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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: WHICH APPROACH SHOULD WE USE IN OUR GHANAIAN CLASSROOMS?

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Abstract:
This paper talks about the approach and the variety of English to be used in our Ghanaian classrooms. English language teaching has witnessed a major boom around the globe in recent times. The continuous spread of English has given rise to different varieties of English language, making it almost impossible to trace the norms for Standard English (SE) (Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Kachru, 1982; Lowenberg, 2000). Research shows that the global spread of English has a significant bearing on English Language Teaching (ELT). Much of this bearing has manifested itself in the lack of a uniform target variety of English for instruction and the prevailing problems in setting suitable teaching goals and objectives commensurate to teaching and learning outcomes. ELT in Ghanaian classrooms has numerous challenges. A closer look at them suggests that the root of many of these problems lies in the unprecedented global spread of English in the last few decades that has given rise to different varieties of English language and the use of social media. A brief explanation in this regard is in order. Different varieties of English mean that ELT can no longer afford to only choose between British or American English as the primary target variety for instruction but can also choose other non-native varieties such as Ghanaian, Nigerian, Indian Englishes and the like. Lastly, ELT in our Ghanaian classrooms should base on a pragmatic and humanistic approach.

Keywords: English language teaching; teaching approaches; Ghanaian classrooms

1. Introduction

English in Ghana has shown formidable resilience as the language of formal education, and a medium for cross-ethnic communication in a predominantly multilingual environment. The language policy for formal education in Ghana has been unstable at the implementation level. At some point in time, it was stated that the mother tongue,

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which actually implies one of those developed for formal education be used as the language of instruction for the first three years of school while English is taught as a subject. From the fourth year, English should be used as the language of instruction and the mother tongue taught as a subject. Dolphyne (1995) states that good spoken English for many Ghanaians is evidence for a school to be considered a good school and so teachers disregard this policy and start teaching English as early as kindergarten. This resulted in the agitation to start with English from kindergarten. Different schools implement this policy differently.

The tensions attendant upon which language to use as a medium of instruction at the lower levels of education appear to be yielding to the logic of complementarities and bilingualism within the local language ecology (Dolphyne, 1995). English in Ghana, as an outer circle phenomenon, has been travelling the delicate expansionist path of innovation, adaptation, and maintenance of standards over the years. The distinctive Ghanaian linguistic and cultural colouration continue to permeate the English language on all levels, including vocabulary, idiomatic usage, and pronunciation (Darko, 2006)

English has come to stay as the official language of the country and is used as the main medium of instruction in schools, and a means to conduct government business. It is used in parliament, in court, in civil service, in the media and in the army and for preaching by many churches, especially in urban areas (Dolphyne, 1995; Darko, 2006). As English has come to stay and many varieties are emerging, one may ask, which of the varieties should we use and what approach can we adopt in our Ghanaian classrooms?

The prevalence of more than one standard variety of any given language may not be entirely unusual. This trend may hold true for various languages in the world such as Arabic, Chinese, French, Greek, and so on. Difficulties in setting a uniform standard variety while teaching these languages as a second or foreign language may parallel those in English. However, what separates the context of the teaching of English from other languages is English's status as the highest stake, most used, and most widespread language the world has ever known (Kachru & Nelson, 1996). Besides, the continuous spread of English worldwide has put it in a unique situation. For example, because of its spread over time, English has become more hybridized and diverse, a phenomenon captured by the term World Englishes. In such an environment, it is natural that English Language Teaching (ELT) at present is more challenging than ever before, especially in our Ghanaian classroom situations.

ELT in the twenty-first century encounters a myriad of problems. For instance, according to an estimate provided by Crystal (1997, cited in Graddol, 1997), in 1995 there were approximately 377 million people using English as their L1, while at the same time there were about 235 million people using English as their second language. Crystal (1997, cited in Graddol, 1999) notes that in 50 years (i.e., from 1995) this balance would shift significantly as the number of people using English as a second or foreign language would almost double. In fact, it is argued that at present, non-native speakers of English have already outnumbered their native counterparts and that native speakers comprise only "*a fifth or less*" of the world's total English users (Lowenberg, 2000).

In spite of this ever-widening spectrum of the English-speaking population, ELT is still mostly controlled (i.e., determining the norms for teaching, designing the syllabus, producing materials, and so on) by native speakers or inner-circle countries. Seidlhofer (2004) refers to this situation as an "*unstable equilibrium*" (p. 209). That is, while non-native speakers have outnumbered their native counterparts, native speakers of English still enjoy the privileges of being "*native*". Native speakers, for instance, are entitled to getting "*special status*" (Graddol, 1999). After all, it is the inner-circle speakers who set the standard norms for English, get jobs that are meant only for "*native speakers*," get a raise or promotion at work just because they identify themselves as native speakers of English (Kirkpatrick, 2007).

At pedagogical levels, the impacts of this phenomenon are quite pervasive. Inner-circle-oriented curriculum design and materials development that show little or no sensitivity to local contexts, developing tests that are incompatible with local teaching and learning goals and objectives, preference for native English speakers for English teaching positions, undue stress on learners for appropriating a particular variety of inner-circle English often disregarding more popular localized varieties are some examples in this connection (Canagarajah, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Phillipson, 1992). As one can see, ELT these days is characterized by numerous tensions on the part of both teachers and students. What is important to note here is that these factors not only impact teachers and learners but also the actual English language teaching practices (ie. approaches and methods). At times, these impacts are so far-reaching that they lead to failures and/or disruptions of English language teaching and learning goals. Therefore, it is important to engage in deliberations on how WE issues permeate ELT.

