

World Englishes as a Pedagogical Stance: Principles to Consider in ELT

Ryosuke Aoyama

University of British Columbia

The World Englishes (WE) paradigm, by challenging the traditional, monolithic native-speaker norm and advocating instead linguistic diversity and identity, reconceptualized the use and users of English in post-colonial and globalized societies. WE thus has direct implications for English language teaching; however, bridging theory and practice is a challenging task for teachers and scholars because of the changes and innovations that the paradigm requires. This article attempts to address the theory–practice divide and discusses how teachers can incorporate WE perspectives into the classroom in a way where WE-informed pedagogy strengthens existing teaching practice without requiring an overhaul of curriculum design. Shifting the focus from a pedagogical method to a pedagogical stance, this article suggests principles for practice of WE-informed pedagogy, including four points to consider when dealing with the diversity of English in the classroom.

World Englishes (WE)のパラダイムはネイティブスピーカーモデルの伝統的で画一的な規範に疑問を呈し、言語にまつわる多様性やアイデンティティの重要性を提唱することで、ポストコロニアル・グローバル社会における英語使用、英語使用者を再概念化した。この英語使用(者)観のパラダイムシフトは英語教育に直接的な示唆を与えているが、教師や研究者にとって理論と実践の溝を埋めるのは、そのパラダイムが要する変化・イノベーションゆえに容易ではない。本稿は、カリキュラムデザインの大きな見直しを要しない、日々の教育実践とWE論を効果的に結びつけるための提案を行う。指導の方法論ではなく、教員が取る姿勢・態度に注目して、WEの教育的示唆を教室に反映させるための原則を、英語の多様性を扱う際に考慮すべき4つの点に注目しながら論じる。

<https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTTL47.2-3>

Research in World Englishes (WE) has advanced our understanding of the multicultural identities of English users, linguistic diversity, and linguistic social justice in the post-colonial and globalized world, paving the way for the development of newer paradigms with similar ideological tenets such as English as a lingua franca (ELF), English as an international language (EIL), and Global Englishes (GE). As do these subsequent paradigms, WE carries pedagogical implications for English language teaching (ELT). However, WE scholars have been faced with the challenge of finding ways to utilize research knowledge to inform practitioners “in ways that resonate with their discourse” (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2017, p. 72). This paper is a response to the need to address a theory–practice divide in this area. After providing a brief overview of WE in ELT, I will discuss and propose research-informed suggestions for

how teachers can incorporate WE perspectives into the classroom, with a sensitivity to the relevance and practical application in everyday situated practice that teachers engage in.

World Englishes and ELT

The discussion of teaching WE in ELT gained momentum in academia when scholars such as B. B. Kachru (1992) articulated the diversely changing sociolinguistic reality of English use and users in the world, reconceptualizing the goals of learning and teaching English while challenging the traditional native-speaker model and offering various suggestions on teaching WE. Simply put, the teaching of WE pertains to how the reality of diverse English communication in global contexts can be incorporated into the classroom. It is not just about teaching varieties of English different from what is called “standard English.” The sociolinguistic reality of English evidences the traditional yardsticks of standard British and American English losing their relevance and validity in measuring the effectiveness of English communication in multicultural and multilingual society (B. B. Kachru, 1992). However, what has been observed in ELT is “the real-world tenacity of normative beliefs about language, language use, and language users” (Kubota, 2021, p. 81), which potentially perpetuates social injustice. As B. B. Kachru (1992) himself admitted, teaching WE is challenging and akin to teachers’ coping with an attitudinal and methodological paradigm shift. Scholars have argued that pedagogy in keeping with the tenets of WE and the related paradigms strive for “breaking the epistemic dependency” on the native speaker (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 24) and rest on “an entirely different set of assumptions than the teaching and learning of any other second or foreign language” (McKay, 2002, p. 1).

