

# English Language Teaching Goals: Embracing Global Varieties for Effective Communication

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**Abstract:** In the contemporary era of globalization, English has evolved into a multifaceted tool for intercultural communication, transcending its traditional boundaries. This paper explores the shifting paradigms in English language teaching (ELT), moving away from the pursuit of native-like competence towards a more pragmatic focus on communicative proficiency in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Through an examination of global English varieties and ELT goals, the paper argues for a pedagogical approach that embraces linguistic diversity and prioritizes effective communication over conformity to native norms. Drawing on insights from ELF research and communicative language teaching methodologies, it advocates for empowering learners with the skills to navigate diverse linguistic contexts and engage in meaningful interactions with speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Keywords:** English as a Lingua Franca (ELF); Global Englishes; English language teaching; Intercultural communication

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## 1. Introduction

With the development of globalization, English is widely used than ever before, as users from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds would use English as a tool for intercultural communication. The number of non-native speakers (NNS) of English around the world is way more than native speakers (NS). Hence, it is not surprising to see that the language is diversifying and “English” has become “Englishes”<sup>[1]</sup>. Some people in the Outer Circle or the Expanding Circle probably still think that English belongs to speakers in the Inner Circle and regard to be nativelike as their goal of learning English, ignoring the fact that they are one of the empowered English users. The traditional framework of English language teaching, which incorporates English as a foreign language (EFL), is not practical now because it is not in line with the ongoing process of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)<sup>[2]</sup>. Therefore, the goal of English language teaching should be adjusted according to the trend of ELF.

## 2. English worldwide

Due to the military action and the formation of empires, English was spread around the world; hence, as the language is widely used, it becomes a useful intermediate of communication, which, in other words, English is used as a lingua franca globally <sup>[3]</sup>. This trend of global Englishes is defined as “an inclusive paradigm looking at the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural diversity and fluidity of English use and English users in a globalized world” <sup>[2]</sup>. Also, different varieties of English can be found around the world, such as Indian English, English in Canada, English in Australia, Sri Lankan English, English in Singapore, Slavic English, and so on.

However, English has a different status in different countries. To classify English used around the world in different countries, Kachru came up with the “three circles model” <sup>[3]</sup>. First of all, it is the Inner Circle, in which most people have English as their native language (ENL), for example, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand; second, due to the colonization, the Outer Circles includes countries like India, Singapore, Bangladesh, Kenya, Zambia, and so on, use English as the second language (ESL) in the fields of education, law, politics, and so on; thirdly, the countries, where English is used as the foreign language (EFL), been defined as the Expanding Circle, such as China, Japan, Egypt, Israel, etc., where people use English to communicate with people from other language backgrounds in the fields of business, education, etc. <sup>[1]</sup>. The three circles reflect the different modes of spread, acquisition patterns, and functional allocations of English in various cultural contexts. According to Kachru, the English used in the Inner Circle provide the norm for English use, the English used in the Outer Circle develop this norm and that in the Expanding Circle dependent on that norm, which in other words, while Englishes in the Outer Circle have become institutionalized and are forming their own standards, the Englishes in the Expanding Circle are seen as “performance” varieties, with no official standing and therefore reliant on the rules set by natives from the Inner Circle <sup>[1]</sup>. This may explain why some learners’ goal of learning English in some countries in the Expanding Circle is to become nativelike. It may also indicate the reason why English undergoes a process of nativization, and as a result, the different new, local dialects of English have developed in different countries or regions <sup>[4]</sup>.

The three-circle model has a great impact on sociolinguistic research, yet some limitations can be found. Specifically, this model is built on geographical and historical elements rather than how speakers currently identify with and use English, but in fact, there are a large number of native speakers in the Outer Circle and vice versa, plus, pidgins and creoles do not fit into this model. Besides, there is a grey area among the three circles, which in other words, English may be learnt as the L1 for many individuals in some Outer Circle countries, and some countries, such as Belgium, Denmark, Argentina, are in transition from EFL to ESL status. What’s more, the term “Inner Circle” implies that speakers who come from ENL are central, which may be interpreted as superior <sup>[1]</sup>. Hence, to improve this model and to take account of more recent developments, Modiano modified his centripetal model and came up with his English as an international language (EIL) theory, which the center is EIF, a core of characteristics which the majority of native and competent non-native speakers of English can understand, the second circle includes traits which may become common internationally or may fade into obscurity and the third area contains five groups: America English, British English, other major varieties like Canada English, Australia English, New Zealand English etc., local varieties and foreign language varieties, each with features unique to their own speech community and seem cannot to be understood by speakers from other groups <sup>[1]</sup>.