I have organised my discussions on issues relating to Ghanaian English, standards of English and how they have made it difficult for ELT in our Ghanaian classrooms and also to set a uniform target variety for ELT, curriculum design and materials development, testing, and teacher training. As mentioned above, because there are so many varieties of English (inner-, outer-, and expanding-circle countries), there is always a conflict as to which variety should be used as a standard norm. Again, this paper discusses the difficulties that ELT faces in curriculum design and materials development, testing and marking the examination scripts. Finally, I have made it a point that a pragmatic and humanistic approach to ELT is necessary for our Ghanaian Classrooms.

2. Ghanaian English

English in Ghana has gone and continues to undergo indigenisation as a result of language contact with the Ghanaian languages. This has resulted in what is described as Ghanaian English. Observation of speakers of English in Ghana suggests that there are differences in the use of English between highly educated Ghanaians, averagely educated Ghanaians and those who have no formal education. This observation confirms earlier studies of Ghanaian English by Sey, Kofi Abakah. Sey (1973) opines that there is a correlation between the level of education and the type of English spoken. He identified four levels, ranging from what they described as close to Standard British English to be spoken by the highly educated people to Pidgin English spoken by non-literates. In current times, Pidgin English is also spoken by many young school leavers of secondary, colleges of education, technical universities, universities and other tertiary institutions. Regardless of the type, there are expressions and lexical items that are used by speakers of all levels and can be described as Ghanaian English. Some of these expressions are directly translated from different local languages while lexical items are borrowed and used directly as if they were original English words. Besides the lexical items and expressions, there are accents that are considered Ghanaian. Dolphyne (1995) talks about a distinct accent that can be identified as Ghanaian when one considers the spoken language. In Darko's study on Ghanaian English, he found that Ghanaians themselves feel that there is Ghanaian English (Darko (1991). There are also some non-standard grammatical forms such as "she is having a baby with him", "does I care?", "I don't think far", "she returned back" and "we have many furnitures" etc.

The situation in Ghana is not very different from most places where English is a second language. Stevens (1980) refers to these varieties of English as local forms of English (LFE) and because they are local, Ellis and Tomlinson (1980) recommend that teachers should 'tolerate' errors that do not create incomprehension. Their idea is not new. As early as 1960s, there were already arguments as to whether to accept or reject non-standard varieties of English. While Jenkins, Kachru, Labov etc. advocated for the acceptance of such local varieties, others such as Quirk and others were against it. Scholars in favour of the acceptance of local forms argue that a shared language does not mean a shared culture, therefore non-standard English lexical items and syntactic variations are inevitable. The use of such varieties or forms within their localities makes sense but when work is done in English for an international readership, then there is a challenge. It is in this view that Mepepuo (2000) argues that for international intelligibility, adherence to a common form or variety is needed.

Now, the argument on whether or not to use our local variety in our Ghanaian classrooms is in the public domain. Because Ghanaian English has not been officially accepted in our Ghanaian classrooms, it poses numerous challenges to our students in terms of school examinations. They try to put some of the local varieties in their exams and eventually the outcome is a failure. Even if a student does not use a particular standard (either British or American) but rather mixes them all together in his or her exams, he or she turns to be penalised. The examiners claim that such a student is inconsistent. Meanwhile, English does not have only one standard and people may keep on using their own local varieties, hence making our innocent students fail in their school examinations.

3. What Are the Standards of English and Their Implications in Our Ghanaian Classrooms?

The global spread of English in the last few decades has caused an unprecedented growth of the language. What this means is that English has grown into a great many varieties. An important fact about the rise of different varieties of English is that they are not only limited to the outer- and expanding-circle countries, rather varieties of English are equally prevalent in inner-circle countries (Widdowson, 1994). With so many existing varieties, maintaining standard norms for English to be used as a single reference point has always been a challenge for its users. The issue is particularly critical for practitioners of ELT since they need to set fixed standards for their teaching purposes. Now, someone may ask, "What are the standards of English (SE) that often intrigue ELT practitioners and who are even the owners of English?" After all, standards are typically set by the "owners" of the language.

Widdowson (1994) problematizes the concept of standards and ownership of English. He suggests that language maintenance is a task that is not necessarily endowed upon a particular subset of people who are by default native speakers of the language. In fact, Widdowson argues that the responsibility of maintaining the standard rests upon all of those who speak or use the language. That is, he implicitly concedes that the ownership of the language belongs to all. But in reality, the fact remains that inner-circle countries determine the standards of English. Matsuda (2003), for example, maintains that when the English language that is taught in EFL/ESL follows inner-circle English, it may result in the neglect of local learners' linguistic needs, ignoring their education about the history and politics surrounding the English language, and the failure to empower learners with ownership of English.

Again, the measures used to evaluate the standards vary across time and space. For instance, in Britain, many people relate spelling errors to a non-standard variety of English. For others, it might be the lexical, grammatical, or phonological system. Widdowson (1994) distinguishes between two major functions of language: communal and communicative. While communal functions relate more to the conventions (such as spelling and accent) of a given language, communicative functions have more to do with communication among its users. According to Widdowson, it is at the level of communal function that the concept of "standard" becomes an issue as it allows its users to exclude those who do not follow the conventions. Lowenberg (2000) opines that it allows the followers of the standard variety of English to wield power and prestige over those who do not belong to the "*community*". Kachru (1982) also explains how the concept of "*models*" [roughly synonymous with "*standards*"] can be disadvantageous. In contrast, at the communicative level, the fact remains that as long as communication is accomplished, the English language remains fully functional. This is not to say, however, that the communal function of English should be considered unimportant.

