



Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada

ISSN: 1676-0786

rblasecretaria@gmail.com

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais
Brasil

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Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada, vol. 12, núm. 2, abril-junio, 2012, pp. 285-309
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais
Belo Horizonte, Brasil

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EFL Students' Perspectives on English: The (widening) gap between ideals and practices

Perspectivas de estudantes de língua estrangeira sobre o inglês: a (grande) lacuna entre ideais e práticas

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ABSTRACT: This paper is based on a survey into perspectives on the English language conducted in a MA in TEFL program in a Croatian University. In the study we examine non-native student-teachers' attitudes towards English and explore four key issues: a) which varieties of English are preferred, b) how the notion of English as an International Language is conceptualized, c) how attitudes about English inform teaching and learning, and d) to what extent the socio-cultural context informs attitudes about English. In the English department, there is no articulated policy toward English, yet there appears to be a strong attachment to native-speaker norms. However, with the internationalization of English and the changing ownership of the language, in recent years, much debate has arisen over the native-speaker ideal (HOLLIDAY, 2005; MCKAY, 2002). The English language is used primarily by non-native speakers to communicate with non-native speakers but it appears that this notion has had little impact on teaching and learning (see JENKINS, 2007). We see this gap as an important, and relatively underexplored issue, which merits more interest in English studies. We conclude that, in this context, perceptions of English are still formed by native-speaker norms, and lack of policy on the English language, in fact, supports native-speaker policy.

KEYWORDS: English as an international language, attitudes, native speaker, language policy.

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RESUMO: Este artigo baseia-se em um levantamento de perspectivas sobre a língua inglesa, conduzido com alunos de um programa de Mestrado em Ensino da Língua Inglesa de uma universidade croata. No estudo, examinamos as atitudes dos alunos-professores em relação ao inglês e exploramos quatro questões-chave: a) quais variedades do inglês são preferidas, b) como a noção de inglês como língua internacional é conceptualizada, c) como atitudes em relação ao inglês informam o ensino e a aprendizagem e d) o quanto o contexto sociocultural informa as atitudes em relação ao inglês. No Departamento de Inglês da universidade não há política articulada em relação ao inglês, porém parece haver um vínculo forte com normas nativas. Entretanto, com a internacionalização do inglês e as mudanças na propriedade da língua, em anos mais recentes, muitos debates vêm surgindo acerca do falante nativo ideal (HOLLIDAY, 2005; MCKAY, 2002). A língua inglesa é usada primariamente por falantes não nativos, mas aparentemente esta noção tem pouco impacto no ensino e na aprendizagem (ver JENKINS, 2007). Nós vemos esta lacuna como uma questão importante e pouco explorada, não obstante meritória de mais interesse nos estudos da língua inglesa. Concluímos que, nesse contexto, as percepções sobre o inglês ainda são formadas por normas nativas e que a falta de políticas sobre a língua inglesa apoiam uma política do falante nativo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Inglês como língua internacional, atitudes, falantes nativos, política linguística.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been much debate about the spread of English and the implications of the phenomenon for various global and local contexts (HOLLIDAY, 2005; KACHRU, 1992; MCKAY, 2002; PHILLIPSON, 1992; WIDDOWSON, 1997). As the English language spreads, it adapted and actualized in different ways, and questions are increasingly raised as to what English as an International Language actually means (WIDDOWSON, 1997). Hence, the relationship between the different English(es) and the varied uses and users of the language is undoubtedly a highly complex issue which is directly reflected in language and education policies.

Consequently, at present, one of the liveliest topics relevant to language education is the spread of English (SEIDLHOFER, 2003). The issue which has sparked growing research into World Englishes, Inner Circle Englishes, English as an International language, and English Lingua Franca, post-geographic Englishes, among others (JAMES, 2008; JENKINS, 2007; KACHRU, 1992; MODIANO, 2001; SHARIFIAN, 2009; SEIDLEHOFER, 1999; SEIDLHOFER, 2000). Similarly, it has raised numerous questions as to which English(es) should be taught and learned in the language classroom and

what the rationale for teaching and learning English is. Furthermore, the spread of English has shed new insights into English language learning, teaching and use, from political and ideological viewpoints (PENNYCOOK, 2000; PENNYCOOK 2001; HOLLIDAY, 2005; CANAGARAJAH, 1999).

