

ELT Research Papers 16.04

Which English? Whose English? Teachers' beliefs, attitudes and practices

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Abstract

Academic debates about suitable target models of English continue to rage around the relative merits of world Englishes alternatives to the hegemony of 'native speaker' standards. However, research has not yet engaged sufficiently with actual practice related to models, targets and standards. Gauging teachers' opinions and perspectives on varieties presents a way of benchmarking some current realities, as seen by practitioners. In the present study, participants in five locations (China, Thailand, India, Spain and Turkey) were asked to reflect on their experiences as teachers and learners of English, and to state which variety or varieties they learned, which are taught in the contexts they work in, which they would like to teach, what they understood about the nature of available varieties, and which they thought will serve as targets in future in the contexts they work in. The methodology included focus groups (n=71) and classroom recordings. Participants were not themselves first-language speakers – the literature is generally under-representative of their views but suggests a relative disempowerment of this group relative to first-language English speakers. Findings suggested that world Englishes alternatives have some appeal at an intellectual level, but that the native speaker hegemony continues, although our findings did not suggest that this leads in itself to a feeling of disempowerment among second-language teachers.

1

Introduction

Our aim in this study was to address the research gap between recent academic debates about suitable target varieties of English for learners, and the ‘Englishes’ that are actually taught and learned worldwide. There has been an increasing advocacy in some quarters (e.g. Jenkins, 2007a) for English as a lingua franca (ELF), which has been characterised as a flexible mode of communication between non-native English speakers. World English alternatives such as local varieties like Indian English are also being advocated by some as models which are comprehensible by, and accessible to, local learners and which are grounded in the real-life usage of people in everyday discourse across a range of domains. Such advocacies are at least partly a reaction to previously prevailing ‘native speaker-ist’ (Holliday, 2006) models. Such models, it has been argued, have a tendency to idealise ‘native’ English speakers’ usages, and disempower non-native English speaker teachers and learners, and so contribute to the perpetuation of a sociopolitical and economic hegemony of ‘core’ English-speaking countries such as the UK, the USA and Australia (Jenkins, 2007b).

The limited amount of available evidence of which English or Englishes are actually taught and learned in different locations worldwide provides a very unclear picture. In national language-educational policy terms, there appears to be little clear guidance, and a default valorisation of ‘native speaker’ varieties through their widespread use in teaching and testing materials (especially for TOEFL and IELTS) produced by major UK and US publishers (Jenkins, 2007a). The views of teachers, themselves likely to be key models, informants and brokers concerning which English is taught, are particularly neglected in the debate (Seidlhofer, 2003; Young and Walsh, 2010). Additionally, little, if any, classroom-based research has attempted to identify target English for learners, or consider how teachers and learners orientate themselves towards the different available targets.

In response to this gap in our knowledge, this investigation focused on six closely related research questions:

1. Which variety or varieties of English did teachers of the language themselves learn? It is likely that the variety teachers were exposed to themselves might influence their attitudes. Any change between the variety learned and the variety taught may provide useful data concerning the reasons for these changes which may not be apparent in, for example, policy documents. Also of interest here is how conscious, or otherwise, teachers are or were about the different available varieties.
2. Which variety or varieties do they currently teach? Here, we are concerned with which local and/or transnational factors influence a choice of variety – factors might include national curricula; supranational guidance such as the Common European Framework of Reference; published support materials such as textbooks; national or international examinations; or the expectations and needs of learners, themselves informed by their own beliefs, attitudes and knowledge of the available alternatives. Of further interest is the extent to which teachers feel autonomous in making choices, and any differences between the views of teachers and learners in different locations.
3. Which variety would the teachers like to teach? The reasons behind this preference – attitudinal or pragmatic – were also of interest.
4. What do teachers understand about the nature(s) of available varieties? Evidence suggests a lack of knowledge, outside the academic community, of the nature(s) of ELF, and a still-prevalent idealisation of exonormative native speaker varieties. Additionally, the extent to which local varieties are perceived as being ‘standard’ enough to serve as models for learners has been debated.
5. Which variety or varieties do teachers expect to dominate in the contexts in which they will operate in future? Here we aimed to evaluate teachers’ perceptions of current trends in their localities as well as more long-term factors which might influence choices.
6. To what extent does the language used in classrooms conform to any particular model or target? Here, we are concerned with the extent to which the use of a particular variety may influence classroom practices and help (or hinder) learning and learning opportunities.

2

Literature review

Our study is centrally situated in debates about the ‘what’ of English language teaching. We draw extensively on literature relating to the nature and the extent of the actual use of the different available varieties, and on the literature relating to teacher cognition (i.e. what teachers think, know and believe, and what they actually do).

2.1 Available targets – models, modes and varieties¹ of English

Until relatively recently, a native speaker-ist model prevailed as an aim for learners worldwide (e.g. van Ek, 1986), but the model is being increasingly questioned (Holliday, 2006). Criticism has related to two broad general shortcomings in the native speaker model (Young and Sachdev, 2011). First, that the native speaker is an unreal, unattainable and idealised figure, whose usage conforms only very loosely, if at all, to the way the vast majority of Americans, Anglophone Canadians, Britons or Australians actually use the language structurally or phonologically (e.g. Alptekin, 2002; Cook, 1999; Kramsch, 1993; Leung, Harris and Rampton, 1997). Subtirelu (2013) argues that one of the main reasons is the fact that the native speaker model sets unattainable goals for language learners as there are maturational constraints on language learning abilities of individuals (Munro, 2008). These constraints make it impossible for learners to reach the targets set by native speaker models (Cook, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2007) and this will consequently reduce learners’ motivation. The second main area of criticism relates to demographics and English language usage. An English native speaker model is based on the (supposed) usage of an increasingly small minority of English language users worldwide, currently estimated at around 350 million, compared with over a billion non-native speaker users. Projections indicate that the number of non-native speakers will double by 2020 compared to the figure in 2000, while NS figures will remain generally stable (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006). As a consequence, the predominance of interactions between non-native English speakers in English will grow, increasing the imperative for learners to prepare for interaction with other non-native speakers rather

than with native speakers. An example of this position is in the workplace, where, increasingly, the majority of users of English are operating in a multilingual context in which it is common to find a range of varieties being used.