As one can see, the ownership of English and the standards of the language are inseparably related. The concept of SE is relative to how the native speakers define the term to maintain its communal functions. As discussed above, no matter how important standards are for maintaining communal integrity, they may not simply serve any purpose in accomplishing communicative functions. In the current scenarios in which English language teaching and learning take place, it is the communicative function that matters the most to both learners and teachers (Alptekin, 2002; Rajagopalan, 2004). Since the main purpose of most English language education is to make learners communicatively competent, addressing the communal function of English, making students learn about the nuanced conventions or standards of the language may be a misfit in the long list of ELT goals and objectives.

This approach to English language teaching/ learning is in contradiction with the interests of most native speakers. One of the most commonly made arguments by native speakers is that a lack of standards allows a proliferation of what they label as deficit English. One may notice that this argument involves more material than practical considerations. An example of this is that it is predominantly the native speakers who control, design, and produce the majority of ELT materials worldwide and provide themselves with a huge share of the ELT market (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Therefore, complete control and ownership of English are of significant interest to them. However, considering the volume of the global spread of English in the twenty-first century, restricting the language to native speakers is as impractical as it is inappropriate.

Kachru's (1982, 1985) concentric model sets the tone for the conceptualization of what is now popularly known as World Englishes (WE), the trend has moved on and continued to promote the importance of viewing English as a language of the world, owned by the peoples around the globe. Over the years, English has been "*the most widely taught, read and spoken language the world has ever known*" (Kachru & Nelson, 1996, p. 71). Now, researchers recognise different varieties of English based on various linguistic levels such as vocabulary and grammar, and accent (Strevens, 1983; cited in Kachru & Nelson, 1996). What binds it together is its common communicative goal. Indeed, helping learners develop communicative skills in English has been one of the primary teaching goals in ELT curricula. However, with so many different indigenous varieties of English (ie. Ghanaian English, Indian English, Nigerian English, Singaporean English, etc.) coupled with conflicting learning needs for passing standardized English tests and communicating with different subsets of people, setting appropriate teaching goals in ELT and teaching communicative skills is not an easy task. A corollary of this has been a tremendous impetus for the codification of the characteristics of different varieties of English, which has resulted in new research agenda in World Englishes (WE).

Efforts have been well underway to describe and codify varieties of English language spoken by non-native speakers. Some of the notable projects in this area are: Jenkins' "Lingua Franca Core" (LFC) (Jenkins, 1998, 2002); work on English as a Lingua Franca Pragmatics by Blommaert and Verschueren (1991) and Spencer-Oatey (2000); and Seidlhofer's work on the description of lexico-grammatical issues of English as a Lingua Franca. Although different researchers may be in disagreement with each other over the meanings of the terms such as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) or English as an

International Language (EIL), it must be kept in mind that they are intended to serve a common purpose—to underscore the importance of describing English used by non-native speakers and to come up with a uniform reference point for the English language used by outer-and expanding-circle countries (Jenkins, 2006). Research in this area of English studies has increased exponentially in recent times to signal a welcome shift from a monocentric approach to English to a pluricentric one (Jenkins, 2006). Interestingly, this shift of approach to English language studies is directly related to the issue of ownership of the English language. While a monocentric approach would give more power to the native speakers, their norms and ways of using English; pluricentricity, by contrast, is everyone's norm, everyone's usage. This invariably puts the custodians of English (to use Widdowson's, 1994:39 words), "*the native speakers, in a less powerful position with regard to the future course of the English language*".

Graddol's (1997) observation regarding the ownership of English may be relevant at this point. In the overview of his book *The Future of English,* Graddol predicts "*significant global trends – in economics, technology and culture…*" (p. 2) that may transform the world in the twenty-first century and cause a new world order. Graddol further points out that ultimately the native speakers of English might be uncomfortable with the effects of these changes on the English language. Based upon various facts, trends, and ideas, Graddol's prediction has several implications regarding the status of English—most crucially, its ownership. Because the spread of English is occurring so fast and these days so many non-native speakers use the language, the control over English may go into the hands of the non-native speakers. Control here does not necessarily indicate hogging the language as a possession. The measure of control of English in this case is determined by the sheer number of people using the language. As mentioned earlier, non-native speakers of English have already outnumbered their native counterparts. As a result, non-native to non-native interactions in English is far more common than native to non-native interactions. This alone has significant implications relating to the concept of SE. For example, with the continuing rise of non-native speakers of English and interactions among themselves, it is believed that English will be used more for its communicative functions, leaving standards to be of less significance. In fact, the new world order might just compel them to forgo the purists' version of English for a more hybridized and impure version of World English, known by terms such as ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) and EIL (English as an International Language).

