

Plural Englishes and English as Language Resource

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This Special Issue presents different perspectives on ‘Global Englishes **and** translanguaging’. It might be noted to begin with that the use of the word ‘and’ is ambiguous – it could either be taken to indicate that the issue is to deal with two unconnected topics, or to imply that there is a connection between them, which the issue is designed to explore. This raises the question of how, if at all, the two are conceptually related - a question that obviously needs to be addressed before considering their implications for language education.

The term ‘Global Englishes’ is itself ambiguous. It has come to be used as an umbrella term to refer English as an international Language in all its manifestations. But its plurality would suggest that the term also applies more specifically to different stabilized varieties of language usage associated with particular communities in what Kachru has called the Inner and Outer Circles and in this sense is synonymous with ‘World Englishes’. ‘Translanguaging’ would usually refer to the immediate process of language use, the expedient exploitation of language as a communicative resource. Translanguaging is particularly evident in the use of English as a lingua franca, ELF, which at times all users engage in whatever Kachru circle they are said to be members of.

Here we have two quite different ways of thinking about language and languages, which I think can be confused by the use of Global Englishes as an umbrella term. One is based on the conception of Englishes as countable entities - particular formally defined languages or language **varieties**, and the other on the conception of English as non-countable **language tout court** - a more general communicative **resource**. This distinction is to my mind crucial and calls for a little further reflection on its significance.

Human language in general serves as an expedient means for relating intentions to others so as to co-operate with them, a necessity for humans as with all other species in order to survive and flourish. So language use, or languaging, is necessarily a social activity. But **language** only becomes a reality for users when it is actualized as **a particular language or variety**, developed to serve the contextual needs of a specific community and thereby at the same time defining its socio-cultural identity. So **a language** comes to be equated with the normal communicative behavior of a community and the communal identity of its users. Since this is how we have all made language specific as a particular named language in the process of primary socialization it is naturally not easy to think of it as a resource dissociated from its communal conventions of use.

In the case of English, the language, often historically imposed by colonization, has now been adopted by previously colonized communities to serve their own contextual needs and to represent their own distinctive socio-cultural identities and it is this that justifies pluralizing the language as World Englishes, WE. But in ELF communication, English is used as a language resource which does not have to be associated with any particular communicative conventions or communal identity, English as language resource is not a communally defined countable entity but an open source affordance available for expedient use wherever the need arises.

But, as has been routinely pointed out, ELF users do not only draw on English as a language resource, but on other languages in their repertoire as well. This has led some scholars to the mistaken conclusion that ELF is axiomatically multilingual. However, although there are frequently linguistic traces from other languages in ELF usage, it is not that ELF users simply transfer linguistic features from one language to another. They make use of them expediently as an additional communicative resource and in so doing dissociate them from their original specificity. So the translanguaging of ELF users is not a process that enacts multilingualism by transferring from one distinctive language to another but on the contrary counteracts multilingualism as it is often simplistically conceptualized by transcending the distinction. In this respect, ELF functions not as a multilingua but a **translingua** franca. And it is franca precisely because it is freed of a dependency on the communal conventions which define particular languages, and openly available for adaptive use as a resource to cope with whatever communicative contexts and purposes might arise.

The conceptual distinction I have outlined between pluralized multi Englishes and translanguaging has an obvious educational relevance. Orthodox English language education, or ELT, is based on the concept of English as a specifically conventionalized linguistic variety and it is almost always an Inner Circle variety that is preferred and promoted. Its objective then is assumed to be to get learners to achieve so-called native speaker competence in that variety by conforming to the established norms of knowledge and ability that define it. The objective of language education that is based on the concept of translanguaging is radically different: it is to exploit the knowledge and ability that learners already have as language users to develop their existing communicative capability by encouraging them to draw expediently on the resources of English and any other language available to them. Such an objective is modelled on the natural use of English as a lingua franca rather than on conventional norms of native speaker usage, thereby prioritizing learner improvised creativity rather than teacher imposed conformity.

The study of Global Englishes as World Englishes and translanguaging such as we see enacted in ELF communication both have their validity as areas of enquiry and a special issue of TESL-EJ devoted to the different perspectives that are taken on them is greatly to be welcomed. But to my mind - from my perspective - it is important to recognise that they are informed by quite different ways of conceiving of language and language education.

About the Author

Henry Widdowson, Professor Emeritus, University of London, Honorary Professor at the University of Vienna has written extensively on the applied linguistics of language education, latterly with particular reference to the conceptualization and educational significance of English as a lingua franca. His most recent book, *On the Subject of English*, appeared last year.

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