Various terms exist with which to frame English language resources which can serve as shared means of intercultural communication between speakers with different primary linguacultural background. These may be able to transcend the difficulties associated with native speaker models. Local or regional Englishes (Indian English, Nigerian English, Singaporean English, Malaysian English, etc.) are features of the linguistic landscape, particularly in post-colonial contexts, and have been the focus of much recent research interest, particularly in sociolinguistics (Kirkpatrick and Sussex, 2012; Jenks and Lee, 2016). ‘English as an international language’ (EIL) foregrounds language in use rather than suggesting that there is a single, unitary international variety. Related to EIL is the notion of ELF (Seidlhofer, 2011). In ELF interactions norms are co-constructed by interlocutors inter-subjectively in every situated interaction. That is, interlocutors collectively create meanings and negotiate understandings in the moment-by-moment unfolding of each spoken encounter; essentially, they jointly ‘work out’ what they are trying to communicate and provide assistance and support in the process.

An ELF position, of all the world English alternatives, is currently gaining a lot of traction in the academy (Saraceni, 2015). Seidlhofer (2004), Gnutzmann (2000), Jenkins (2007a) and other critical linguists have outlined a case for proficiency in EIL/ELF as an aim for teachers and learners. However, Jenkins (2007a) concedes that to date the native speaker models remain the norm in English language education worldwide. This, she says, is the result of the actions of ‘gatekeepers’ such as government institutions, examination boards, universities, publishers, the British Council and other British and American cultural–political institutions whom, she argues, are overly influential in English language policy decisions. She contends that the dominance of forces advocating the native speaker model

¹ Please note, in this report, ‘mode’ is used to refer to ELF, ‘model’ refers to teaching target variety and ‘variety’ refers to the ‘English’ of a particular geographical region (Saraceni, 2015).

impacts on the attitudes and beliefs of ‘non-gatekeepers’ (including non-native English speaker teachers) around the world, essentially disempowering them in relation to ‘native speakers’.

However, despite claims that the native speaker model is unsustainable, very little research has investigated the extent to which alternative models are superseding, or will supersede, it. Seidlhofer’s (2003) survey lays out a research agenda to explore this question, but most of this is still outstanding. She notes that research is needed into attitudes towards the global role and spread of English(es), and into the exact nature of EIL and ELF. She also identifies pedagogy as a key area for future research. Specifically in this regard, she identifies as a central question how EIL/ELF (as opposed to English as a second language – ESL – and English as a foreign language – EFL) might actually be taught. Which variety or varieties actually are, should be or will be taught remain key questions, largely unaddressed in terms of teacher practitioners’ beliefs and practices. Teachers are likely to be key brokers between language research, ideology, theory, policy and language learning practice, with their own experiences and beliefs related to varieties, models and modes, playing a key role in classroom realities for English language learners worldwide.

2.2 Teacher cognition

Teacher cognition encompasses what teachers think, believe and do and the extent to which their beliefs affect both their perceptions and judgements of teaching and learning interactions in the classroom (see, for example, Pajares, 1992; Borg, 2006; and Li and Walsh, 2011). While the specific area has been subject to very little investigation, two small-scale studies have investigated teachers’ beliefs about ‘native speaker’ and alternate models for English language learners (Jenkins, 2007a; Young and Walsh, 2010). Neither found much support for any world Englishes model or ELF as a mode. Both reported a lack of teacher knowledge of the nature of ELF or EIL, with indications that they were seen as deficient versions of native speaker models. In both studies, teachers characterised ELF as a lowering of standards, and ELF pronunciation as tending to be less intelligible or even ‘broken’. Participants in both studies claimed that the learners they worked with did not want to learn ELF or EIL. Additionally, in Young and Walsh (2010) teachers also reported a need to believe in ‘standard’ forms of the language to serve as targets for learners, while acknowledging in most cases that this does not correspond to the reality of Englishes which are in use worldwide. Both studies did report, however, an intellectual interest in the general area of world Englishes. The study reported here built on these studies by broadening the focus and looking more closely at the relationship between teacher beliefs about, attitudes towards and knowledge of the nature of varieties of English, and their use as classroom modes, models and targets.

3

Research design

There were three stages to the research. In the first, we provided available contacts in five countries with briefings and project outlines and asked them to contact local networks of currently active English language teachers who were prepared to participate in the research project (see Appendix 1). The five countries chosen were China, India, Thailand, Turkey and Spain. Our aim with this choice was to survey a geographical spread of perspectives which would also allow us to access different socio-cultural and socio-historical factors that might influence language choice in each location. Volunteers from each country took part in the second stage of our research process 'focus groups', where they were asked to discuss our research questions (above). In the third and final stage, classroom observation was conducted. This entailed participants preparing a short 'mini lesson' or lesson segment to get students talking about language varieties. The aim was for students to engage in group discussions about which varieties they preferred or found to be useful. The research questions from the study were used as a way of initiating a discussion. (See Appendix 1 for the full set of guidelines for this stage of the study).

A total of 71 teachers took part in the focus groups. Each was moderated by a local researcher, and either audio or video recorded, depending on available technologies. There were two Thai teacher focus group discussions. The first group consisted of five participants: three women and two men. They were a variety of ages with experience of teaching English ranging from six months to 15 years. The second Thai group had four participants – all women, with teaching experience from seven to almost 20 years. All were employed by universities in the Bangkok area. There were three Indian focus group discussions. The first group (ten participants) was made up of seven men and three women teaching at various levels, from primary to tertiary and teacher training in the Delhi area. Their experience

ranged from five to 16 years. The second Indian group consisted of eight women participants, teaching staff at a school in the south of India with experience ranging from three to almost 13 years at primary through to secondary level. The third group discussion, which took place in central India, had nine participants, again all women, with experience in the field of education ranging from five to 50 years at various levels from primary upwards. There were three Turkish focus groups, the first consisting of four university teachers, two women and two men. Participants in the second and third groups were all student teachers who were currently actively engaged in English language teaching. Group 2 had four participants (three women, one man), and Group 3 also had four (two men, two women). All teachers were working in the Ankara area. There was only one Chinese focus group discussion, due to time constraints. This involved five university-level teachers (two men and three women), all members of staff at a university in the Beijing area. The Spanish focus groups consisted of five participants (Group 1) and nine participants (Group 2).