Dilemmas relative to English(es), Inner Circle English, English as an International Language and English Lingua Franca have undoubtedly influenced many a language policy, and by implication, language practices and individual language acquisition decisions. In line with these discussions, the aim of this paper is to explore which English(es) Croatian student-teachers in an MA in TESOL program at an English Studies Department consider appropriate. We also examine why the student (prospective EFL teachers) consider these particular English(es) to be acceptable and desirable. And finally, we consider the findings in the light of (a lack of explicit) language policy in an English Department in Croatia.

In the next section we will look at discussions relative to the position of the English language in global/local contexts and its implication on language learning and teaching. We will then consider issues of language policy relative to English Studies. Next, we will examine the role of English in a Croatian English Studies Department, where the research was carried out. And finally, we will look at the study and discuss the findings and its implications for the future, and end the paper by drawing our concluding remarks. It will be argued that while it is undeniable that English is an International Language, the notion has little implication in practice, which is still driven by native-speaker British English and/or American English standards. At the same time, and most interestingly, there persists a wide(ning) gap between these standards – or rather ideals – and what the actual classroom practice is. This point is taken up below.

Discussions about the spread of English

English has spread globally and there is no doubt that it is the most widely taught, read and spoken language the world has ever known (KACHRU; NELSON, 2001). Given the different contexts where it is used, attempts have been made to clarify the global scene and describe and define its users and uses. Interest in the topic was sparked by Kachru's (1992) model of three concentric circles of users of English: the Inner, Outer and Expanding Circle. This model has raised awareness about the complexity of the English language, its different roles and the underlying issues of power and status. Furthermore, it shed light on the problematic distinction native speakers (NS) / non-native speakers

(NNS) of English, which has become an issue of concern of many applied linguists and English language teaching (ELT) professionals (BRAINE, 1999; BRAINE, 2010; HOLLIDAY, 2005; KRAMSCH, 1998).

The NS debate gained momentum in the 1990's when the underlying political and ideological implications of the constructs NS were brought to light. Work by Phillipson (1992, 1995) on the "native speaker fallacy" coupled with the overarching spread of English as an International Language (EIL) fostered discussions about the status and the changing "ownership of English" (WIDDOWSON, 1994, 377) and brought into question the appropriateness of the NS linguistic ideal (JENKINS, 2007; SEIDLHOFER, 2000). In a word, the emergence of a new paradigm of reference in English (see, e.g. SHARIFIAN, 2009) has challenged the NS image in much debate about the notion 'native-speakerism' and, by implication, questioned English language policy and what should be taught and learned in the name of English.

Given that English is used world-wide primarily by non-native speakers (NNS) to communicate with NNS, it seems fair to question whether all who learn it want to strive towards the NS ideal, and whether the NS ideal should be set as the benchmark. Further, in most cases across the world, English is taught by NNS to NNS (KACHRU; NELSON, 2001), hence the relevance of the NS ideal is widely disputed. It would thus seem that the global spread of English has become a major issue for both teachers (e.g. BRAINE, 1999; BRAINE, 2010; LLURDA, 2006; MEDGYES, 1994; PETRIC, 2009) and learners of English, and with the increased spread of English, native-like proficiency has become an unrealistic standard for non-native speakers (MODIANO, 2001). Hence, it has been proposed that the teaching of English should not focus on NS norms, methods and culture (McKay, 2002; Holliday, 2005; JENKINS, 2007; Seidlhofer, 1999).

Nevertheless, it appears that this notion has had little impact on the teaching and learning of English (Jenkins, 2007) and in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, as the focus still tends to be on the ideal monolingual native speaker and a specific variety of English, namely, British English (BE) or American English (AE). From a practical point of view, the traditional focus on a native speaker variety does not cater towards the needs of the international English speaking community (JENKINS, 2007; MCKAY, 2002). Indeed, it would seem that, today, the goal of language learning would be the ability to negotiate different English varieties, and not to imitate the NS (CANAGARAJAH, 2006; SEIDLHOFER, 1999). From

a pedagogical point of view, doubts have been expressed as to whether a single NS variety actually fosters intelligibility in international settings and contributes towards intercultural communication. In fact, the more varieties students are exposed to, the higher the level of understanding (MATSUDA, 2003; MATSUURA *et al.*, 1999).

From this it would follow that we would need to reconsider the current English language paradigm and embrace EIL as the new paradigm for practice and research (SHARIFIAN, 2009). Hence, ELT should concentrate on incorporating EIL (uses of English with regard to NNS worldwide regardless of whether they are interacting with other NNS or with NS, e.g. LLURDA, 2006). Nevertheless, at present, EIL is still not functional in Europe (MODIANO, 2009).