## 3. Goal of ELT

### 3.1. Near-native competence as an ELT goal

As mentioned before, the Inner Circle sets the norm of English use, and speakers from the Outer Circle and the

Expanding Circle feel that if they want to immerse in native speakers' culture or community and communicate with them, they need to follow the norm and be similar to native speakers. Research on second language acquisition in the past found out that sometimes it specified the aim of L2 learning explicitly: language pedagogy is concerned with the ability to use language in communicative situations, but more frequently, it subtly: the age debate centers on "whether the very best learners have native-like competence," which in other words, successful L2 learners are those who can use English like native speakers <sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, to fulfil the goal of native-like in English learning, the coursebook writers and the policymakers work so hard to create the textbook in line with the Standard English, which is British English or American English, also called Standard British English or Standard American English, so, teacher as well as learners refer to those coursebooks and try to reach the target of "standard" blindly. Nevertheless, when they communicate with the native speakers, they may still meet some troubles, for example, cannot understand the idiom used by the native speakers, or hard to follow their interlocutors because of their accent or speed.

EFL emphasizes the importance of learning things related to the native speakers' culture and society as well as the significance of mimicking the language behavior of native speakers <sup>[6]</sup>. Also, EFL approaches see the learner as an outsider or a foreigner who struggles to gain recognition from the native speakers' community. In some countries in the Outer and Expanding circles, English has traditionally belonged to the school curriculum, in which English was treated as a timetabled subject, with emphases on grammatical accuracy, native-like pronunciation, and literature. In this situation, if EFL learners are measured against the "standard," few of them will be perfect <sup>[6]</sup>. Besides, in those countries where people need to pass English exams to get a promotion or graduation, it has often resulted in considerable pressure and resentment by learners, rather than significantly improving their English proficiency. Hence, chasing the goal of being a native speaker indicates that learning a second language can only lead to a different degree of failure, rather than success, which undoubtedly would be demotivating <sup>[5]</sup>.

It is important for learners to refer to the native speaker's language competence, proficiency, or language knowledge for the second language proficiency definition used in language instruction <sup>[7]</sup>. Hence, the most suitable language teacher is definitely the native speaker who can present the target language that learners can imitate. However, it is hard or unlikely for the second language learner to become a native speaker, as according to the definition, we cannot be the native speaker of any language other than our first language <sup>[5]</sup>. Also, the pure "native speaker" is hard to find, as there are still differences among speakers in the inner circle. For example, the speaker who comes from New York will undoubtedly have a different accent from the speaker from Sydney. More commonly, English teachers in the Expanding and Inner Circles are non-native speakers. The learning goal of native-like proficiency has exposed these non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) to some degree of discrimination. To illustrate, Mahboob claimed that native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) will present a better teaching and learning model, while the NNESTs who are not in touch with NESTs would underperform <sup>[8]</sup>. What's more, NNESTs are in a difficult situation, as compared with the language proficiency of NESTs, NNESTs were characterized by language deficiencies. Yet, in both ESL and EFL contexts, most NNESTs have a sufficient degree of language proficiency to complete their teaching duties <sup>[9]</sup> and English proficiency is determined by the capacity owned by both NS and NNS to use the language appropriately, rather than birth. Besides, NNESTs have a number of advantages that NESTs do not have. Initially, they are more able to predict the anticipated language difficulties that learners would face; secondly, they can be more sympathetic to the demands and troubles of the learner; thirdly, only NNESTs can take advantage of sharing their learners' L1; and fourthly, NNESTs can effectively instruct learning strategies <sup>[8]</sup>.

The truth is native speakers are a minority in the number of English speakers around the world, and more often or not, people in the Outer Circle or the Expanding Circle use English to communicate with non-native speakers<sup>[8]</sup>. To be more specific, a Chinese tourist buys a souvenir in a store in Japan, an Italian young man works in a restaurant in London, or an American businessman signs a contract with a Vietnamese. This indicates the trend of English as a lingua franca.

## **3.2. Exploring the goals of ELF**

### **3.2.1. English as lingua franca**

Global Englishes is regarded as an umbrella term that includes World Englishes (WE) and ELF ideologies<sup>[10]</sup>, which is also a sociolinguistics model that aims to limit the linguistic and regional barriers of English, decrease its differences in diversity, and acknowledge its diversity and dynamics<sup>[2]</sup>. With the increasing cross-cultural interactions, English grows so fast and no longer belongs to native-speaking groups, but the ownership is now shared by all its speakers<sup>[7,8]</sup>. ELF has come up as the first truly “global linguistic” phenomenon<sup>[11]</sup> and it concluded that ELF means English is used as a contact language among speakers with different L1 who need it as an intermediate language to communicate with each other<sup>[1]</sup>, according to which, the majority speakers of English are NNS, and rather than being judged against an NSE criterion, all English varieties are recognized in their own right, no matter it is native or non-native. From the perspective of ELF, once NNSs stop to learn English, they are not the “failed native speakers” of English, but rather highly skilled language users who are able to take advantage of their multilingual abilities in ways that are not available to NSs who are monolingual, and also who prefer successful communication over limited conceptions of “correctness”<sup>[12]</sup>. The ELF stresses the successful communication, interaction, and negotiation of meaning across different communities.

