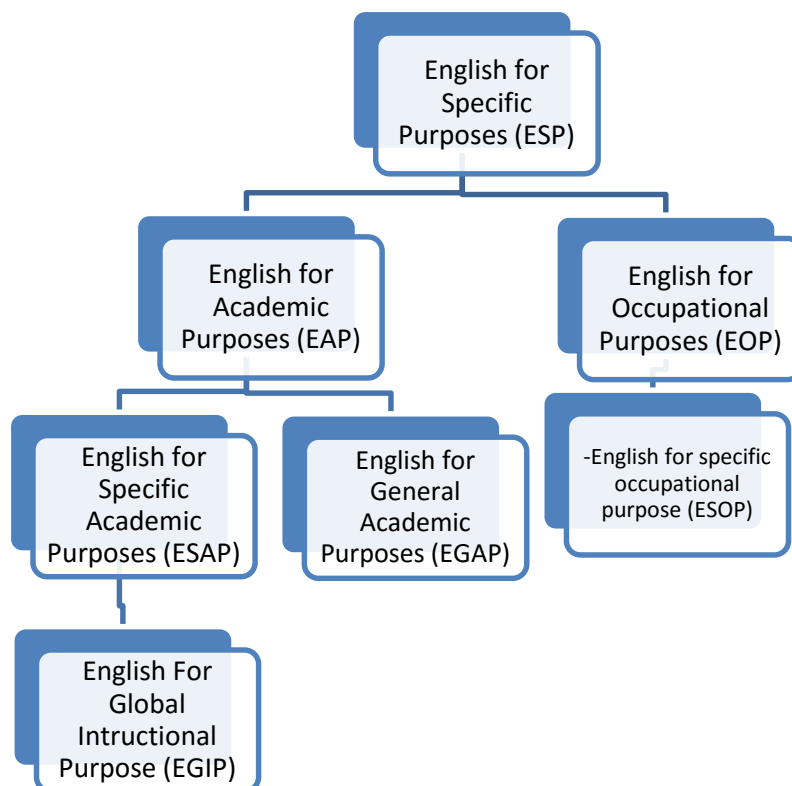


Figure 2: The table above illustrates how EGIP will be generated from ESP

This implies that all varieties of English should be considered by linguists and educationists, who would select common features amongst these varieties. These common features would be used as a premise in the creation of a unique universally intelligible and acceptable variety of English. In other words, contributions would come from all varieties and the new variety would pass through the processes of standardization.

Ultimately, the benefits of having a universal variety of English are not farfetched. Just as the world is in search of a 'one-world currency', having a universal variety of English for Global Education will indeed foster globalization. For instance, it would reduce the challenge of comprehension and the search for translators during international meetings. From our observation during class collaborations, one of the major impediments to wholesome participation by students was a variety barrier as a result of participants making lexical choices, structures and pronunciation that are only familiar to their region without much consideration for partner institutions from entirely different circles.

Conclusion

Developing a universal variety of English for instructional purpose in global education will help to create better understanding and foster mutual intelligibility globally. From the discussion so far, English language can be said to be an appropriate medium of instruction for collaborative learning. But due to several varieties of English (e.g., lexical choice, accent, etc.), students who are involved in these collaborative classes are sometimes misunderstood and do not get the message speakers intend to communicate.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

COVENANT UNIVERSITY, CANAAN LAND, OTA DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES

GLOBAL EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE: Proposing a Universal Variety of English as a Medium of Instruction

Dear Respondent,

I request your honest response to the statements below. Be free and honest about your responses because they will be kept in strict confidence and are only used purely for research purposes. Each item has to do with your perception, participation and the challenges (if any) you experienced during any international collaborative learning. This is a research work carried out as our contribution to the search for a universal variety of English for Global Learning via exchange and collaborations.

Please read the statements and tick what you consider most appropriate.

Thank you.

Joshua, Idaraobong
(For the Research Group)

SECTION ONE:

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Instruction, please, tick right [] in each box as applicable to you.

1. Sex: Male [] Female []
2. Educational Level: 100 level [] 200 level [] 300 level [] 400 level [] 500 level []
3. Discipline: Science [] Art [] Social Sciences []

SECTION TWO

Assessment of participation and Challenge(s) faced during the Collaborative Teaching Class

4. Have you been a participant in International Collaborative learning situation?
Yes [] No []
5. From the range of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how would you grade your level of participation? Please circle as appropriate.
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
6. What was the language of Instruction? Please tick right [] in the box as applicable to you.
English [] French [] Spanish [] Others (please specify)

7. With reference to the language of communication during the class (es), what would you say was your greatest challenge in understanding your international partners?
Accent [] Comprehension [] Lexical choice [] others, please specify

8. What would be your perception of the use of a unified variety just for the purpose of Collaborative teaching among English speaking countries?
Fine [] Good [] Very Good [] Excellent [] Undecided []