World Englishes as a Pedagogical Stance

Although the discussion of incorporating WE perspectives into the classroom may give the impression that it requires great innovation, I argue that it does not always have to be methodologically innovative; rather, it is something teachers can incorporate into their classroom with relative ease in a way that does

not interfere with their existing everyday teaching practice. I do not intend to downplay the value of attempting the conceptual and methodological overhaul that WE-related pedagogy calls for. Rather, I argue that the progressive scholarly discussion on the plurality and complexity of Englishes and the inclination towards pedagogical innovation may be what runs the risk of estranging teachers who are under contextual limitations (e.g., national standards, school curricula, assessment, collegiality, student needs). These teachers may often not be afforded the necessary autonomy to carry out such innovation. Again, I maintain that teacher practice does not have to be *innovative* to be WE-informed. In other words, it does not have to be something methodologically special or startling. Echoing similar views by Rose and Galloway (2019) and Saraceni (2015), I argue that what we need is the reconceptualization of teaching WE, shifting our focus from a pedagogical method to a pedagogical stance. WE as a pedagogical stance offers guiding principles to be interwoven into the existing ELT curricula in various teaching contexts. With a focus on secondary EFL contexts such as Japan, where dependency on idealized native-speaker norms prevails at both the policy and individual levels (Aoyama, 2021), the following section details research-informed principles that are necessary in order to take up a WE pedagogical stance, which will help teachers navigate from the theory to its practical application.

The Overarching Principle of WE as a Pedagogical Stance: Enriching Attitudes Toward English Use and Users in Global Contexts

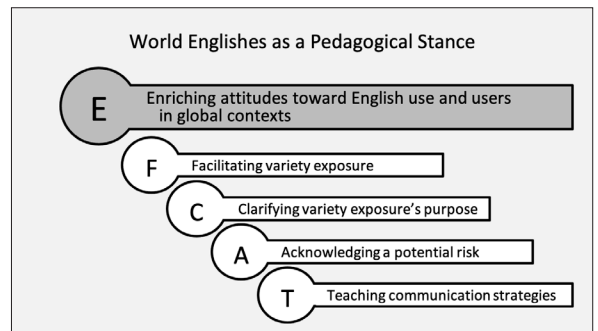
The primary goal of WE-informed pedagogy is to enrich students' attitudes toward the diversity of English users and uses in the global context (B. B. Kachru, 1992). Being keen to awareness-raising opportunities for students to think about the diversity of English users from different racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds is key in WE as a pedagogical stance. Considering that the predominant instructional model is standard English, the lack of such awareness-raising may lead to or perpetuate normative, narrow-minded attitudes toward English use and users anchored on idealized native-speaker models, where deviation from the standard is framed as deficit. This might inadvertently plant the seed of linguistic racism in students' minds, which also hampers their agentive self-identification as legitimate L2 English users.

The first step to nurturing open-minded, respectful attitudes toward diverse English users is to purposefully expose students to the variety,

uniqueness, and creativity shown by English users in the real world. The adoption of WE as a pedagogical stance can be conceptualized as a single overarching principle informed by four supporting sub-principles and encapsulated by the acronym EFCAT (see Figure 1). The overarching principle is one of enriching attitudes toward English use and users in global contexts. Each of its four supporting sub-principles will now be discussed in turn.

Figure 1

EFCAT: Principles of World Englishes as a Pedagogical Stance



Facilitating Variety Exposure: Purposeful Exposure to the Diversity of English Users

Purposefully planning to provide students with exposure to other varieties of English is of central importance in WE-informed pedagogy (B. B. Kachru, 1992; Y. Kachru, 2011; Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011). This is a pedagogical response to the fact that English variations are natural and omnipresent (Matsuda, 2019). Exposure to these other varieties can be smoothly embedded in the curricula where a designated textbook is the primary teaching material for instruction. For example, to supplement the input relevant to the teaching content, the use of authentic multimodal materials from online video platforms (e.g., YouTube) or online news media that feature diverse speakers of English would be the most feasible way. When the content of a lesson unit includes a story or explanation of specific individuals, cultures, or places, teachers often use actual footage about these to promote student engagement and provide necessary scaffolding for instruction. However, this practice also offers the potential for incorporating other varieties of English used in the real world into the classroom. Moreover, given the rich variety of topics in English textbooks, such opportunities are abundant. In addition to native and non-native English speakers from other countries, exposure to non-native English speakers who share the same L1 as students should also be encouraged in class to raise awareness of the ownership and performativity of English.