Although several research projects are aimed at codifying different levels of ELF/EIL (Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2004), it is by no means an easy task for various reasons. First, it is extremely difficult to come up with a uniform set of characteristics with so many varieties around. Second, it is also difficult to devise an objective set of principles of ELF/EIL for pedagogical purposes. The intelligibility principle (Levis, 2005), for example, has been a long-held reference point in the practice of pronunciation teaching, although it is widely believed that there is no single and universally-agreed-upon definition and measure of "intelligibility" in language teaching (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Jenkins, 2000). Finally, even if researchers in the field successfully come up with proper descriptions of the characteristics of ELF and EIL, in the end, it is feared that it may only yield a set of prescriptive formulae for ELT, much like what native-speaking varieties of English have done over the years. This, of course, is contradictory to the spirit of a pluricentric view of WE in ELT.

In fact, it is true that the monocentric, "*native-speaker-oriented"* perspective of SE is extremely difficult to do away with. Seidlhofer (2005), for example, maintains that the "*Anglo-Saxon attitudes*" are still extremely prevalent in English language education around the world. That is, while on the surface we have moved away from monocentrism, in reality, pluricentrism is still to be materialized at various levels of English language teaching and learning. Seidlhofer (2005) calls this phenomenon "*submission to native-speaker norms*" (p. 170). This tendency of submission is so strong that in certain non-native contexts educators are establishing the so-called "*English village*" in order to immerse non-native English learners to approximate the native standards (Jenkins, 2006).

As one can see, ELT in this time, particularly in Ghana suffers from a lack of a uniform variety of English for instructional purposes. The discussions above illustrate how issues such as "*standards*" and "*ownership*" of English play significant roles in ELT today. Not only has the use of social media, but the continuous spread of English has also been a tremendous boost for the recognition of non-native varieties of English as viable alternatives to inner-circle English for ELT. In spite of a considerable amount of work in this regard, it seems as though it is going to take a while before such a pluricentric approach to English becomes the norm rather than the exception in ELT.

4. The Use of Instructional Materials and Curriculum Development

Setting a uniform target variety is important for English language instruction. Designing effective curricula and developing suitable materials are also part of important considerations in ELT. With an ever-expanding landscape of English, ELT curriculum and materials need to be innovative to meet the burgeoning complexities surrounding English language pedagogy. It is often difficult to make ELT curriculum and materials effective but it is good to select them through your local content.

Innovation and flexibility are what everybody needs to deal with the new challenges one encounters on a daily basis. Like other spheres of life, this phenomenon is applicable in ELT as well. It is important to consider the adaptability factors in ELT. Factors that would make various aspects of ELT curriculum and materials, methods and approaches serve the desired purposes most efficiently. Hadley (1999) reports on novelty in ELT curricula at the tertiary level in some Japanese colleges and universities. To keep up with the need for effective English language pedagogy and at the discretion of the Japanese Ministry of Education, these colleges and universities introduced what Hadley describes as "innovative" ELT curricula. Some of the characteristics of these curricula are: only English language usage in classrooms (also known as immersion) and no teacher-centered classes. Students may express themselves the way they wanted, eg. laughing, joking, and expressing their opinions in English (Fukuda & Sasaki, 1995; cited in Hadley, 1999, p. 93). Furthermore, English content courses taught exclusively in English were introduced.

As one examines the characteristics of "*innovative*" ELT curricula, several interesting phenomena emerge. Clearly, making learners communicatively competent is an objective that was taken seriously by administrators at these institutions. Furthermore, there is an attempt to provide learners with as much exposure to English as possible, by creating English-speaking environments within a non-native context. While it is heartening to see efforts for innovation in ELT, one cannot help wondering about the potential challenges associated with it. For instance, implementing the mandatory use of English at all times may help improve learners' spoken abilities, but the question remains as to how an instructor may objectively write and give a test on such open-ended skills acquired by learners. What about learners' reading and writing skills? Do the administrators consider them entirely irrelevant to learners for effective communication in English?

Drawing on the "functional" dimensions of language use, Coffin (2003) recommends that curriculum designers or language teachers should organise and structure the language curriculum in ways that would fall in line with the "*theory of language as 'social action'*" (p. 11). She identifies four areas of language use on which learners need to build their knowledge, namely, text structure, experiential, interpersonal, and textual grammar. Each of these four areas serves various aspects of language use in everyday life. Knowledge of text structure, for example, would help learners with different types of written and spoken texts in different cultures and contexts. Knowledge of experiential grammar provides learners with grammatical resources for representing the world, making them aware of the people or things, processes, and circumstances involved in language use. And, while interpersonal grammar relates to knowledge of the successful incorporation of linguistic choices based on various social relations and attitudes, textual grammar helps learners organize the message so as to facilitate the smooth flow of information (Coffin, 2003).

Coffin (2003) again argues that a careful and systematic analysis of these four areas of language use can provide important insights into devising syllabuses for English language learners. What is interesting in Coffin's (2003) argument is that she proposes the identification of a set of spoken and written genres that directly relate to the social and cultural contexts in which language learners are most likely to operate. These genres then could be incorporated into the language syllabus. While Coffin's (2003) acknowledgement of social and cultural sensitivity renders support to the pluricentrism that is central to the discussion of a World Englishes perspective of ELT, there are potential shortcomings to her notion of ELT syllabus. English education in the twenty-first century has crossed all national borders. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to devise a localized, context-specific syllabus that would address all possible social and cultural contexts in which English learners would operate. Also, for the most part, the major theme of ELT in our time is to acquire communicative competence.