Our focus group sampling was therefore purposeful, in that it was directed at teachers from each of the five national locations, and in so far as it involved currently active teachers. It was random in the specific choice of volunteers, who were self-selected. Discussions in the focus groups were directed towards research questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, with responses analysed as below.

Classroom observations were aimed at addressing aspects of question 2, related to learner perceptions, and question 6. The video-recordings were analysed primarily from a content perspective as a means of accessing student attitudes towards language variety. A number of themes emerged from the student discussion groups, and these were then compared with findings from the teacher focus groups.

4

Main findings

Main summary findings from each location are reported below. Where quotes are given, these identify location, which group (where there was more than one) and which individual (e.g. Turkey, FG2T2). Focus groups were transcribed using the principles and theoretical underpinnings of conversation analysis in order to highlight features such as overlapping speech, micro-pausing, latched turns and so on. This said, our transcripts did not provide the same level of detail as a full conversation analysis transcript as it was not felt to be necessary given that our analysis was mainly thematic.

4.1 Which variety or varieties did teachers themselves learn?

With very few exceptions, and across the focus groups in all five locations, teachers reported that they had not been aware of which specific variety they had learned in their earliest experiences as learners; their responses to this question were therefore very much retrospective and surmised, and even now it was difficult for them to specify:

...I actually I never (.) I realise that I never developed the ability to even distinguish different varieties? (.) till like later stages in my (.) career when I went to... Britain first I realised that OK (.) that's like there's something going on here but it was because of the dialect so as well [(local)] in that area... but until then I never (.) really like (.) consciously thought about a variety and (.) thought about how I which where I can speak it or anything ... as long as I could (.) communicate I didn't (.) it didn't matter... [Turkey, FG1T1]

Teachers across the focus groups were generally more confident in expressing answers in relation to their higher and tertiary education, partly because this was more recent, partly because it had sometimes been explicitly stated, and partly through their own surmises. Even here, however, they were not always able to answer with confidence.

...I suppose [[I learned]] American (.) and British English (.) both...but um we cannot tell one from other ((laughs))... [China, FGT4]

Teachers in Thailand felt they had been taught either British or American English, or a mixture of the two, largely depending on which teaching materials they had been exposed to. Only one had been taught by a native speaker, so it was agreed that all models were mediated through their predominantly Thai teachers. In India, teaching materials had again been a powerful influence, with British English predominating, but here the nationality of the teacher was also a factor – for example, many of the north Indian teachers had been educated by Christian nuns (Italian, Irish and an unidentified nationality) and teachers felt that this was a powerful influence on their early learning. In the south the influence of local languages, particularly Tamil, was seen as being very influential, with Tamil-Indian-English being the predominant model. In general, teachers across the Indian focus groups questioned the extent to which any single ‘Indian English’ model could be identified. Another general observation was that the more prestigious and expensive the Indian teachers’ own educational background, the more likely they were to report early exposure to British English, although often via the canon of great literature rather than through specifically language-educational materials.

In Turkey, the groups each reported different responses. To the question of which variety or varieties had been learned, the first reported either British, American or Australian English depending on teachers and/or teaching materials. In the second and third groups all teachers identified American English, perhaps because all had been through a similar teacher training curriculum which employed American English materials. All the teachers in these groups also reported that American English had been an important influence outside of the classroom, particularly from television programmes and music. A majority of the Chinese teachers reported learning British English mediated through the ‘Chinese English’ of their local non-native English speaker teachers, with published teaching materials being the predominant influence on this choice. As they rose through the educational system teachers had all been exposed to more native speaker varieties, with models depending very much on the nationality of the teacher. All Chinese teachers reported a lack of

explicitness in which variety was being taught. Teachers in Spain reported a variety of early influences and models, with the degree of 'Spanglish' they were exposed to being related to how much, or little, exposure they had had to native speaker teachers, usually teaching assistants. Where these teaching assistants were American, and the teaching materials British, teachers reported some (amusing) problems:

...yeah because (they are mostly) people that work in- in the books (.) we used to take u:h British (xxx) and maybe (we have some) (.) some people that (xxx) people that come here from America (.) bu:t people that designed books are [definitely] British

M: right (.) okay (.) how do you feel about that?

T4: sometimes weird

M: ((laughing)) yeah okay

T4: yeah because it's (.) when y- when you have the help from the: from the: guys they come from America and eh they see it's: not very common for them some concepts so: (.) sometimes it's weird for them even for us

M: yeah

T2: and sometimes they cannot help us [because]

M: [right]

T2: you ask them any word and they say 'well I don't know maybe it's British I don't know'... [Spain, FG1S4]

4.2 Which variety or varieties do they currently teach?

Teachers in Thailand reported different varieties being taught, either American or British English, depending on the varieties they had been exposed to, institutional guidelines, textbooks and their own familiarities. There was a general recognition that whatever variety was targeted, it was probably heavily mediated through their own usages, especially in terms of pronunciation. Specific learner needs were also identified as an important influence.

