Teaching World Englishes in Japan Reflections on Aya Matsuda's presentations at *JALT2009*

日本におけるワールド・イングリッシュ教育 ―全国語学教育学会第35回国際年次大会で行われた松田文氏の講演を振り返って―

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Background

On the surface, English language teaching (ELT) in foreign language contexts like Japan may seem like a simple endeavor. In reality, ELT is suffused with pedagogical and ethical controversies. Phillipson (1992), for instance, denounces several assumptions that have guided ELT efforts, including the belief that English is best taught monolingually, and that the ideal teacher is a native English speaker. According to Phillipson, these assumptions exist in spite of evidence that use of students' native languages can aid in comprehension and acquisition of English, and that non-native-speaking English instructors may better understand students' needs and difficulties than native speaker instructors, who are often monolingual. One manifestation of these beliefs in Japan is the JET program, in which native English speakers are sent to secondary schools to teach English alongside Japanese teachers, who likely know much more about teaching and the English language than the native English speakers do (Jenkins, 2006).

An emphasis on monolingual education and native English speakers reflects ELT's imperialistic legacy (Canagarajah, 1996, 1999; Pennycook, 1998), and indicates how ELT ultimately benefits Inner Circle countries, such as the United States and the U.K., rather than formerly colonized Outer Circle countries, such as India and Singapore, or Expanding Circle countries like China and Japan, where English generally functions as a foreign language (Kachru, 1988). The value of "native English" has also been debated. Graddol (1999) views a decline in the importance of native English speakers, caused by demographic changes in world population as well as shifting ideological notions about linguistic competence and identity. The notion of error itself becomes problematic when the "error" may be understood by the majority of the world's English speakers (Seidlhofer, in Davies, 2003). Moreover, what may seem like an error to a native English speaker may represent a linguistic innovation in a variety of English (Jenkins, 2007).

A growing number of scholars and educators have declared the need for ELT to acknowledge different varieties of English, or "World Englishes." (The establishment of the academic journal *World Englishes* attests to this.) In many parts of the world English is used as a *lingua franca*, i.e. as a medium of

communication between non-native English speakers, rather than native English speakers and non-native English speakers, the model of communication traditionally focused upon in ELT instruction. In such English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) contexts, an exclusive focus on native speaker English may be inappropriate (Jenkins, 2007).

Instructors in countries where English is not spoken as a first language, who hope to adopt a World English-minded approach in their classes, are faced with a number of difficult questions. Dr. Aya Matsuda, an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at Arizona State University, addressed these questions in several presentations, including a plenary presentation, at the Japanese Association for Language Teaching (JALT) international conference held in Shizuoka on November 21-24. Matsuda's presentations centered on teaching English as an international language (EIL) in Japan. EIL differs from ELF in that EIL interactions can include those between non-native English speakers and native speakers, as well as interactions between non-native speakers, whereas the ELF model, in the strict definition, includes only those interactions in English between non-native speakers (see Jenkins, 2007, p. 4).

In this paper I will report on Dr. Matsuda's views, expressed in her presentations and elaborated upon in subsequent correspondences, regarding one particularly difficult question faced by English instructors: Considering the great variety of Englishes across the world, which variety of English should instructors teach to students? According to Matsuda, there is no one correct answer to this question. However, she believes that three options are available to English instructors in Japan.

Option 1: Teach a variety of English that would be intelligible in all intercultural situations

This may appear to be the ideal solution. The problem, Matsuda asserts, is that this is impossible. No such "all mighty" variety of English exists. Standard American English or British English may have the greatest potential here, as they are taught in a variety of countries and contexts; but even these varieties will not be perfectly effective in all intercultural situations. The preferred variety to teach will depend on the context and the needs of learners, and instructors must accept that whichever variety they choose will not be useful in all situations.

Matsuda emphasizes that EIL is not one single variety of English, nor do EIL researchers seek to establish a single EIL model that would be effective in all intercultural situations (see Jenkins (2007, p. 19)) for a similar statement regarding ELF). EIL is tied more to the diversity of World Englishes than it is to a distillation of these varieties to produce one "common core" variety of English. Matsuda views EIL as a term describing the function of English in intercultural contexts, rather than as a linguistic entity. She takes the position that everyone brings in a variety of English most familiar to him or her, and uses it along with various communicative strategies to achieve mutual understanding. Therefore, this first option is, in her view, untenable.

Option 2: Teach "Japanese English"

As an English speaker from Japan, Matsuda finds this option to be ideologically appealing. In fact, Nobuyuki Hino, who presented after Matsuda in one session, spoke about the need for an original model of English to express Japanese values and culture. Hino believes that a number of characteristics of this Japanese English model have been identified—for instance, a syllable-timed pronunciation pattern—and states that in his classes he attempts to teach students Japanese English. Native English speakers, in fact, are welcome to learn Japanese English in his classes.

However, attempting to teach Japanese English, Matsuda states, introduces a number of problems. First, the functional range of Japanese English is highly limited. Essentially, it will work best with people living in Japan—i.e., mainly with Japanese people. Moreover, a model of Japanese English has not yet been established. It would be a mistake to identify every "non-native" feature of English produced by a Japanese person as a characteristic of Japanese English. Lowenberg (2002) states that since most English speakers in Expanding Circle countries such as Japan acquire English varieties non-natively, it is important to recognize the difference between deficiencies in the second language acquisition of English from true varietal differences that have been previously learned.

