

Essay

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Critique Arguments for Teaching One of the Standard Varieties of English

Introduction

English, being the lingua franca of the world, plays a pivotal role in communication. It is estimated that there are 1.35 billion English speakers around the world. Unlike other prominent languages, English is widely used by both native and non-nativespeakers, resulting in a wide range of English dialects. Nevertheless, not all these dialects or varieties are equally accepted or considered accurate. British English is presumably the original variety of the language and is considered "prestigious." However, this situation is changing as a result of the political atmosphere of the world as well as because of the notions against Standard English ideology.

Trudgill (1992) defines standardization of language as 'consisting of the processes of language determination, codification, and stabilization' (p. 71). Linguists today reject the Standard English ideology in favor of the new ideology of world Englishes. It has become customary to use the plural form 'Englishes' to stress the diversity to be found in the language today and to stress that English no longer has one single base of authority, prestige, and normativity (Mesthrie and Bhatt, 2008, p. 3). English is an official language in sixty-seven countries. Regrettably or not, all of these countries do not use Standard English. According to Kachru's (1992) three-circle model, the L1 (first language) English-speaking background within the inner circle is very strong. Nonetheless, Standard English has very little importance within the inner circle. As the circles expand, the significance of Standard English is getting more insignificant. However, the expanding circle remains fascinated with Standard English because they prefer to hire native teachers specifically from the United Kingdom or the USA.

As a result of English's linguistic imperialism as a dominant second language, the necessity for standard variation is crucial, particularly in education and communication. However, the mistake of using 'Standard English' to refer to both writing and speech without clarification is a common error done by sociolinguists (Crowly, 2003, p. 272). This error has created many socio-cultural and pedagogical issues in ELT pedagogy. All things considered, we are unable to teach a second language learner our preferred dialect. This will cause the language to become inconsistent, and the language learner may not be able to meet the desired objectives. To remedy this problem, a standard variation of English should be chosen to be taught in ESL classrooms. This is not to say

that the learner's native English, if there is one in the case of the outer Englishes, should be neglected. To ensure a well-rounded language education that caters to diverse linguistic contexts, the choice of a standard for L2 classrooms should be based on educational objectives, taking into account factors such as learners' needs, curriculum goals, and regional preferences.



Cultural Bias

With the expansion of the English language, we currently have numerous prominent English variations, particularly British and American English. The issue is which variant should be recognized as a second language learner. The internet, as well as this paper, are written in American English since technology and the media are oriented toward it. However, as an ESL learner, selecting which type is ideal is a challenge for both the learner and the teacher. Not only have ESL students struggled with the decision of which variation to choose, but native speakers of eighteenth-century British English have also encountered this dilemma. According to Crowley (2003), England witnessed a cultural change in which one spoken variety was preferred over another, and this scenario was indicated by the enormous quantity of literature available on elocution instruction at the time.



Even in the twenty-first century, there is a cultural bias in the English language. The language testing scenario is one of the major areas in which cultural bias occurs in English. Test items slanted toward Western culture may confound non-Western examinees due to cultural load, causing the examinees to incorrectly answer them (Djiwandono, 2006, p. 83). While it is true that learning a language entails acquiring its culture, the validity of the language test is called into question here. The validity of a test refers to whether it measures what it is intended to measure, which in the case of language testing is the learner's four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Given the circumstances, test creators and examiners should have cross-cultural understanding in order to perform a test and avoid cultural bias that supports a certain variety of English.



Linguistics Diversity of English

A most prominent notion that questions the existence of Standard English is “World Englishes” by Kachru (1992). In a world in which English is not only the native language of the British or the Americans, the linguistic prestige that is held by the two varieties is questionable, especially given the larger number of speakers who use the other varieties, such as the Canadian, Australian, Indian, etc. According to a 2001 linguistic survey of India, 125 million of the Indian population speak English. ~~This number is larger than the British population.~~  13

Language change is a dynamic process, and languages undergo this change gradually over time (Ellis, 2008; Hickey, 2010). Neglecting these linguistic nuances may result in a loss of cultural heritage, the exclusion of certain communities, and a limited understanding of the dynamic nature of language. Embracing language variations not only promotes inclusivity but also acknowledges the importance of preserving linguistic diversity, fostering a more comprehensive and nuanced appreciation of the complex tapestry of human communication. However, within the ESL teaching-learning context, there needs to be a predetermined standard so that the learners can be made aware of the expected outcome.