I use American English (.) because I'm familiar (.) with that more (.) than I'm not saying that I'm keen in that (.) but I'm more familiar than British English...I taught myself (.) I grew up (.) with American English (.) I watched like films (.) I listened to the (.) songs (.) those are from America so ((nods)) [Thailand, FGD1T2]

my case is more specific as I teach (.) English to a (certain) profession which is ah flight attendants er though mainly we refer back to American and British English but we also add on a lot of vocabulary and pronunciation of other varieties (.) ah depending on the destination that that the the airline flies to (.) this includes Australian and some New Zealand as well as Indian and South African [Thailand, FGD1T4]

Thailand, FGD2T3:

T3: ...OK um (.) ((laughter)) what I currently teach er it depends on the material that I um assigned to do (.) so (.) it can be both Br British or American (.)

M: only British or American?

T3: yeah because of most of the textbook that we are using ah (.) from (.) publisher well known publishers so they tends to have (.) only either British or American (.) at least we can notice that their choice by look at the spelling (.) but some (.) some of the latest or recent recent textbooks (.) they seems to (.) (graded) to more to other varieties (.) but still (.) still most of (.) ah (.) courses that we are doing here right now (.) either British or American...

In India, responses varied very widely across the groups, with Indian linguistic influences being very strong, both as a resource and to some extent as a restraint. British English was held to be more usually targeted, but American influences were growing. An interest in presenting and maintaining 'standards' was a frequently expressed opinion.

...ultimately our er goal is to achieve to the standard target language ... so and you er and that will be you know all students will be recognised internationally (.) because we want to make them (into international er citizens) (.) you know... [India, FGD1T2]

...in the elementary classes we have to focus on the er some use of the regional er variety of English er and then er gradually we have to a shift to a (.) er some particular standard (.) er whether it is er er of a er American accent or to the British accent but some standard er would be there (.) some standard [India, FGD1T3]

In Turkey, teachers reported a range of models and targets, but a majority overall reported American English. Teachers also reported frequent differences between what they themselves use and what they teach. There was a general consensus that it was important to present learners with a range of varieties, although there was little interest expressed in presenting a mode like ELF. Teachers reported that learners' own needs and preferences were an important influence on what is actually taught and learned in their contexts, with native speaker varieties carrying prestige and being privileged among learners and employers.

...about the students ...they don't want to sound Turkish for instance they say that you wanna really get that British or American (.) er (.) yeah... sound ...and especially British (thing) because they say that English kind of er belongs to them because this is the real English...this is really more prestigious...
[Turkey, FGD1T2]

another problem (.) while applying a job (.) when the students graduate (.) they apply for lecturers (.) the positions for lecturers or research assistants or (another)...(accept) from minister ministry of education (.) and authorities I think look for er ...the teachers who speak American English or British English...because they don't want...I don't think (.) yeah (.) they don't want the teachers as being (.) as sound Turkish (.) because I have er this kind of problem when when I applied er a job...
[Turkey, FGD1T3]

Among the Chinese group, a range of opinions were expressed in response to this question. Two teachers identified British and American (a combination of both) as the varieties they taught: the term 'hybrid English' was coined. Another said they lacked the expertise to teach consistently in one 'accent' or the other. They later said they advised their students to learn consistency in one variety if they wanted to impress, but that this took a lot of hard work and they (the teacher) were not able to do this themselves. One teacher said they didn't care what accent their students learned as long as they could communicate. One teacher said they thought Chinese intonation was more similar to American English, while another said the pronunciation of individual words was closer to the British accent. The discussion also covered factors which were the stronger influences in their teaching. Two teachers asserted that they were autonomous in choosing what to teach. There was general agreement that American English dominated in terms of availability of materials. One teacher wondered whether the greater global clout of the USA was related to its dominance. Two teachers felt that students preferred to learn American English, while one disagreed saying some students liked

British English. British English was identified by one teacher as sounding elegant, but two teachers agreed it was harder. Another identified it as better suited to reading poetry aloud. British and American English were identified as being seen as 'authentic' by one teacher and 'standard' by another.

In Spain, teachers in Group 1 agreed they taught a mixture of 'Spanglish, plus British and American' with the help of native speaker assistants. They agreed that about 80–90 per cent of the time, English was used in class. The second Spanish group had a wide variety of responses to this question, from 'I have no idea', to Spanglish, British (one teacher had taught and travelled in the UK), American, Australian, and to Pakistani (said as a joke). Two teachers made comments on 'mixed' or 'compound' varieties, with one saying that this was the trend nowadays. One teacher said that from experience in teaching in the US, they found they were free to speak any way they wanted, as people come from many parts of the world there.

From the classroom observation data and class discussions, it is apparent that students were more familiar with British and American accents than lesser-known ones, although there was a generally very high level of awareness of other varieties across each of the five contexts. In general, data indicate that students found American English more 'fun', 'colloquial', and 'fashionable', while British English was perceived as being 'useful', especially among older students preparing for higher education study. In some cases, students had familiarity with other varieties because they had been exposed to them via teaching assistants employed in schools. As one Spanish secondary student reports:

We think that British and American accents come from the teachers and books used and from the teaching assistants that have come to our school.

In some cases, the choice of variety was directly related to which examinations were taken. For example, where Cambridge ESOL exams were used, both teachers and students reported a heavy use of British English. Interestingly, there was no agreement on which variety was 'easier' or 'more difficult'; perceptions were very mixed.

From the classroom data, there was quite a lot of disagreement concerning whether it was more useful to stick to one variety or use several. Most teachers and students felt very strongly that the choice of teaching assistants strongly influenced the variety which was used. Materials too were very influential, with topics such as movies and music proving to be quite important in selection of variety among older secondary students.