Clarifying Variety Exposure's Purpose: Not for "Studying" Each Variety

Although WE-informed pedagogy stresses exposure to varieties of English, the aim is not extensive linguistic analysis or mastery of each variety (Y. Kachru, 2011; Matsuda, 2019). As previously discussed, the central aim is the development of open-minded, neutral attitudes toward diverse English use and users. As Matsuda (2019) argues, what should be prioritized in instruction is "the meta-knowledge of the linguistic diversity [rather] than the specific formal and functional rules of particular varieties" (p. 688). In other words, through experiencing other varieties of English, students need to understand that the institutionally dominant model of English, namely standard English, is just one that serves a convenient purpose for learning and does not mean it is superior to any other. Such understanding can be strengthened by using discussion activities where students engage in topics about English varieties and language ideologies (e.g., Aoyama & Denton, 2022; Rose & Galloway, 2017).

In addition, assessment can play an important role in raising students' critical awareness. Teacher feedback on student performance in class and evaluation criteria for classroom-based oral performance tests should focus on what students can do using English, rather than on how similar their performance is to that of traditional native speakers. Therefore, criteria for assessing pronunciation on performance tests should especially be scrutinized in this regard.

Acknowledging a Potential Risk: Sensitivity to the Risk of Essentialization of English Varieties

One of the theoretical criticisms of WE is that it characterizes linguistic diversity in terms of differences between dominant national varieties and tends to overlook variety within nations (Pennycook, 2016). The nation-based model of conceptualizing English varieties could lead to students' overgeneralizing or essentializing language use and users within the country. Simplistic introduction of English varieties might produce or reinforce certain stereotypes about English users if students fail to recognize the nature of diversity, that is, the premise that there is always variety within variety and exception from variety (Aoyama et al., 2023). Thus, it is judicious for teachers to be sensitive to the risk of naïve essentialization of varieties when introducing a specific type of national or regional variety of English.

Here, I am not arguing against utilizing the nation-based model of English to discuss linguistic variety in the classroom. The nation-based English variety should be strategically introduced

as a convenient starting point in understanding linguistic diversity and acknowledging each English as a variety in its own right. What I problematize is the superficial treatment of linguistic variety in the classroom, which bears the aforementioned risk of stereotyping. An example of this is the use of short online videos that demonstrate reductionist and essentialist views toward particular English varieties for attention-grabbing or entertainment (e.g., YouTube or TikTok videos titled "Indian English vs. Japanese English") with no further explanation or discussion of the complex nature of language use, which fails to nurture students' nuanced understanding of linguistic diversity.

Teaching Communication Strategies: Mediating Strategies to Negotiate Differences

How can teachers prepare their students to handle different English varieties? Research on ELT has suggested that communication strategies could play an important role. A well-researched area since the early days of ELT, the teaching of communication strategies (see Dörnyei, 1995) is often given an explicit focus in speaking and listening instruction aimed at helping students develop their competence in impromptu interactions with others. WE-informed pedagogy encourages teaching communication strategies, as they are regarded as mediating strategies in negotiating linguistic and cultural differences in today's diverse communication contexts (Canagarajah, 2007; Kubota, 2012). Students benefit from explicit instruction on asking for repetition and clarification, rephrasing and circumlocution, taking conversational turns, using backchanneling, and employing full linguistic (i.e., including other languages/varieties) and non-linguistic (e.g., gestural) repertoires.

Also, although it does not sound like a strategy in a literal sense, utilizing or practicing attitudinal resources such as patience, tolerance, and openness to difference (Canagarajah, 2007; Kubota, 2012) is key to preparing students for the diverse communication opportunities they might encounter in the future. Thus, it is reasonable and natural that developing communication strategies should become one objective in a unit or syllabus. Accordingly, a rubric for classroom-based performance testing needs to reflect this objective, including a criterion to evaluate whether students can use these communication strategies to achieve what they want to do, rather than how "accurate" their utterances are compared to the standard.