Adding second language acquisition perspectives to the current discussions on ELT, Ellis (1993) argues for structural syllabuses in English language programmes. Structural syllabuses would incorporate structures of the language at various levels (e.g., phonology, morphology, syntax) for English language learners. The rationale behind Ellis' argument rests upon the claim that grammar teaching should be done as part of "*consciousness-raising*" act among learners. In short, consciousness-raising refers to instilling an understanding of the various "*formal and functional properties*" of the target language in learners' minds. This process of consciousness-raising is compatible with the L2 acquisition theory of "*learnability*" (Ellis, 1993). While Ellis' accounts add interesting L2 acquisition perspectives to ELT syllabus design, it must be remembered that there have been long-drawn debates regarding whether or not grammar instruction helps language learning in the first place. Furthermore, much of English language learning in these recent times occurs in informal, out-of-class settings and learners are generally exposed to a myriad of language input, derived from different varieties of English in various contexts. Therefore, ELT syllabuses that do not account for contextual variables such as these may turn out to be ineffective.

As research aims to reach a common ground for the intelligibility of different varieties of English across the world, Jenkins (1998) presents some core phonological issues to be included in the pronunciation syllabus of English language programs. Jenkins identifies problems with setting the unrealistic goal of approximating native speakers (either British or American) norms in the syllabus. Instead, she argues for a compromise norm of pronunciation of English as an International Language (EIL). EIL norms would have three core areas of instruction namely segmental, nuclear stress, and the effective use of articulatory setting. Jenkins again maintains that EIL norms of pronunciation would promote international intelligibility, freedom to express EIL speakers' own variety, and stop approximation of native speakers' norms. Jenkins' argument, while persuasive, it is just a proposal and likewise, we must examine it carefully. As one would imagine, codifying all pronunciation problems with non-native speakers of English is an extremely difficult task. Also, it is quite daunting to address the pronunciation difficulties of non-native speakers with so many different L1s and to come up with a uniform set of core pronunciation instruction areas. All in all, one may see that designing an effective English curriculum entails a great deal of difficulty.

Since curriculum design and materials development go hand in hand, failing to shed some light on materials development, this section of the paper would remain incomplete. Good materials are essential for achieving the goals and objectives stated in the syllabus. Lately, the concept of authentic texts is quite pervasive in ELT circles (Little, Devitt, & Singleton, 1988). It is believed that *"…exposing students to the language of the real world will help them acquire an effective receptive competence in the target language*" (Guariento & Morley, 2001, p. 347). It is also believed that authentic texts bridge the gap between students' linguistic knowledge and their capacity to use the language in real-life situations (Wilkins, 1976 as cited in Guariento & Morley, 2001). Literature in the field suggests that, in spite of their supposed effectiveness, authentic texts or materials are not devoid of their own share of problems. One of the problems voiced by Guariento and Morley is the mismatch between authentic texts and language tasks. They argue that authentic materials are of no help unless they can derive authentic responses from language learners (Guariento & Morley, 2001).

This phenomenon is especially true in the case of English language materials. In ELT, for example, learners' tasks are typically based upon guessing rather than a complete control and understanding of the tasks as students cannot relate the tasks to the contexts (i.e., students normally use materials that come from contexts such as Britain or USA that are completely foreign to them). The claim that authentic materials stimulate motivation in language tasks also needs to be considered with caution. Peacock (1997) shows how authentic materials were found less interesting than artificial materials. On a separate note, Wong, Kwok and Choi (1995) maintain that the effectiveness of authentic materials depends upon, among other things, the teacher's knowledge of each student's ability, student's temperament and readiness and the teacher's judgment on manipulation of the materials. González (2010), in this regard, argues for an incorporation of local teacher educators' voices into the design of curricula and the development of materials.

As one can see, materials by themselves cannot involve students in tasks for language learning. It requires a great deal of perseverance and hard work on the part of the teachers. In fact, without teachers' conscientious efforts, it is extremely difficult for language learners to make the best use of the materials. The bottom line is that unless more localized-cultural and context-specific materials are used in ELT classrooms, it is difficult for both teachers and learners to relate to the language tasks. Matsuda (2003) fittingly argues that textbooks should provide English language learners more exposure to English as an International Language (EIL) by incorporating more characters from outer and expanding-circle countries. In order for the successful incorporation of EIL components into the materials, textbook writers or materials developers must be conscientious of the appropriate use of the characters and activities or tasks so that they derive authentic responses from learners.

5. What and How to Test?

Tests are an integral part of any language program. No matter how undesirable tests are, for both teachers and learners, there should be some form of tests in order for teachers to assess learners' achievement and to evaluate the effectiveness of instructions. Furthermore, tests may be required for gate-keeping measures for various purposes (e.g., jobs, immigration, pay raise, etc.). More often than not, language tests entail high-stakes choices. Tests in ELT are particularly complicated, at least on two counts: First, there are an unprecedented number of test-takers, more generally, users which include both test givers and test-takers, and all others who use test scores for some reasons of English and the stakes involved in these tests are enormous. Second, as mentioned earlier, there is no single reference point for SE, making both teachers and learners grapple with the design and preparation for these tests. It is the latter that relates more directly to various WE phenomena. Because there is no uniform reference point for SE, it is difficult for test givers to design and administer tests that would truly test learners' knowledge for communication in the pluricentric world. Furthermore, although there are various local varieties of English, they are invariably excluded from most high-stakes proficiency tests in English. At the local level, too, teachers are compounded by questions such as how to test learners' proficiency in English objectively and what skills reflect learners' actual proficiency.