4.3 Which variety or varieties would teachers like to teach?

There was a general consensus in Thailand that teachers would like to continue to teach the varieties they taught now. This was largely for pragmatic reasons related to their own knowledge and abilities, rather than for any affective attitudinal reasons. There was also, especially among the second group, a focus on an aim for communication rather than proficiency in a particular variety. In India teachers were generally interested in teaching a 'standard' variety, usually related in discussions to one of the 'large' exonormative varieties such as British or American English. Again, the preferred target was very much what was actually taught now. Reasons given were also largely pragmatic, but there was also, especially in the first group, an interest in linking learning a 'standard' variety to global citizenship and international mobility:

...ultimately our er goal is to achieve to the standard target language ...so and you er and that will be you know all students will be recognised internationally (.) because we want to make them (into international er citizens) (.) you know... [FGD1T2]

In Turkey, teachers also confirmed that they would like to continue teaching what they teach now, and again pragmatic reasons for this predominated. 'Consistency' was also mentioned frequently as a reason, in the sense of teachers providing (through their own usage, and in the materials they presented) as clear a model to learners as possible over time. A variety of 'voices', as one teacher in Group 1 noted, added 'spice' to a class and might reflect different 'cultures and varieties', but the consensus was that consistency and clarity was more centrally important an aim when modelling. A proviso did emerge in relation to the needs and preferences of learners:

...well (.) I don't know if you have the (.) (right to choose)...on behalf of the students ... it's up to them you know we we have to (.) we have our own way of speaking (.) pronouncing um...I don't think there needs to be (.) um (.) anything imposed on us to change it...because it's the way we are.. um (.) but when it comes to students they they have to decide which one to use but before deciding they need to know...I think we need to have a specific course on that... [FGD1T4]

In China, the main weight of opinion was also that teachers would prefer to keep teaching what they are teaching now, again for the practical and pragmatic reasons identified in the other locations. There was also a recognition that this position might be put under pressure by the realities of English usages that learners were exposed to, most particularly those conforming in some way to American English via the internet.

In Spain, teachers reported that they would also like to continue to teach what they taught now. Discussions here also tended to bring in learner perspectives, although some teachers felt that learners generally 'didn't care' which variety they learned. Others felt that they, and the learners, were centrally concerned with communication – 'communication is the key' – and that as such they would prefer to teach English which was internationally intelligible.

4.4 What do teachers understand about the nature of available varieties?

Across the groups and locations, in response to this question, 'varieties' was used very broadly to encompass modes and models. In Thailand, the groups discussed the nature of EIL, ELF and, to a lesser extent, American English. There was consensus across the two groups that most people would not be able to differentiate between EIL and ELF. After some consideration, a majority of Group 1 felt EIL referred to English as a medium of communication used around the world, with one teacher saying it was used by non-native speakers. Another teacher said EIL was both spoken and written, while another thought EIL referred to the status of English as an international means of communication, mentioning that it is currently the most widespread language. When discussing ELF, a majority of teachers thought ELF was perhaps a means of communicating between non-native speakers, while one teacher in Group 1 thought native speakers could be included among users. When asked about American English, one teacher said it was English used by American people and it had varieties due to America being 'full of immigrants'. Another teacher commented that if you want to speak EIL, you needed to have your own standard, using American English as an example.

In India, there was little interest in discussing the nature or natures of EIL or ELF, despite prompts to do so. Interest instead focused across the groups on the purposes of learning English, and how these purposes impacted on which variety people would learn, with a consensus that communication was the main aim and purpose. There was a recognition that it was hard to pin down a single, unitary entity that could be described as either British or American English – these were the only two native English speaker varieties cited by participants. There was also a general view that while a standard target was necessary, and that this generally conformed to a native English speaker model, this did not mean that the language 'belonged' to native English speakers in any sense, this was changing:

English is no longer a privileged language of any native country...so and language one more thing language is ever-growing no doubt about that...

[India, FGD1T2]

In Turkey, the groups expressed considerable uncertainty about the difference and definitions of ELF and EIL. One teacher said they had learned that the difference was that in ELF there had been an attempt to establish rules, but in EIL there hadn't. Another teacher felt there was no difference between them, no distinction made in the literature, and they both meant people from different backgrounds communicating in English. Two teachers felt that ELF could include native speakers as well as non-native. When the moderator asked if there was a pecking order in varieties of English, two teachers answered positively, with one saying that British English was more prestigious. Another teacher noted that students felt American English was easier, though they would like to learn British English. Participants across the groups tended to agree that it was important for people from different countries to be able to communicate with each other. One participant likened this to a bridge, and another said it was 'breaking the ice'. The first of these two thought that it was easier for two non-native speakers to understand each other because they would both find it difficult, and so be prepared to make accommodations. When asked, one student mentioned their experience of communicating with people from other countries (British, American, German and Polish were mentioned). Across the groups, this question led to detailed discussion of questions related to standards and targets. The discussion in Group 1 started with one teacher saying standards helped because teachers knew what to teach, students what to learn and coursebook writers what to write, but that teachers should be tolerant of exceptions. There followed a discussion about intelligibility and communication being most important, with one teacher agreeing and adding that that was why they liked the idea of ELF. Two teachers agreed that students were resistant and 'judgemental' about the idea of variations in grammar being acceptable despite being shown evidence, and one of them further elaborated that trainee teachers said they needed standards to teach to the exam. During the second and third groups' discussions on standard and target varieties, teachers agreed that they would like to set a standard and have a target but had to be realistic about students achieving them. This led in one group to a discussion about what 'success' meant, with distinctions being drawn between academic success (in examinations, for example) and 'communication success', using English well enough to 'get by' internationally in different personal and professional settings.

The group in China discussed this question at some length, and had similar difficulties in defining and differentiating between EIL and ELF after a brief attempt to do so. Much more interest was expressed in the nature(s) of American, British and Chinese English as varieties, and on the nature and importance of standards and targets in their work with learners. For American English, different accents/dialects within the USA were alluded to (the Midwestern accent was identified as 'really strange' and the Californian one as 'quite pleasant' by one teacher), and one teacher confined the Chinese perception of American English to a uniform, formal way of speaking in the eastern half of mainland USA. They recognised too that English spoken by Latino Americans was also part of American English, so that American English could be seen as a 'hybrid'. Differences between British and American varieties were briefly discussed (intonation, pronunciation, usage and written forms) and then the discussion turned to Chinese English. Differences between the terms 'Chinglish' and 'Chinese English' were discussed (Chinglish was defined by one teacher as not being used any more 'due to its being a negative term'). One teacher was at first adamant that Chinese English was not a variety, that it had no written form and was just 'wrong' English. The other teachers were far more open to the idea of Chinese English as a variety in its own right (one teacher mentioned how it was accepted and discussed in journals, and another defined Chinese English as having two main elements: accent and vocabulary) and they managed to persuade their colleagues to some extent by the end of the discussion. When discussing other varieties, Japanese was identified by one teacher as the hardest to understand, while another said that English as spoken by some Middle Eastern students in the US had been incomprehensible to her. There was a long discussion in China about standard and target varieties. Teachers concurred that a standard target was 'very very important.' On the meaning of 'target variety', one teacher said that if you're teaching Chinese students it means Chinese English is the target variety. Another teacher said that students in one class may have different needs, so they would stick with the variety they were teaching now and include other varieties (Chinese, British, American) 'through materials'.