The English language has become a global lingua franca in part as a result of globalization; however, large-scale globalization is still contingent on the advent of an internationally diffuse lingua franca. There are many actions made to respond to globalization and ELF. Specifically, TESOL, one of the biggest and most prominent professional organizations for English language teachers around the world, has in recent years released a series of position statements related to ELF. First of which is addresses the fallacy that compared with NNSs, NSs are automatically preferred as language teachers due to the misguided belief about the outstanding linguistic competence of NSs, consequently, NNESTs always face employment discrimination<sup>[14]</sup>. Hence, the statement illustrates that NNESTs can bring an inimitably valuable perspective. The second statement emphasizes that language proficiency just one of the criteria for evaluating the expertise of a language teacher, which in order to fit with the perspective of ELF, it also makes the important point that English is more like an additional language than a foreign language, as it spread so widely and the variety of English being spoken globally, what’s more, using a singular or monolithic method to standardize English is not viable anymore<sup>[13]</sup>.

### **3.2.2. To be exposed to a variety of English and to be communicative as the goal**

As mentioned before, English learners will most likely use English to communicate with other non-native English speakers. If English language teachers simply teach learners that English complies to a singular “standard,” students would not be well-prepared to use the language. It said that it is English language teachers’ duty to prepare learners to use the language in this globalized world, where speakers speak and use English in a way that is different from prescribed standards<sup>[10]</sup>. Also, Jenkins mentioned that ELF researchers believe that any speaker engaging in international communication should be familiar with as well as know how to use the certain forms that are widely used and comprehensible across English speakers with different L1 backgrounds<sup>[14]</sup>. In other words, teachers should let learners be exposed to different varieties of English, which are the legitimate



models of communication, so that students would be more well-prepared for Englishes they might encounter in the future and communicate with others more successfully. Specifically, teachers can let learners familiarize themselves with the similarities and differences in pronunciation, accent, or expressions among Englishes, so that students would be able to understand their interlocutors in the future.

The language competence of speakers is defined by perspectives that include not only grammar and lexis, but also how members of a group use the language to accomplish their goals and are related to the interpersonal abilities crucial to communicate effectively and properly by using that language<sup>[15]</sup>. Therefore, to improve students' communicative competence, communicative language teaching (CLT) became popular. CLT emphasizes interaction-based tasks that are conducted entirely in the target language. These tasks often require filling the information gap, for which students request and offer information necessary to complete the task by working in groups, nevertheless, in CLT, it also includes student-focused task, in which students can share their experience with each other, for example, giving their opinion about some event or talking about their daily life. Hence, two axioms of CLT have been concluded: the first one is that it is necessary to speak and speaking is inherently good; secondly, through speaking, one learns how to speak.

CLT then transformed to the task-based language teaching (TBLT), which as implied by name, sees tasks as its center. In this teaching method, tasks serve as the language learning trigger because of the way in which their meaning-centeredness and goal-orientation stimulate the process of language cognition that contributes to meaning. This kind of activity related to cognition is regarded to start with the action of negotiation for meaning, in which, "in an attempt to interact, students and capable speakers show and articulate signs of their own and their interlocutor's perceived comprehension, thereby provoking changes to the choice of lexis, the structure of conversations, the content of the message, or all of them, until they reach a decent level of understanding<sup>[15]</sup>". This process seems similar to what students would encounter in the future when they communicate with people from different countries and try to understand each other through negotiating the meaning. Hence, Seidlhofer commented that in the era of CLT and TBLT, the language presented in the learning process should be the "real" language that will be used in daily communication, in other words, should be "authentic," rather than the idealized "textbook English," and as most people and their interlocutors are not native speakers, the "most real English" spoken by majority people is ELF<sup>[1]</sup>.

Besides, it suggested that teachers should spend relatively less time on ENL norms, especially if those norms are less used in learners' communities, and try not to penalize innovative non-native like but intelligible forms<sup>[13]</sup>. Moreover, to ensure students be communicative, teachers should focus more on teaching communicative strategies, for example, prioritizing learners' accommodation skills, training learners to gauge and adjust to their interlocutors' repertoires, instructing students to signal whether their interlocutors understand them or not and telling learners how to ask for or provide repetition, therefore, learners would know how to keep the conversation going and negotiate the meaning, and consequently, be more confident and successful in communication in the future.

## 4. Conclusion

At present, English is no longer dominated by native speakers and the ownership is shared by all the speakers. To pursue to be native-like is outdated, and learn "standard English" is not compatible with this globalized world anymore. Although it would be helpful if learners refer to the native speaker's language competence, proficiency, as well as knowledge of the language during their learning process, it is unnecessary and unrealistic to try hard to become native-like. As different varieties of English can be found around the world today and

the group of non-native speakers is much bigger than that of native speakers, it is unwise to still measure the English learner against the “standard.”

In today’s world, where English is used as a lingua franca, the goal of English language teaching should be adjusted to help learners to be communicative. To meet students’ needs to communicate with other people from different first language backgrounds by using English as a common language, most commonly non-native speakers, English language teachers should introduce various aspects of English to the learner and try to improve their communicative competence by creating the authentic situation or exposing them to the authentic language. Also, teachers can teach learners some useful communicative strategies to guarantee that students can keep the conversation going and have a natural as well as fluent conversation with other speakers in the future.

## Disclosure statement

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