In the light of the discussions above, it seems fair to question as to why practice, in spite of the emerging research in the EIL paradigm, still focuses on NS English. First, the very notion of EIL and the many names used to denote the actualization of English(es) in the world seems to cause some confusion in the field as to what it actually is and what it represents. For example, Seidlehofer (2003) points out that EIL may imply a codified and unitary variety called International English, which it is not. Sharifian (2009:2) also makes a distinction between International English which may suggest a particular variety of English and EIL which “does not refer to a particular variety”. Widdowson (1997) explains the distinction by stating that English as an International Language is spread and not distributed, hence, it is differently actualized in various contexts. James (2008; 2006) posits that the new post-territorial Englishes are actually a chimera created in informal ad hoc situations, and thus cannot be codified. Undoubtedly, the many different positions lend themselves to various interpretations raising uncertainties about how they can be reflected in practice. In brief, EIL seems to be a viable paradigm at the theoretical level, but tends to pose challenges at the pragmatic level, i.e. in practice.

Further, teaching is embedded in the sociocultural context and decisions relative to the teaching and learning of English are influenced by tradition and socially situated beliefs and practices (e.g. it seems appropriate to teach what we were taught and thus ‘pure’ English varieties tend to be favoured, in particular BE). Moreover, various factors like the expectations of stakeholders, society, students and parents impact teaching and learning as do English language teaching methodology and the socially expected learning outcomes.

Available ELT course materials undoubtedly guide practice and international tests like Cambridge Proficiency Examinations and the TOEFL set measurable standards based on NS norms. These tests and standards have a significant washback effect on teaching and learning (CANAGARAJAH, 2006). And finally, attitudes towards English(es) affect language choice and NS English still holds high currency in most contexts (DALTON-PUFFER *et al.*, 1997; DECKE-CORNILLE, 2002; KUBOTA, 2002; MAHBOOB, 2005). Namely, the choice of language will be affected by how favourably it is judged and it is indisputable that some varieties are considered better than others. Also, given that English has different roles in different countries (e.g. native, second and foreign), greater importance is attributed to particular varieties, which has different social implications and thus influences language policies. Similarly, ideology about language will undoubtedly be reflected in the choice of language / variety and language use.

It seems fair to say that the communicative value of a language i.e. the “tidal wave of English” and its instrumental value (SPOLSKY, 2005, p. 2162) undoubtedly impact language choice and affect decisions relative to language use. Given that language policy is closely connected to choice (SPOLSKY, 2005), attitudes which underlie the choices that individuals make will have implications on language policy as well as on language learning and teaching. Let us now take a closer look at language policy and ideology.

Language policy, language ideology and English

In this paper, we use the term policy to refer to the “general linguistic, political and social goals underlying the actual language planning process (DEUMERT, 2000, p. 384) which has a direct impact on education (MACKAY; BOKHORST-HENG, 2008). Language policy is shaped and influenced by various factors like global issues, (language) education policy, financial issues and political issues, among others. It “includes not just the regular patterns of choice, but also beliefs about choices and the values of varieties and of variants” SPOLSKY, 2005, p.2152). Central to language policy are three key components, namely, “language practices, language beliefs and ideology” (SPOLSKY, 2005, p. 2154), which influence decisions about language teaching and learning. Language ideologies are “sets of social representations that are the basis of arguments advanced about languages” which involve value judgments and the assessment of a linguistic variety (BEACCO, 2007, p. 25), and the assessment of a linguistic variety “is the result

of external factors” (BEACCO, 2007, p. 26). Hence, notions and decisions about the ‘appropriateness’ of varieties as ideals for language learning and teaching are not intrinsic to the language itself, but are closely related to language beliefs, ideology and language policy.

In the light of the discussions, it seems fair to state that language policy and language learning/teaching are interdependent and, by implication, the decisions that are made about which language to teach, to whom and how, i.e. the rationale for teaching a language may be defined by language policy, or the lack thereof. Therefore, teaching is influenced by language policy and can at the same time contribute to changes in language policy, i.e. reinforce policy or undermine it thereby creating new policy (BALDAUF, 2005). Indeed, language policy can change (negative) language attitudes and ideologies, but can also reinforce them.

One of the main issues with language policy is that, unlike with other policies, it is rarely explicitly stipulated in documents (MOORE, 2007) and decisions about including or excluding a language issue from policy is, in fact, policy in itself (MOORE, 2007). Hence, policy, whether explicit, implicit or non-existent, affects the nature of language and the teaching and learning context (BALDAUF, 2005).