The spread of the English language was greatly aided by colonization. Its importance in the colonies, however, did not stop with the end of the colonial era. According to Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008), the British Council, established by the British Government in 1935, is the modern-day agency that propagates and popularizes not only the language but also British literature, arts, political philosophy, and science throughout the pre-colonies. As a result, the English language's linguistic imperialism in the former colonies has not been reduced. Even if local variations of English exist that are completely mutually intelligible with other global English speakers around the world, teaching British English, particularly pronunciation, is focused on the instructional setting. This predicament is exacerbated by the importance and dominance that language exams like IELTS (International English Language Testing System) have. Even if a person from the outer or expanding circle of English (Kachru, 1992) has studied in English up to the bachelor's level in the medium of English, when in need of migrating, **he or she must demonstrate that his or her English is at the standard British level.**  14

Differences in spoken dialects involve prestige rather than standardization (Fisher, 1996, p. 7). Hence, many ESL learners tend to acquire a certain dialect as it will benefit them in the socio-

economic dimensions associated with language (Beebe and Giles 1984; Derwing, 2003; Sung, 2016). This English-language problem frequently mimics existing societal hierarchies, contributing to a cycle of inequity. Non-standard variations may be stigmatized and linked with lesser social standing, whereas standard varieties are often connected with formal education, prestige, and socioeconomic status. By focusing primarily on one standard, education institutions may unintentionally reinforce and perpetuate existing socioeconomic inequities, impeding the empowerment and equal participation of multiple language populations. A more inclusive approach to language education would entail acknowledging and valuing a society's linguistic diversity, fighting linguistic stereotypes, and promoting a more equitable representation of all language varieties.



Communication Effectiveness

Language's primary role is communication. Furthermore, in a more commercialized environment, the essential requirement of language maybe how it facilitates trade. Crystal (1994) contends that if British English can be used to sell goods, it should be used. If American English can sell things, sue it; if another English can do the job, use it. The adaptability of English-language speakers is more respected in this situation than the standard of the language utilized. Above all, the communication process should achieve the desired result through effective communication. These communication aims are more important than the debate over whether a particular linguistic variety is superior to another. Many sociolinguists who oppose standardization say that intelligibility is the most important aspect of language and that as long as the purpose is met, any variant is acceptable (Fisher, 1996; Kikrpatrick, 2007).

Additionally, the question heightens as to what is expected by standardization: the 'uniformity' or the 'level of excellence'. It is also unclear what is expected when it says Standard English—does it refer to spoken English or written English? Bex and Watts (1999) define standard English as the medium of writing in the English language that is grammatically stable and codified (p. 271). And the most notable argument presented by Bex and Watts (1999) is that standard English can be spoken in any accent of English, though in practice it is seldom. This argument contradicts all the previously mentioned norms and practices with regard to English, in which pronunciation and speech played a major role in directing the learner towards imitating native-like speech. Especially as an adult learner, leading towards this mirage of developing native-like pronunciation can create

unnecessary stress for the learner. Pronunciation involves the articulation of the speech organ, which is neither flexible nor adaptable in an adult.

ESL learners who strive to imitate native-like pronunciation may sometimes end up with what they perceive as a "weird" accent (Kong and Kang, 2022; Rajković, 2019; Melchien, 2016). Scholars have dismissed many pedagogical attempts to make ESL learners speak like native speakers. This impression has been fueled mostly by socio-political factors as opposed to linguistic or communicative factors. Kang and Kong (2022) assert that in the context of China, EFL native teachers whose accents were more difficult for the students to acquire and comprehend, and as a result, learning a native or standard accent was not the primary goal. Instead, teaching and learning English should focus on conversation between interlocutors in varied contexts for the learner. This ESL learning need does not necessitate a typical standard variation. However, it should be highlighted that the argument here concentrates on oral communication rather than written communication.

Education equity

Another argument against teaching a standard variant of English is that it discriminates against alternative 'Englishes' and disadvantages particular student groups. Linguists believe that in a globalized society where speakers of 'Englishes' are connected with one another, it is more pedagogically useful to familiarize learners with a diversity of accents (Sung, 2013). Not all ESL students have the opportunity to work with a native teacher. As a result, it is exceedingly improbable that they will all acquire the same speech or, in some cases, writing ability. Learning a new language might be far more difficult for many students than we realize. For example, Chinese /ts/ is used instead of English /t/. Notably, the majority of Chinese ESL speakers cannot tell the difference between the two distinct sounds. In other words, they do not distinguish /g/ from /k/ as different phonemes (Zhang and Yin, 2009). These circumstances can obstruct both language creation and comprehension. And the assistance of a teacher is required to remedy them. However, this does not imply that they should be rectified to the point that their pronunciation is identical to that of the native, which is quite unlikely. And in this case, the teacher can help the student understand diverse accents rather than forcing the learner to talk with a distinct accent.

