

Are Englishes as lingua franca?

Lin Cong

School of Foreign Languages, Yantai University, Yantai 264005, Shandong Province, China

Abstract: It is well-known that English is a global language. People around the world are not speaking a certain type of English but different varieties of English. With the increasingly awareness of this phenomenon, the word “Englishes” has been widely applied. This essay is to focus on the issue of “Englishes function as lingua franca” by discussing whether “English as a lingua franca” is a distinct variety.

Keywords: English; Englishes; Lingua franca

Publication date: April, 2020

Publication online: 30 April, 2020

***Corresponding author:** Lin Cong, 286758441@qq.com

Due to the globally widespread English, the increasingly growing number of cultures is becoming associated with English, which contributes to the development of varieties of English. The term of “Englishes” came into being, used to describe, according to Crystal, with the spread of English around the world, the new varieties of English become visible in different countries where the language has rooted^[1]. Although English is used by people from different nations for various purposes, such as communication, tourism, business, education, diplomacy, *etc.* it could be assured that the types of English used are not exactly the same. Englishes play a vital role in their communicative processes. The essay will argue the diverse way of using English as a lingua franca that Englishes used as lingua franca. The essay will firstly introduces the definition of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and World Englishes, followed by a discussion of the issue that whether ELF is a distinct variety.

The lingua franca comes from Italy with a literal sense of “Frankish tongue”. A pidgin language used in the south-east coast of Mediterranean between 15th to 19th century was initially viewed as a lingua franca,

which is based on Italian dialects and also loan words from Arabic, French, Greek, Persian, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish^[2]. Gradually, the term “lingua franca” has been applied to refer to a contact language, a common language, or trade language used by people from different language backgrounds. Jenkins defines that a lingua franca, a contact language used by speakers who are not sharing the first language, is normally as a tool adopted by second language of its speakers, in which native English speakers are not excluded^[2]. On the other hand, Seidlhofer considers that a lingua franca is usually the only choice of communicative medium for speakers of different first languages^[3]. “English as a lingua franca” might be an alternative term for English as an global/ international/ world language, because they all represent that English serves as a communicating tool between people from different territories worldwide.

Some researchers believe that English has become a lingua franca, whereas Fiedler and Brosch suggests that Esperanto(language created for intercultural interaction) could be a valid option as lingua franca, which has been primarily used outside the private realm until now^[4]. This essay will suggest that ELF is not a simple variety and there could be a number of types of English served as a lingua franca. It could be agreed with Mackenzie when he claims that “ELF is not and will almost certainly never become, a stable variety, because of the range of participants in the international use of English^[5].” World Englishes have much possibility to be the candidate of lingua franca at the moment.

Bhatt prefers name World Englishes as: varieties of English used in diverse sociolinguistic contexts^[6]. He argues that “the “pluricentric” view of English, which represents diverse sociolinguistic histories, multicultural identities, multiple forms of use and acquisition, and distinct contexts of function.” On the other hand, World

Englishes could be pidgins and creoles. Kirkpatrick suggests that the varieties of English are similar with pidgins and creoles because they have all shaped by the same kind of natural reconstructing processes^[7]. Pidgins emerge when people from at least two languages are frequently contacting and have no language in common. Creoles generate when pidgins learned as a mother tongue. Furthermore, Kachru introduces the concentric circle model of three circles of World Englishes: the inner circle, the outer circle, and the expanding circle^[8]. The inner circle refers to native English speaking countries whereas the outer circle include countries of nonnative contexts where English has been institutionalized as a second language within the spread of English. The expanding circle, as Crystal illustrates, are nations with stable increase number of learners and functional areas, where English is regarded as a foreign language^[1].