Language classrooms are not isolated from external political concern and “what happens in the classroom is intimately linked to social and political forces” (TOLLEFSON, 1995, p. ix). Hence, the global spread of English and the increase in English speakers has direct implications on the English language itself and the English language classroom. From the ideological perspective, it has been suggested that English language learning and teaching have been dominated by the ‘ideal native speaker’ (NS) (HOLLIDAY, 2005; MCKAY, 2002; PHILLIPSON, 1992). In other words, the NS has been held up as a benchmark for knowledge about language (DAVIES, 2003) and represents an ideal in language teaching and learning (HOLLIDAY, 1994; HOLLIDAY, 2005). Hence, NS ideology has had significant influence on English language policy, be it explicit or implicit.

In order to contextualize the debate and better understand (English) language policy and attitudes about the appropriateness of English(es) for English language learning and teaching, we will now contextualize the theory by looking at how it is reflected in an English Studies Department in Croatia.

An English Studies Department and English language policy: A case from Croatia

A look at language practices in Croatia will show that English has no official status in the country and is widely taught as a foreign language. In our higher education context, in English Studies Departments, no language policy document defines what should be taught in the name of English, i.e. which varieties are the models or to which varieties students should be exposed to in the MA in TESOL Programme. Hence, by default, the desirable varieties are standard British English (BE) and American English (AE) with the choice usually contingent on the course instructor's, educational background and/or personal preference. In short, the British and / or American native speaker is set as the ideal and the linguistic goal is to achieve native-like competence.

Mention has been made that there is no 'planned/visible' English language policy in the English Studies department, nor is there a legacy of teaching varieties of English. Much like in other contexts, ELT is supported by materials, resources and publications from Inner Circle countries. In the past, various English language programs like United States Information Agency and Soros, among others, provided 'Inner Circle support'. Also, scholarships for university lecturers for study and professional development at institutions in Inner Circle countries, namely, the US and UK have influenced attitudes about appropriate English. International tests are used to set the benchmark for English in language courses. In addition, the seminal reference tool developed by the Council of Europe in 2001, *The Common European Framework, for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (see <<http://www.coe.int/ling>>) sets standards with reference to the native-speakers. And finally, in the curriculum, the overall focus on British and American culture and literature reiterates the importance of the two varieties. Speaking about the concrete case of the English Department at Rijeka University, in Croatia – which is where the study reported in this paper has been conducted -only recently, two courses have been introduced in the MA in TESOL program which explore the current debates on English(es). The first explores English as a global language and the second raises awareness of the cultural implications of English learning and teaching. Admittedly, these are only two courses, which at a theoretical level, introduce students to the field, and as such, have little impact at the practical level, which is widely governed by BE and AE.

Therefore, throughout the studies it is widely acknowledge that the 'appropriate' English varieties are BE and AE. If we consider this with reference

to the notion that the key domain where policies are created is education (MOORE, 2007; SPOLSKY, 2005), it would seem fair to conclude that the language policy created in the English Department at Rijeka University reinforces Inner Circle English. If language policy is about choice and if language policy exists even when it is not formally established or explicitly stated (SPOLSKY, 2005), it seems fair to state that the implicit policy in the English Department is driven by tradition and practice. In brief, although there is no explicit language policy document which stipulates as to what, in fact, the Department English language policy is, and what should be taught and learned in the name of English, in the English Studies Programme, NS ideology is pervasive and taken for granted and, by implication, BE and/or AE are taken as the appropriate models.

In the light of the discussions on English, ideology and language policy it seemed desirable to carry out a small-scale attitudinal study concerning English among EFL students (prospective EFL teachers) about their perceptions towards the English language. We believe that attitudes of prospective teachers towards English are particularly important because they:

- a) reflect the beliefs and values that are dominant in a particular context
- b) provide insights into future EFL practice and education policy
- c) influence the choice of variety as a language model
- d) reflect language ideology
- e) drive the selection of materials.

Let us now look at the study itself and relate the findings to the theoretical backdrop discussed so far.

The study

Aim and method

In order to explore the student's attitudes about English, i.e. with respect to different English varieties, and try to investigate issues relative to and shaping students' opinions as to which English varieties are considered important for EFL teaching / learning, we designed a questionnaire. It was a combination of a) a set of close ended items (statements ranked on a Likert scale 1-5); b) a set of Y / N questions; and finally c) a few open ended-questions. Apart from allowing us to gain insight into students' opinions i.e.

attitudes relative to varieties of English (within the EFL context), we saw the findings as potentially interesting with respect to the current debates relative to English and EIL and the future trends in EFL curriculum development.