Linguistic imperialism is connected with the concept of acquiring the standard variety of English. As Crinson (1997) points out, children from working-class families or certain ethnic groups are

expected to learn this linguistic variation. They are led to believe that they can only advance up the social ladder if they acquire the standard vocabulary—the language of the powerful. However, as a result of their failure to acquire native-like Standard English language proficiency, these youngsters do not attain their full potential because they get demotivated and lose self-esteem.

The aforementioned ideas about providing fairness in ESL education are learner-centered. Moreover, rather than promoting the standard variety, context and learner needs should be used to select the variety taught (Kikrpatrick, 2007, as cited in Van Den Doel, 2010). This does not imply that English language education should ignore standard variety, but the ultimate goal of English language teaching should not be to produce a native-like second language user. The idea is that the learner should be comfortable using the English language, and that as long as the communicative function of the language is fulfilled, language learning has achieved its aim.  16

However, we cannot completely dismiss the concept of standard English. The preceding arguments do not completely reject the existence of a standard variety, and the denial is mostly geared toward modifying the standard variety's pronunciation and accent, either British or American. As a result, maintaining a standard is critical in ELT instruction, particularly when it comes to the written form of the language. It should be noted that different dialects of English employ different spellings. The spelling conventions of British and American English, for example, can be difficult for a second language learner. What's more difficult is that both British and American English are deemed standard. This puts the learner in a bind when choosing which variation to study. In this scenario, the learner's context is important. A learner with educational goals to migrate to Australia or the United Kingdom should use British English, whereas a learner with aspirations to seek a higher education or a position in media, marketing, or trade should be advised to use American English. The context of the learner, rather than the diversity of the language, is important here as well.

Written language necessitates accuracy, whereas spoken language necessitates fluency. Written language is more rule-bound than spoken language, and because of its permanence, grammar is extremely important in writing. In the name of regional variability, or "world Englishes," ELT pedagogy cannot overlook grammatical faults in writing if they contradict conventional wisdom. For example, in Indian English, the progressive aspect is used instead of the basic present tense. Eventhough this would not significantly impair spoken communication, it would have an impact

on students' writing if ignored in the language classroom. This is an example of why the necessity of a standard language in the classroom cannot be overstated.

Kachru (1983) recommends a 'polymodel approach' to this English, which entails introducing learners to a range of Englishes. This method accepts the diversity of languages and allows the learner to utilize the language in context. It is also believed that in an ESL or EFL (English and foreign language) setting, second language learners associate with more second language speakers than native speakers. As a result, knowing L2 variations of English is more significant than knowing native varieties. In addition to Kachru (1983), several linguists advocate for exposing English language learners to as many varieties as possible (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Jenkins, 2006). However, this logic only works with spoken English and can backfire when it comes to written English.

Conclusion

A standard variety, from a pedagogical standpoint, implies consistency and benefits the teaching and learning system in numerous ways. It provides teachers and students with access to a broader selection of materials and language input. Both British and American English have authentic and diversified language input, such as novels, films, and magazines. And this content is a resource for a learner who is intrinsically driven. Furthermore, it allows the learner to acquire the grammar of the language, which aids the learner's writing. Standard grammar and spelling norms should be promoted, even if standard accents should not be promoted in language classrooms. While a standard accent has the potential to limit student capacity and have a negative impact on the learner, encouraging standard spelling and grammar can help the learner both academically and professionally.

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Essay

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

50/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Some identification of key issues from the background reading. You demonstrate reading of relevant literature from a variety of sources but they are fairly outdated. This is fairly well presented, but there are problems with expression and coherence in some parts. You need to proof-read carefully.

It is a satisfactory answer, but the argument needs further development and elaboration.

There is some thought given to selection of material, but the theoretical reading could be extended much further.

Overall a good effort which you can build upon in your next assignment. The style does need to be more academic and we need application of theory.

1. Read more around the subject.

2. Check your syntax and grammar carefully.

3. Try to elaborate on key research into language learning.

4. The references are very limited for this level of study. Check whether there are more recent references. and these will need to be acknowledged fully.



Comment 1

Rather vague.



Comment 2

Who ? Try to be specific.



Comment 3

Clarify? What exactly do you mean here?



Comment 4

vague sweeping statement.



Comment 5

A fair point, but you need to express concisely drawing on detailed references.



Comment 6

for use by second language learners.

Strikethrough.



Comment 8

Why this period of history??



Comment 9

answer incorrectly?



Comment 10

Interesting point which could be elaborated further.

Strikethrough.

Strikethrough.



Comment 13

The number is larger than the population of the UK ??



Comment 14

Isn't this a useful benchmark?

PAGE 4



Comment 15

Useful identification of the main issue, but this could be expressed earlier.

PAGE 5

PAGE 6



Comment 16

Check word count.

PAGE 7



Comment 17

a resource - typo.

PAGE 8



Comment 18

Very dated references.

PAGE 9

PAGE 10

PAGE 11