The Spanish teachers subsumed their discussion of this question into their discussions of other questions. In sum, their opinions generally concurred with those expressed in other groups. The nature(s) of EIL and ELF were elusive, with the latter perhaps encompassing the English used by native English speakers when interacting with non-native English speakers. There was a recognition that American English and British English (and other exonormative

varieties like Australian English) were not unitary, but that a standard one (or both) was a suitable target and were what learners needed to learn, largely for pragmatic reasons related to examinations and employment purposes.

4.5 Which variety or varieties do teachers expect to dominate in the contexts in which they will operate in the future?

Teachers in Thailand tended to see this question very much through the lens of their own specific professional circumstances rather than as a question of large-scale societal or international influences. Most gave similar responses to those they had given in relation to the question about which variety they would like to teach. There was some discussion about the possibility of non-native English speakers varieties having a future impact – Chinese English was mentioned by more than one participant as being a possible future influence. There was a general sense that an emphasis would remain on helping students towards intelligibility, rather than having a specific target model, but that non-native English speakers varieties would probably still be important, if not necessarily in a dominant position, mediated through teachers' own usages as models. As one Thai teacher said:

no specific (.) ((laughter)) English variety (.) it depends on the trend at that time in the future (.) but maybe if I have to choose (.) um (.) I'll choose the most (.) common ones like (.) British American and maybe Thai English (.) my my own version and if the student would love to follow my version (.) I'm happy with that (.) but if they choose other varieties (.) I'm OK with that too... [FG2T1]

In India, opinions were very divided on this question, with affective attitude being a central reason for the differences of opinion. There was a division between teachers who saw a multilingual, multi-level bilingual or globalised English as the variety of the future, and those who spoke in what they saw as more 'practical' terms about the variety they and their learners would use in future, because that was what they knew and felt was easier for students and for them – in most cases this corresponded to a British English or to a British-Indian variety. One teacher said English had been so successful globally because it had 'conquered' in the past and had absorbed words from many different countries. Another stated that Indians still spoke English and were proud of it (despite gaining independence in 1947) and that it was a sign of education, particularly in relation to British English. Two teachers from Group 2 expressed perceptions of change and of learner flexibility reacting to models and targets:

...we cannot always be rigid (.) of course the priority should be there (.) but at the same time (.) because there's a lot of influence of technology...over today's generation (.) so we need to adapt certain things (.) we cannot penalise for the same (.) right...maybe there will be abbreviated forms can be there the future language... we need to be flexible but at the same time the priority of the language needs to be preserved otherwise it will lose its (own)...entity ... like a classical music if I draw analogy all right there's so much fusion is there it's accepted (.) but if your base is strong of the classical music you can understand and appreciate anything... [India, FGD2T1]

A sense of change was also noted:

...gradually I feel (.) our children are actually becoming very smart ...in the sense that they have realised they know (.) when and what to use (.) in the school (.) in the class in front of me they will use beautiful formal English...at home when they're using the Facebook (.) you would find them coming out with (.) such expressions (.) American expressions which even we might not know... so in fact at times I tell my children also in class that see (.) why while I go through your Facebook status I find you are using words like dude (.) (hey bro) (.) and (all this) which we don't usually allow in our schoolso but then I feel it's healthy change where a child is ...smart enough and mature enough to understand (.) what to use and when to use... for his own benefit... [India, FG2T4]

Discussions of this question in Turkey were brief, but there was a uniform view that American English would be predominant in Turkey in the future. There was some recognition by different teachers that what would actually be learned and used would depend on an individual person's needs and the situations in which they were using the language, situations here encompassing both the social and different professional domains.

In China, discussion of this question covered both future dominance and which varieties were actually currently dominant, in the sense of which were currently used by Chinese governmental leaders and by their translators and interpreters – general opinion on the latter was that it was difficult to generalise. There were differences of opinion about which varieties were likely to be important in the future, with a majority thinking American would be so. Others thought that a Chinese English might well grow to prominence as that country's socioeconomic importance grew. There was disagreement about whether teachers would therefore have to target Chinese English, or whether this would be acquired by Chinese learners anyway, and that native English

speakers targets would be the actual target presented in curricula. The following exchange illustrates some of the arguments made, and perhaps reveals some of the underlying attitudes among the teachers towards the varieties, and the strong and prevalent idea of a standard as the future aim.

...but we don't expect to teach Chinese English in our class huh? (.) I mean students actually speak Chinese English

T4: er sure

T1: yeah so we teach of course one of the two major...varieties

T2: we can(not) avoid you know completely the use of Chinese English right because we're in China and you know but we try our best to you know to use the standard English (.) yeah both the American English or British English (.) [so yeah]

T3: because er now our government er is emphasising (.) er translation right?...er so in CETs or College English Test er there is a translation part a new translation part...so I think er in the future er that means we have to include more (.) Chinese English... [China, FGT1]

Teachers in Spain were not sure about which varieties might predominate in future. Most agreed it would be important, perhaps more important than currently, to expose learners to a variety of 'voices'. The need to expose learners to a variety would not, it was felt generally, lessen an emphasis on clear models and targets.