Hamp-Lyons and Davies (2008) maintain that high-stakes English proficiency tests such as TOEFL and IELTS are often condemned on the grounds that they are biased and unfair to test takers who follow exonormative standards. The contention revolves around the fact that an International English (IE) view of the situation suggests that there is and should be only one norm of English, the norm of the educated native speakers of English, the more liberal WE is that to impose an IE norm on non-native English speakers, many of whom already have local standard or norms (such as Ghanaian English, Nigerian English, Singaporean English, Indian English etc.), is discriminatory (Hamp- Lyons & Davies, 2008).

Additionally, though high-stakes proficiency tests of English such as IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC, etc. are often claimed to be international in their scope of potential test-takers and the varieties of English tested, Chalhoub-Deville and Wigglesworth (2005) express their reservations about such claims. While it is true that IELTS has an international partnership (i.e., University of Cambridge, The British Council, and IDP Australia) for developing tests, it still fails to provide a uniform reference point as to what should be considered an international knowledge base for English (Chalhoub-Deville & Wigglesworth, 2005). The same is true about TOEFL. For instance, although TOEFL's purpose statement endorses the use of the TOEFL scores by various institutions such as government agencies around the world, its research agenda and test design and development do not support the incorporation of such uses of English (Chalhoub-Deville & Wigglesworth, 2005). Test of Spoken English (TSE), a component of TOEFL, supposedly measures test takers' proficiency in communicating in English. However, Chalhoub-Deville and Wigglesworth maintain that the design, development, and research are oriented by and focused on North American contexts, ignoring the vast majority of other contexts around the world in which the test results are to be used.

High-stakes proficiency tests aside, localized English tests too are compounded by various phenomena of WE, for the most part, by the fact that there are so many varieties and norms of English. As a result, while writing tests, local test administrators fail to set the appropriate target model of English. Additionally, because there is no uniform variety of English to be used as a reference point, our students often go through enormous stress as well.

Another level of problem emerges when test givers have to decide what kind of proficiency is to be tested. Generally speaking, one's language proficiency entails a holistic measure of one's competence in the target language. However, in reality, especially after the inception of the communicative method of language teaching, English educators are caught-up between testing learners' communicative competence and discrete-point grammatical knowledge. In outer and expanding-circle countries, it is still not certain whether it is enough to test learners' communicative competence as an appropriate measure for proficiency in English, since testing communicative competence by itself may not be able to provide a true indication of learners' writing and reading skills necessary for various academic and professional contexts. That is, someone who is communicatively competent in non-academic, informal situations may still have difficulty in reading and writing tasks at academic and professional levels.

Relating to standards of English, they pose a different kind of problem in testing spoken English. As mentioned earlier, because there is no uniform reference point for SE pronunciation, it is extremely difficult for test administrators to set uniform grading rubrics for testing pronunciation. Although Levis' (2005) "*intelligibility principle*" may be considered to be a compromise position in assessing pronunciation, researchers argue that there is no universally agreed-upon measure for "*intelligibility*" of speech (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Jenkins, 2000). In fact, there are so many variables that affect intelligibility measurement that it is almost impossible to obtain a truly objective score of intelligibility. Finally, most second language acquisition research shows that a foreign accent is a natural phenomenon for post-puberty learners of any given language. Therefore, there are questions regarding whether or not it is practical to set native-like pronunciation norms for testing spoken English.

As one can see, testing in ELT can be extremely difficult. It is evident from the discussions above that many of the problems occur due to the unavailability of a uniform, universally-agreed-upon standard variety of English that can be modelled while designing tests. Additionally, diverse global communication scenarios as well as new needs and new demands coupled with an ever-changing landscape of English language because of its continuous spread over the last few decades make it challenging for educators to determine English language testing norms. Needless to say, this continues to confound English language teachers in their classroom teaching and beyond.

6. Some Challenges of English Language Teachers and The Use of English Language in Teacher Training Programmes

English teachers these days are confronted with unprecedented challenges that make their job difficult. Because teachers play a central role in language pedagogy both in and outside the classroom, the way they go about doing their tasks has a profound impact on ultimate teaching and learning outcomes. Literature in the field suggests how English teachers' jobs have become complex with the emerging norms and varieties of English across the globe. Additionally, English teachers have to work within various local exigencies, which keep changing across contexts and cultures and give rise to further challenges (Baumgartner, 2007). Overall, in order for English teachers to be successful in their job, it is imperative that they are aware of the various nuances of ELT at present.

Matsuda (2006) simply maintains that changing the curriculum alone does not help materialize the changes in ELT. Since teachers play a crucial role in carrying out the actual teaching activities, teacher training is an important process that must be given due importance.

Non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) constitute about 80 percent of the total English teachers in the world (Canagarajah, 1999). Considering the current status of English language education, it is neither practical nor possible to employ only native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) to teach English (Pasternak & Bailey, 2004). What this means is that NNESTs need to be properly trained and educated with the current theories of language and methods of language teaching. In addition, they must also be abreast of the latest language acquisition theories so that they can employ the requisite knowledge of ELT.