Conclusion

In arguing for a shift of focus from a pedagogical method to a pedagogical stance, I have discussed

the principles for practice of a WE-informed pedagogy. As a former mid-career high school teacher of English in Japan, I understand contextual limitations such as pedagogical priority given to imminent entrance exams, the lack of resources and professional development opportunities for teachers, and all other non-teaching-related responsibilities that keep teachers busy. I hope that the focus on a stance as opposed to methodological innovations enables teachers to understand how the essence of WE-informed pedagogy can be implemented in a way that does not interfere with, but instead strengthens existing teaching practice without requiring an overhaul of curriculum design. As Kubota (2012) suggests, what is important is for practitioners to be keen for potential teachable moments and to effectively use them in instruction. WE as a pedagogical stance will prepare teachers to better predict, capture, and most importantly, respond to such critical moments in the classroom.

References

- Aoyama, R. (2021). Language teacher identity and English education policy in Japan: Competing discourses surrounding “non-native” English-speaking teachers. *RELC Journal*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882211032999>
- Aoyama, R., & Denton, L. (2022). Creating space for World Englishes perspectives in the ELT classroom: Voices of high school students in Japan. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 26(1). <https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.26101a5>
- Aoyama, R., Kajigaya, T., Takeda, Y., Kubota, R., & Deschambault, R. (2023). On pedagogical applications of World Englishes: Stumbling blocks, stepping stones, and usefulness of boundaries in ELT. In R. Tierney, F. Rizvi, & K. Ercikan (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education*. 4th ed., pp. 825–836. Elsevier.
- Canagarajah, S. (2007). After disinvention: Possibilities for communication, community and competence. In S. Makoni & A. Pennycook (Eds.), *Disinventing and reconstituting languages* (pp. 233–239). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853599255>
- Dörnyei, Z. (1995). On the teachability of communication strategies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 55–85. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587805>
- Kachru, B. B. (1992). Teaching world Englishes. In B. B. Kachru (Ed.), *The other tongue: English across cultures* (2nd ed., pp. 355–365). University of Illinois Press.
- Kachru, Y. (2011). Teaching and learning of World Englishes. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 155–173). Routledge.
- Kubota, R. (2012). The politics of EIL: Toward border-crossing communication in and beyond English. In A. Matsuda (Ed.), *Principles and practices of teaching English as an international language* (pp. 55–69). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847697042>
- Kubota, R. (2021). Examining and overcoming the theory/practice divide in World Englishes. In R. Ruddy & R. Tupas (Eds.), *Bloomsbury world Englishes volume 2: Ideologies* (Vol. 2, Issue November, pp. 81–98). Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350065871.0011>
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012). Individual identity, cultural globalization, and teaching English as an international language: The case for an epistemic break. In L. Alsagoff, S. L. McKay, G. Hu, & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Principles and practices for teaching English as an international language* (pp. 9–27). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203819159>
- Matsuda, A. (2019). World Englishes and pedagogy. In C. L. Nelson, Z. G. Proshina, & D. R. Davis (Eds.), *The handbook of world Englishes* (2nd ed., pp. 686–702). Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119147282.ch38>
- Matsuda, A., & Friedrich, P. (2011). English as an international language: A curriculum blueprint. *World Englishes*, 30(3), 332–344. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2011.01717.x>
- Matsuda, A., & Matsuda, P. K. (2017). Teaching English as an international language: A WE-informed paradigm for English language teaching. In E. L. Low & A. Pakir (Eds.), *World Englishes: Rethinking paradigms* (pp. 64–77). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315562155>
- McKay, S. L. (2002). *Teaching English as an international language: Rethinking goals and approaches*. Oxford University Press.
- Pennycook, A. (2016). Politics, power relationships and ELT. In G. Hall (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 26–37). Routledge.
- Rose, H., & Galloway, N. (2017). Debating standard language ideology in the classroom: Using the “speak good English movement” to raise awareness of global Englishes. *RELC Journal*, 48(3), 294–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688216684281>
- Rose, H., & Galloway, N. (2019). *Global Englishes for language teaching*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316678343>
- Saraceni, M. (2015). *World Englishes: A critical analysis*. Bloomsbury. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474249232>

Ryosuke Aoyama is a PhD student of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) in the department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. His research interests, shaped and informed by his experiences as an English teacher in Japanese public high schools, include pluralist approaches to English education (e.g., World Englishes, Global Englishes, teaching English as an international language, English as a lingua franca, translanguaging), language teacher identity, and language ideology.