Furthermore, unlike Singaporean English and Indian English, Japanese English has not been institutionalized, with vast amounts of aural and written records that enable researchers to identify grammatical, lexical and other distinguishing features of this variety (see Crystal, 1997, for a discussion of "New Englishes."). I would add here that students themselves, as well as their parents and instructors, and those in the government, would likely be unhappy with a Japanese English approach. From an early age students learn through the media and in schools that "native" English is the correct and true English, and breaking down this perception will require a profound cultural and institutional paradigm shift.

Matsuda concludes that although this idea sounds attractive and stems from noble intentions, it is not yet a practical solution. We are not yet ready for it. Moreover, she acknowledges that other instructors, for instance native speakers of American English, may not be comfortable with this option. This may be due partly to a lack of familiarity with Japanese English, as well as the belief that teaching it might betray expectations of students and administrators.

Option 3: Teach an "established" variety of English

The last option given by Matsuda is to teach a variety of English proved to be useful and relatively well-accepted in diverse intercultural situations, such as Standard American or British English. Such an approach, unfortunately, reinforces the dominance of inner circle countries, especially the U.S. and the U. K. It also reinforces the "deficit model"—that non-native learners are handicapped by language deficits, and will always be measured against the unattainable ideal of the "native speaker." From a number of ethical angles this option is problematic, but Mastuda concludes that it may be the most realistic solution,

and reluctantly she accepts it. However, she cautions that if American English, or British English, is chosen as an instructional model, it should be introduced as one variety of English, and not the only correct English.

Most important: To raise awareness of World Englishes

However, Matsuda states that the question of which variety to teach, though difficult, may not be the most important question for EIL-minded instructors to ask. What may be important here is that instructors at least ask themselves this question. Of course, instructors should look to students and within themselves when preparing to teach English, and take into consideration the goals of learners; course objectives; availability of materials; the instructors' own background; attitudes of learners, teachers, and the community; and other resources. It is logical, then, for instructors to teach a variety or varieties of English that they themselves know best and feel most comfortable with.

Regardless of the selected variety to be taught, EIL-minded English instructors should attempt to promote an awareness of other Englishes in students. This can be done in a somewhat "sneaky" fashion, by occasionally bringing in recorded samples of different varieties of English, or segments from films that feature people speaking different varieties of English. Promoting an awareness of the diversity of World Englishes could be said to be the primary goal of an EIL approach. Students should be encouraged to develop a broader, diverse conceptualization of English-speaking cultures. Instructors may also wish to introduce intercultural communication strategies to enable students to communicate effectively with people from different cultures.

Moreover, Matsuda believes that assessment of language proficiency should focus more on communicative effectiveness rather than on native-speaker-likeness. This is a particularly daunting challenge in Japan, where high school education and the entire entrance examination system place such a strong emphasis on grammatical perfection. However, Matsuda states that instructors can act "locally," within their own classrooms, taking small steps here and there to help students develop an awareness of World Englishes, and thereby challenge the current English education system.

Implications for English education at Kagawa University

Introducing EIL to the general education curriculum at Kagawa University could bring considerable, and positive, changes. First, the present curriculum is largely based on a traditional model of English education. Native English speaking and Japanese instructors teach different kinds of courses: Japanese instructors are in charge of TOEIC-focused courses for first year students, and a Listening and Reading (LR) course for second year students. Native English speakers teach a Speaking and Writing course for second year students and an Advanced English course for upperclassmen. An EIL paradigm would suggest that native English speaking teachers and Japanese teachers should be able to teach the same kind of

courses; there is no reason to restrict native English speakers to "productive" skill-development classes and Japanese instructors to "receptive" skills courses (arguably the distinction between productive and receptive is itself problematic.)

An EIL paradigm would also raise questions about the central role that the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) plays in the curriculum here. In actuality, the TOEIC is far removed from the kind of international communication embodied by EIL. Native-speaker like, grammatical perfection is targeted by this test, and the only varieties of English that can be heard in the listening section are native varieties, particularly Standard American and British English. Non-native speakers acting in dialogues are even voiced by native speakers, the standard practice in listening materials accompanying textbooks produced in Japan. Moreover, according to Lowenberg (2002), tests like the TOEIC, based on Inner Circle varieties of English, fail to account for English norms developing in countries where these tests are widely administered. Widespread usages thus become "errors." The TOEIC's near-exclusive emphasis on American business culture also does not resonate with an EIL approach, where exposure to a variety of different cultures is ideal. This business emphasis may also partly account for the generally low scores of students in the faculties of engineering, nursing and agriculture, whose targeted careers are far removed from the content of the TOEIC.

In 2011 the general education curriculum will be revised, and this will be a good time to re-think the curriculum from an EIL perspective. Even if the framework does not undergo a radical transformation, an awareness on the part of English instructors of EIL teaching would be a step in the right direction. Matsuda states that she herself is not striving for sudden, revolutionary change, but likes to take small steps to promote a heightened awareness of EIL among students. Global changes begin at the local level.

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