4.6 To what extent does the language used in classrooms conform to any particular model or target?

Our aim here was to explore the extent to which teachers and students oriented towards one particular variety or another. In particular, we were concerned to examine the extent to which their comments on varieties – concerning preferences and so on – were borne out in classroom interactions. An initial analysis of the data did not reveal any particular trend in relation to this question; there was no evidence that any one variety was used to any greater or lesser extent than another.

In the commentary which follows, we present a number of 'snapshots' from the classroom observation data to give a flavour of the kinds of comments which were made about varieties.

Extract 1 is taken from a Thai classroom, where the students are reporting back on which variety or varieties they prefer. The teacher (M) is eliciting preferences from students and student 10 is trying to explain why she likes the Australian accent the least. After some prompting by the teacher (in lines 4, 7 and 10) and some help from a classmate (in line 11) student 10 replies that it is difficult to understand. This contribution is accepted by the teacher in line 17.

Extract 1

1. M: one question um why do you like Australian
2. accent the least? haha
3. S10: because I think this is really interesting um (.)
4. M: but but why do you like Australian accent
5. the least
6. S10: ah oh (.) ((looks at notes)) (.)
7. M: you like British accent the most (.) but you
8. like Australian accent the least? (.) why?
9. S10: because (2) [ah]
10. M: [(xxx)] help you (xxx)
11. ((another student talks inaudibly offscreen))
12. S10: it's really hard to understand it
13. M: for you?
14. S10: yes ((nods))
15. M: it's really hard to understand?
16. S10: ((nods))
17. M: uh (.) OK? thank you!

In the second extract, students in a Spanish secondary class are discussing which varieties they would like to learn in the future. It is interesting, in this extract, that three students select different varieties and offer quite different, but specific reasons for their choices. Nuria selects British English because it is the most 'polite' (line 5) and also because it has the least flexibility (line 7); we interpret this to mean that the rules are more fixed and that there are fewer choices. In lines 12–14, Patricia tells us that she would like to learn American English because she plans to live there at some point in time; interestingly, she also feels that American English is closer to Spanish than British English (line 15). Again, we interpret this to mean that there are greater similarities in terms of pronunciation. The third student in this extract, Gonzalo, selects Irish English as his preferred variety, giving the reason that it is 'hard' and that he would like to be able to speak to Irish people (line 22)!

It is clear when looking at the classroom data that students do have very clear reasons for wanting to learn a particular variety – they are able to articulate their preferences very clearly and, as we have seen here, they provide a very wide range of reasons for their choices. The challenge for teachers and materials writers is how to accommodate these very different preferences, which were extremely prevalent among older students.

Extract 2

1. T: okay? (.) let's continue (.) e:m which variety
2. would you like to learn in the future and why (.)
3. (Nuria)
4. S8: e:h in the future I would like to learn British
5. English? Because I think that is: the most polite
6. of the different varieties? A:nd also (.) it follows
7. an: eh-specific structure (.) it's less flexible for
8. exam- for instance e:m e:h it's more flexible
9. than- it was less flexible than American English
10. [for instance]
11. T: okay? what about you Patricia?
12. S8: I would like to learn more eh American?
13. Because I know- I like- I would like to go e:h live
14. eh sometime in America and I like eh because is
15. e:h more similar to Spanish
16. T: okay? em: let's have someone (.) else (.) for
17. example Gonzalo (.) which variety would you like
18. to learn in the future (.) and why?
19. S10: I would like to learn Irish English because I
20. think it's: a hard eh variety so: I would like to
21. understand be- better that accent and to: be
22. able to talk to some Irish guys

Extract 3 is taken from a university English language class in Turkey. Here, a small group of upper-intermediate learners is discussing which varieties of English they feel to be appropriate for the future for Turkey as a country. The three students in the transcript begin by agreeing that American English is perhaps the most appropriate variety for the Turkish people to adopt. The reason they give is that America is a 'large country' which 'impacts on everything' (lines 9–10). Student 1 then proposes that British English would also be useful (lines 12–15), a suggestion which Student 4 disagrees with, arguing that there is a need to 'fix accents' and adopt only one (line 16). Note the reason for adopting a single accent is an aesthetic one: using different accents is not considered to sound 'beautiful' (line 16). Finally, having spent some time discussing the merits of adopting American English, Student 3 rejects this proposal owing to the 'politics' of the USA and their impact globally (lines 21–23).

Extract 3

1. and so which variety or varieties are the most
2. app appropriate for our country (.) like Turkey
3. which is (.) which accent is appropriate
4. S2: I think American
5. S1: I think American too
6. S2: (xxx)
7. S3: (xxx) don't have to er (.) er (.) (xxx) for Turkish
8. S1: and American for example American I think
9. because they're a large country and they have
10. a large impact on everything
11. S2: yes
12. S1: er so they have er (.) American English is
13. more of (.) (not) for (everybody) but if British
14. English (.) er (.) have a chance to do that also
15. (.) (xxx)
16. S4: I think we should (fixe) our accent (.) we
17. use different kind of accent and I think it's not
18. sounds beautiful
19. S3: yes yes (mix) er (xxx) (.) er some (.) doesn't
20. sound beautiful so I agree with you on that (.) we
21. we should use accent that (xxx) (.) I don't prefer
22. American accent because of the political (.)
23. politic (.) politics [all over world]

5

Discussion

In relation to RQ1 (Which variety or varieties did teachers themselves learn?), teachers across the locations reported little awareness of the specific varieties they were exposed to in their early learning experiences; answers were mostly related to their experiences in tertiary education. This indicates that until they themselves were quite advanced learners or users of English, typically at university level, the question of 'which English' did not impinge strongly on our participants as learners, confirming findings in Young and Walsh (2010). American English appears to have been an important influence outside of the classroom, mainly through popular culture such as television programmes and music.