One of the continued debates in this area is concerned with “Could ELF be classified as a distinct variety?” Advocates start with the forms of English as the forms used by ELF speakers are not completely consistent with native forms, which are greatly influenced by the first languages of ELF speakers. They also maintain that ELF is a distinct variety because ELF speakers differ in linguistic backgrounds and learning proficiency. Widdowson highlights that users are able to evince themselves inconsistently with norms which correspond to the “sociocultural identity” of other citizens^[9]. Opponents would argue that in spite of being used by speakers of disparate linguistic backgrounds, a range of linguistic features are shared by speakers of different communities, and the focus of ELF on the function of the language rather than forms. All varieties are in common with a huge number of lexis and English Native Language still occupies the “grammatical core” which used by both post-colonial WE and ELF^[2]. As Kirkpatrick mentions, the view of opponents that “ELF describes a language function rather than a form that ELF cannot therefore be classified as a distinct variety”^[10].

This essay prefers view ELF as a distinct variety mainly based on two reasons: different types of English are taught in expanding circle countries and the existing Englishes spoken in inner circle territories. It is hard to adopt a certain variety of English as a lingua franca owing to the fact that for the nations in expanding circle, the variety of English as their English teaching norm for the purpose of communication are

favoured differently with other countries. The results on the recent research of Monfared and Khatib reveal that teachers in Iran prefers US American English pronunciation whereas teachers of India mostly in favor of British English^[11]. What’s more, inner circle countries such as the United Kingdom, the USA, are using different varieties of English as their lingua franca during the interaction with people of other countries. Given these two reasons, it is less possible that a single type of English is used as a lingua franca when different varieties of English is actually learned and used around the world.

China could be a representative expanding circle country to be talked about in this essay. Firstly, China is a country with large population, the number of English learners could be listed as the top of the world. According to Bolton and Graddol, there are approximately four hundred million learners of English in China, which is almost equal to one third of population of China^[12]. Secondly, the improving international status of China could be an acceptable reason for the chosen country in this essay.

The variety of English as a second language taught in China is not a certain one, as well as there is no favored English variety as a teaching norm is encouraged to be taught to Chinese English learners. The problem is that even though there always be a peculiar unit in the English text book in China putting efforts to help learners separate British English and US American English, most learners still mix them up and follow the most familiar way (the one repeated much by teachers or other learners) that they are even unable to distinguish which type they are using. For instance, many of college students prefer US American pronunciation because they are influenced by US TV series^[13]. They still mix pronouncing “poem” as /'pəʊɪm/ rather than US American sound /'pəʊəɪm/. What’s more, sometimes learning resources are controversial to themselves. The pronunciation of General American of USA is used in tapes attached to text books and published practicing books whereas the phonetic symbols labeled on text books are the British English Received Pronunciation, so the inconsistent between pronounce and phonetic symbols lead to the generate of barriers in learner’s acquirement of speaking and listening^[14].

The rise of “Chinese English” might be a new variety of English spoken by a large amount of people. The number of Chinese English learners is a powerful

strength for the increasingly growing “Chinese English”. Jenkins agrees with this statement and suggests that Chinese English would be a new variety of English with the largest number of users in the world^[15]. Moreover, a Chinese scholar Fan believes that people of other countries communicate with Chinese English speakers are mostly come from the outer and expanding circles rather than English speaking countries, hence, Chinese English is one of the varieties of English used as lingua franca for the interaction with others, which is not belonging to the area of English as a foreign language^[16].

Since distinct varieties of English or even the mix type of English are taught in the expanding circle, the definition of lingua franca should be reviewed here—a language used for communication between people who do not share linguistic backgrounds. In different regions distinct varieties rather than standard British or US American English are actually being learned and used as the language for communication between people with different native languages. Confronted with the emerging varieties of English spoken by a vast number of people being used as lingua franca, how could lingua franca be considered as a simple variety?