This brings us to the core issue of teacher education. How are language proficiency and professional qualifications viewed in ELT? It is indeed an intriguing issue that has left scholars in the field occupied in debate for years. Pasternak and Bailey's (2004) view on the matter is that language proficiency is only one aspect of English language teachers' professional qualification. English teachers must also have appropriate professional preparations to be able to teach (Phillipson 1992). They must have declarative knowledge (knowledge about the subject area, in this case, the English language), as well as an understanding of various facts relating to educational psychology, second language acquisition, and current socio-political events. They must also have procedural knowledge (i.e., knowledge about how to or ability to do things), in this case, the actual teaching. Pasternak and Bailey (2004) maintain that English language teachers should be able to accomplish at least three key things: Knowing about (1) how to use the target language; (2) how to teach in a culturally sensitive way; and (3) how to behave in a target culture (p. 158). As explained in Pasternak and Bailey's accounts, ELT in our times is much more complicated than ever. English teachers need much more than just being native speakers of English. In fact, being native English speakers and having proficiency in English do not necessarily go hand in hand (Pasternak & Bailey, 2004). Furthermore, even if an English teacher is proficient in English, that alone does not qualify him or her to be a good teacher. He or she needs much more professional preparation to be eligible for teaching. This means that associating native English speakers with an automatic choice for English teaching positions is quite problematic since native English teachers may be completely foreign to various local needs and preferences.

Snow, Kamhi-Stein, and Brinton (2006) outline important points that need to be taken into consideration for both pre- and in-service English teacher training programmes. They stress that the immediate context of language teaching and the socio-cultural factors should be important criteria while devising teacher training programs for English-as-a-lingua-franca settings. Indeed, contextual variables are too important to be ignored in the teacher education curriculum since teachers have to work under various local constraints. Snow, Kamhi-Stein, and Brinton's further recommendations include going beyond the inner-circle variety of English both in teacher training programmess and classroom teaching and deconstructing the myth of the native speaker. They also argue that while there can be a collaboration between local and outside experts, professional development should be guided by local norms. González (2010), for example, shows how Columbian teachers and teacher educators are gaining "*respected space*" in ELT and displacing some traditional voices of world-renowned scholars.

Overall, literature in the field recognises the importance of promoting local norms for the English language in teacher training programmes. There is also enough indication for going beyond inner-circle varieties of English and training English teachers to value local varieties of the language (Snow, Kamhi-Stein, & Brinton, 2006). However, the fact remains that it is difficult to entirely do away with inner-circle-centric norms, partly because in many cases teacher education programs are either funded or administered by inner-circle English language educators (Snow, Kamhi-Stein, & Brinton, 2006). A corollary of this is that English teacher training objectives, materials, or even the training itself rarely addresses context-specific needs. In fact, inner-circle-centric ideologies are so profoundly embedded into the teacher training curricula that native-speaking norms are automatically transmitted into the training activities. Since there is still a lack of a well-laid-out and comprehensive non-native-speaking English teacher training programme, realistically it is going to take a lot of time before one can move beyond the inner-circle norms.

As with the three other areas I discussed previously, teacher training programs are heavily dependent upon inner-circle norms. Although literature abounds arguing for a pluricentric, all-encompassing ELT approach that would recognize non-inner-circle varieties of English, the accounts above show that while we are well underway to that end, problems are still prevalent. In order to take ELT forward, both educators and theorists in the field must recognise these facts sooner than later.

7. A Pragmatic Approach to ELT in Ghanaian Classrooms

A pragmatic approach to ELT considers the "*do-ability*" issues in teaching and all relevant tasks. It is evident from the accounts above that ELT in our time is complex. Therefore, the most viable option for educators would be to first determine the "*do-ability"* criteria for ELT. An evaluation of the English language teaching goals against the do-ability factors would help teachers or administrators set more realistic targets for themselves.

So, what would be the procedures for determining the do-ability criteria in ELT? How would an inventory of do-ability criteria help ELT practitioners better in Ghanaian classrooms? How would such a move help re-conceptualize the priorities of ELT in our Ghanaian classrooms and to what benefits? One can begin by considering Widdowson's accounts discussed earlier as a starting point. ELT practitioners should focus more on the communicative functions of English rather than its communal functions (Widdowson, 1994). That is, focusing on communicative functions would allow the users of English, native and non-native alike, to become more tolerant and respectful to each other, to accept the realities regarding the current status of the English language. Considering the vast landscape of English, finding a common ground for communication is understandably not easy. For instance, a huge majority of English language users would be concerned about the intelligibility and comprehensibility of English interlocutors' speech, communication failures, misunderstanding and/ or other potential scenarios thereof. However, as Canagarajah (2013) suggests, showing tolerance and respect to each other emanating from the realization of the current status of English can help enhance mutual understanding to a large extent. It would also help erase the myth of non-native speakers' inability to communicate in English in challenging situations. Promoting the communicative functions would also help break the jinx of the native and non-native dichotomy and broaden the perspectives of the users of English across the world.

This entails that more awareness and recognition of the enormity of the non-native speaking population need to be firmly established. We can hope that knowledge of the current status of English would empower non-native speakers by instilling confidence in them and helping generate more neutral attitudes toward speakers of English worldwide. Although the current efforts in the literature to describe English speakers from the outer- and expanding-circle as speakers of English as a lingua franca (ELF) or of English as an international language (EIL) provide alternative perspectives on the ongoing conundrums regarding the issue, these terms are by themselves discriminatory. Instead, a more pragmatic and meaningful approach would be to describe all English speakers within a single bracket as "English speakers," in which case, all English speakers would be known as "English speakers" only, without a string attached to them. It is only at this point that one can expect a true change of attitudes towards and efforts for the accommodation of all English speakers regardless of their L1 backgrounds.