In relation to RQ2 (Which variety or varieties do they currently teach?), our findings largely confirm an ongoing dominance of exonormative native speaker models, suggested in much of the previous literature (see e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2010). While there was some disagreement as to whether it was more useful to stick to one variety or use several, American and British English appear to dominate in the contexts the teachers currently operate in. Emergent from our findings were suggestions that the reasons for this seem closely related to institutional guidelines and textbooks, as well as the teachers' own learning experiences and familiarity with these varieties. However, learners' own needs and preferences were also identified as an important influence on which variety was actually being taught, with American and British English carrying prestige and being privileged among both learners and employers. However, there was also a recognition that whatever variety was targeted, it was likely to be mediated through teachers' own usages, especially in terms of pronunciation. Although teachers appear to have strong affective reactions to different varieties of English, these are not overwhelmingly important reasons for choosing which variety to teach. Classroom decisions appear to be informed largely by pragmatic considerations, including the teachers' own experience as learners of English and the availability of textbooks and materials. While there

was some awareness of guidance 'from above' in terms of English language policies, this was not usually a predominant reason for choosing one particular variety over another. The findings indicate that while exonormative native English speaker modelling still predominates, there is also an increasing awareness of the fact that this is mediated through 'local' usages and that this is not necessarily a 'bad thing'.

In relation to RQ3 (Which variety or varieties would teachers like to teach?) there was a general consensus across the locations that teachers would like to continue to teach the varieties they taught now. This was largely for practical and pragmatic reasons related to their own knowledge and abilities, rather than for any affective attitudinal reasons. There was a general view that while a standard target, generally conforming to a native English speaker model, was necessary for consistency and clarity, this did not mean that the language 'belonged' to native English speakers in any sense.

RQ4 (What do teachers understand about the nature of available varieties?) highlighted interest in world Englishes models from our findings. They were viewed positively as tools for promoting communication and understanding internationally, and the ways that EIL and ELF were framed were considerably more positive than teachers' ascriptions of them in previous research (Jenkins, 2007a; Young and Walsh, 2010; see also Gray, 2010). However, the nature(s) of EIL and ELF were also described as elusive and the teachers expressed considerable uncertainty about the difference and definitions of the two constructs. Emergent from our findings was a need among the teachers to work towards a 'standard' model for learners, largely for pragmatic reasons related to examinations and employment. This standard seemed to conform closely to an exonormative, idealised 'native speaker' variety, with American English and British English retaining their privileged, predominant positions. However, there was also an awareness that these exonormative models were not unitary.

In RQ5, we were interested in which variety or varieties teachers expected to dominate in the contexts in which they will operate in the future. Here, teachers' views revealed a positive view of the uptake of world Englishes models not hitherto apparent in the literature. Our findings clearly show that teachers see world Englishes models as potentially important in future English language education, focusing on helping students achieve intelligibility, rather than having a specific target model. There was, however, also some recognition by different teachers that what would actually be learned and used would depend on an individual person's needs and the situations they were using the language in.

Our analysis of classroom data, the focus of RQ6 (To what extent does the language used in classrooms conform to any particular model or target?), did not yield any evidence that any one variety was used to any greater or lesser extent than another. However, it did show that students appear to have clear reasons for wanting to learn a particular variety. Orientations towards a particular variety seem to depend on a whole host of factors, largely related to exposure (through materials, teachers, teaching assistants

and artefacts outside the classroom such as music and movies). In addition, preferences are strongly influenced by perceived present and future language needs, and by the extent to which a variety is seen as 'useful', contemporary or even 'posh'. The challenge for teachers and materials writers is how to accommodate these very different preferences. Attitudes concerning whether students should follow one variety or use several were mixed; some of the participants seemed to indicate that it is far better to follow one variety, whereas others felt that being exposed to and using several might be preferable. Some students demonstrated strong preferences towards one variety, over another according to its intelligibility. Some, for example, felt that American English is easier to understand than British English; others were 'put off' a particular variety because it was difficult to understand. Other extraneous factors – such as politics – also influenced present and future choices concerning a preferred variety. The global impact of a particular variety was felt by some to be an issue depending on whether that impact was regarded in a positive or negative light.

6

Conclusions and recommendations

The main value of this study, and its contribution to current debates and dichotomies, is that it offers a ‘bottom-up’ perspective on teacher and learner attitudes to varieties of English in five distinct yet interrelated global contexts. Our goal was to get some sense of how practitioners and their learners perceive current issues relating to models, varieties and targets around the teaching of English. Findings suggest that participating teachers and learners demonstrate a high level of awareness concerning which variety (or varieties) they either use or prefer, with a continued dominance of British and American English in most contexts. That said, almost all of the respondents were acutely aware of world Englishes and had good reasons for their use of different varieties. As far as the implications for future research and for pedagogy are concerned, we make a number of observations. First, there is a need for additional research of this nature in contexts where English is not spoken as a first or dominant language, in order to gain a ‘finer-grained’ understanding of some of the issues identified in the present study. Second, there would be considerable benefit in research which used multiple case studies of a range of contexts to explore current practices concerning language variety. This is of growing importance in light of a current trend which plays down the importance of a ‘native-speaker’-like level of proficiency in favour of a position which highlights

the importance of intelligibility. The notion of intelligibility itself raises issues for materials and test designers. Third, from some of the findings in the present study, we note that a range of influences is at play in determining which varieties are adopted in different global contexts. These include well-known factors such as perceived usefulness, intended future use of the language, external factors such as political influences, and so on. In addition, we observe that other factors are highly relevant, such as the nationality of language assistants, previous language learning experiences, and perceived status of a variety; more research is needed to study the influence of these lesser-known factors.

Finally, we advocate further research which looks at the relationship between teacher cognitions of language variety and the extent to which those cognitions inform classroom practice. Are some varieties more difficult or easier to teach or learn than others? How do certain varieties influence teaching methodology? And how do reflections on practice inform decisions concerning choice of variety, if at all? In sum, there is still much work needed to enhance our understandings of the complex relationship between language varieties and classroom practice.

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Appendix 1: Project partners

We sincerely thank our research partners in this project, without whose invaluable help none of this would have been possible. Any errors are of course entirely our own.

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