English used as a lingua franca is not the same even in native English speaking countries. “English as a lingua franca” is a term that could be applied to all English users, in which native speakers are not excluded despite of native or non-native speakers they are interacting with^[2]. So that it is properly to talk about the inner circle Englishes as their regional lingua franca. American English, is the most impactful and strong variety of English worldwide nowadays^[7]. Imagine a conversation happens between a man from Washington and a man from London when they are negotiating how to design a reliable “elevator” or “lift”, so which type of English would they use? People would say, undoubtedly, American man would speak US American English while the British one speaks British English. I would agree that both of them speak their own mother tongue, which differs markedly in pronunciation, lexis, grammar and other aspects of the usage of English. In this simple case, interlocutors come from different linguistic backgrounds and two Englishes are involved while they are communicating, which forms a perfect situation of a lingua franca interaction. If we say that English as a lingua franca during the communication, so which English is it in view of two types of English are involved. Phenomenon in native English speaking

countries shows that lingua franca which in use could be considered as a distinguishing variety.

In conclusion, the essay argued that World Englishes could be used as lingua franca by analyzing the issue of could lingua franca be a distinct variety. It has been examined that lingua franca may be a distinguishing variety due to the fact that not a certain type of English is taught as a foreign language in countries of expanding circle and there are World Englishes existing and used as lingua franca in inner circle nations. In other words, as Seidlhofer puts it, “ELF is not a variety of English but a variable way of using it^[3].” As it has discussed above, it is clear that it is different varieties of English are being used as lingua franca in different regions, thus it could be argued that Englishes function as lingua franca served to people who do not share first languages for intercultural communication.

In consideration of that World Englishes function as lingua franca and Chinese English is most likely to become a mature variety of English in the foreseeable future, English teachers and students in China should be confident with their own features of English rather than following strictly with the so-called authoritative English norm and considering it as the only criteria to weigh people’s mastery level of English.

References

- [1] Crystal D. English as a global language[M]. 2nd edn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012.
- [2] Jenkins J. English as a Lingua Franca: attitude and identity[M]. Oxford University Press, Oxford. 2007.
- [3] Seidlhofer B. Understanding English as a Lingua Franca[M]. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2011.
- [4] Fiedler S, Brosch C. "Esperanto-A Lingua Franca in Use: A Case Study on an Educational NGO"[J]. Language Problems and Language Planning, 2018, 42(2): 220-245.
- [5] Mackenzie I. English as a Lingua Franca: Theorizing and teaching English[M]. 1st edn, Routledge Ltd, London, 2014.
- [6] Bhatt RM. “World Englishes”[J]. Annual Review of Anthropology, 2001, 30(1): 527-550.
- [7] Kirkpatrick A. World Englishes: implications for international communication and English language teaching[J]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007.
- [8] Kachru BB. World Englishes and English-using communities[J]. Annu. Rev. Appl. Linguist, 1997, 17:66-87.
- [9] Widdowson HG. A Perspective on recent trends, in A.P.R. Howatt and H.G. Widdowson, A History of English Language Teaching[M]. 2nd edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp353-72, 2004.
- [10] Kirkpatrick A. English as a Lingua Franca in ASEAN: A Multilingual Model[M]. Hong Kong University Press, HKU, Hong Kong, 2010.

- [11] Monfared A, Khatib M. Allameh Tabataba'i University " English or Englishes?: Outer and expanding circle teachers' awareness of and attitudes towards their own variants of English in ESL/EFL teaching contexts[J]. Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online), 2018, 43(2): 56-75.
- [12] Bolton K , Graddol D. English in China today[J]. English Today, 2012, 28(3).
- [13] Li W, Li J, Wang X, et al. A Study on the Bias of Chinese College Students to British English and American English: A Case Study of Anhui University of Finance and Economics[J]. Modern Business Trade Industry, 19: 171-172.
- [14] Chen WP. "The Difference between British and American English and Its Enlightenment to Teaching", Journal of Tianzhong, 2009, 24(5): 128-129.
- [15] Jenkins J. World Englishes—A Resource Book for Students[M]. 2nd edn, New York: Routledge, 2009.
- [16] Fan Y. On ELF Paradigm in the Research of English-Language Globalization and Nativization and Its Impactions for 'China English' and English Teaching in China[J]. Contemporary Research of Foreign Languages, 2015, 6: 29-33.