A rather more obvious and less drastic measure would be to train English teachers within the latest language acquisition theories and perspectives on WE. Efficient English teachers are central to ELT; therefore, efforts must be made for educating English teachers with up-to-date theories of language. Furthermore, it must also be established that professional expertise is much more important than language proficiency. That is, proficiency in English alone does not qualify someone for an English teaching position (Phillipson, 1992). Teachers' professional expertise—knowledge about the subject area plus an understanding of various facts relating to educational psychology, second language acquisition, and current socio-political events as well as the ability to deliver the knowledge should be the sole criteria for determining professional expertise. Local norms for professional development as well as more universal standards must be incorporated into teacher training programmes.

A pragmatic approach to ELT in line with the accounts above is necessary in order for making English language pedagogy more accessible and viable. It is imperative that the practitioners in the field shake off all limiting factors in order for ELT to assume a more progressive agenda to take English language teaching and learning moving forward. Eliminating all barriers and embracing diversities should be the driving principles for ELT to sustain its growth and vitality in our Ghanaian classrooms.

8. A Humanistic Approach to ELT in Ghanaian Classrooms

The concept of a humanistic approach has been part of educational theories and practices for a long time. The efficacy of such an approach lies in explaining some of the problems relating to ELT raised in this paper. I adapt renowned educational theorist Nimrod Aloni's notions on humanistic education in my attempt to delineate a humanistic approach to ELT (Aloni, 1997). According to Aloni, a humanistic approach to education must be committed to the enhancement of human freedom and growth, to the realisation and perfection of human potentialities, and to an ethical code that places the highest value on the dignity of humanity, as an end in itself, in relation to which all political, religious, economic, and ideological doctrines are regarded as means to its enhancement. Taking Aloni's accounts, I suggest that a humanistic approach to ELT relates to considerations about setting goals and assigning tasks in ELT that are "humanly" possible. Such ELT goals and tasks must help the realisation and perfection of human potentialities rather than acting as political, economic, and ideological means to subjugate English learners. Literature in the field suggests that English language teaching or learning has traditionally targeted native-like proficiency. However, apart from its underlying political and ideological ramifications, setting such a target is problematic on at least two counts: First, it is clear from the discussions in this paper that there is no universally-accepted single reference point for SE. Second, research shows that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, especially for post-puberty language learners, to achieve native-like proficiency (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Why should ELT course goals and objectives then persist with an elusive "*native-likeness*," approximating proficiencies that are ostensibly impossible to achieve while leaving out more viable alternatives for acquiring communicative competence? Aloni's humanistic education views learning to be the properly human way of developing natural talents and capacities (Gadamer, 1975, p. 11, as cited in Aloni, 1997).

In this connection, one may consider the example of the high-stakes English proficiency tests have. Although TOEFL and IELTS scores are widely used as standard measures for proficiency in English, for the most part, these tests are designed to measure either American or British norms of English. While it is well-accepted that the bulk of the communication in English in today's world occurs among non-native English speakers, to what extent these tests are justifiable for measuring English proficiency remains a contentious issue (Canagarajah, 2006). A poignant direct effect of this on test-takers is that they attempt to approximate the native speakers' norms (primarily to pass these tests), knowing that in real-life situations they are more likely to communicate with non-native speakers of English. What is more, definitions of the terms such as "*native-likeness*" or "*nativeness*" themselves are relative to contexts as they vary even within native-speaking societies, and there is no uniform measure for native-likeness and nativeness (Levis, 2005). A humanistic approach that aligns with the terms and definitions stated above rejects such objectives of ELT on the ground that they are devoid of "*self-generation, self-nourishment, and self-creation*" (Aloni, 1997, p.102). The most logical goal for ELT courses should be such that English learning helps learners communicate successfully– that is, the learners are able to accomplish the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions in English (Berns, 1990).

Furthermore, a blind approximation of native-like proficiency or a specific standard for English language teaching and learning denounces the fundamental human spirits that crave the values and ideologies specific to the native culture (Canagarajah, 1999). González (2010) reports how the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as the standard in English language education policy in Colombia encountered resistance from students and teachers alike. A humanistic approach to ELT would promote sensitivities toward learners' native cultures, self-regulated development and spontaneous exercise of natural powers (Aloni, 1997). Such an approach would also help both teachers and learners appreciate diversity and pluricentrism–central characteristics of WE. After all, considering the current landscape of English, no one can confine his or her perspectives to the native-speaking norms of English anymore.

Finally, if the purpose of having native-speaking norms of English is exclusion rather than inclusion, such a purpose is completely uncalled-for (Widdowson, 1994). A pluricentric approach to English is what the world needs most, whereby diversity would stand for a welcome change, not as a basis for discrimination, intended or unintended. Only a humanistic approach to ELT can ensure an end to this effect.

9. Conclusion

So far in this paper, I have problematised some of the contentious issues surrounding ELT from WE perspectives. My discussions looked at the difficulties in five major areas of concern, namely, Ghanaian English, setting a uniform standard variety for ELT, curriculum design and materials development, testing, and teacher training programmes. Literature on these issues indicates that much work has already been done. However, one must say that ELT in Ghanaian classrooms faces stiffer challenges than ever before. Tasks related to ELT are constantly confounded by the current trend of the global spread of English, emerging new stakes coupled with diverse, and at times, conflicting expectations of the various stakeholders. While it is extremely difficult to come and term with the challenges that ELT faces, I further discussed what I consider to be a pragmatic and humanistic approach to ELT.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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