Participants

The study reported in this paper was conducted among 52 3rd and 4th year university students from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Rijeka, all enrolled in a double major programme, where one of the two majors is English and the other one is chosen from a variety of humanistic disciplines (e.g. Croatian language, history, history of art, pedagogy, German and similar). The sex ratio was preponderantly female.

We are fully aware of the fact that the subject sample chosen for our study is not just very small for us to draw any definitive conclusion, but also extremely homogeneous (in terms of age, education, linguistic picture, social background), and that as such it does not represent a very good sample for generalizations. However, as pointed out by Wright (2004), “since university students can be seen as the group which, in meritocracies, will constitute the future elite in their societies, data on their language behaviour reveals *developing practices* among future national and global actors.” (*Ibid*, p. 2-3, italics our). Furthermore, many of our students represent future English teachers, i.e. people who will most directly implement but also co-create foreign language policies, and are certainly the ones who will directly influence the perceptions of or rather attitudes to different English varieties among their future students, i.e. who will most directly impact future EFL learners and practices.

Data

Below, we report the results of selected study items, i.e. of those questions which yielded the most interesting i.e. most insightful responses. We shall first list the questions followed by the graphic representation of the results (for each question), and then discuss the implications of the responses.

Q1: It is important to learn the following varieties.

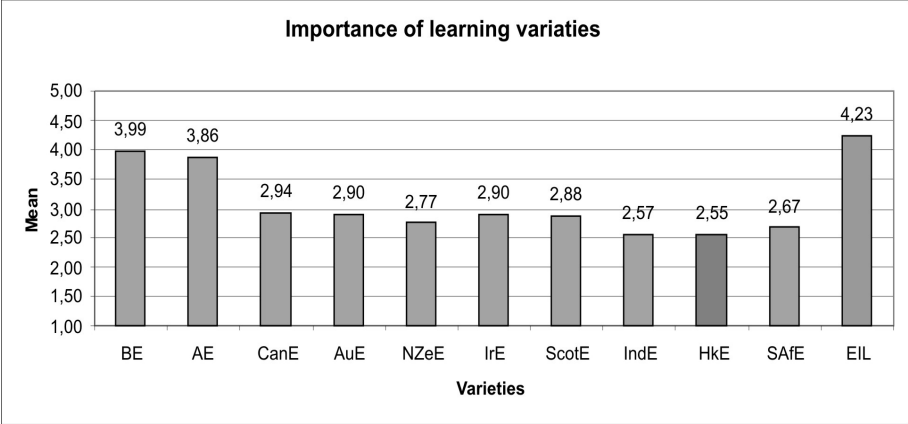


FIGURE 1 - Varieties that students believe should be learned

Q2: Which varieties should be taught in the English language program?

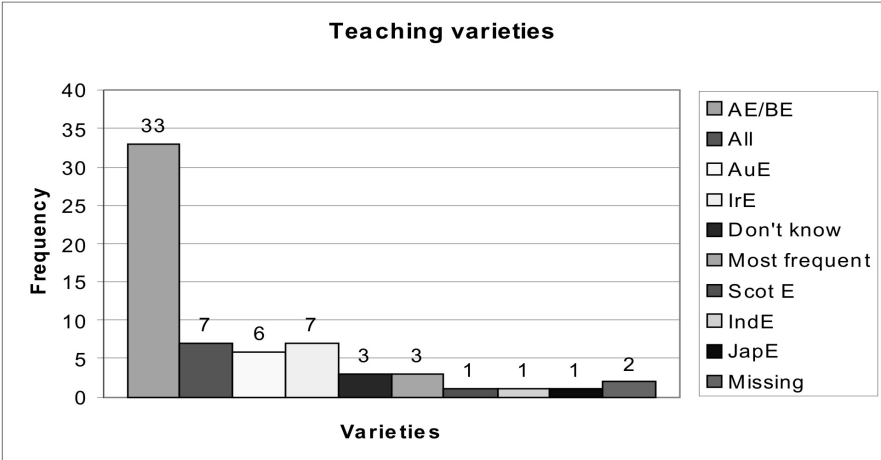


FIGURE 2 - Preferred teaching varieties

As seen in FIG. 1, our students claim that it is important to learn different varieties of English, and most interestingly, they state that it is most important to learn EIL. This is in stark contrast to what they state should be taught in the classroom. Curiously, in FIG. 2 which indicated students' preferences with respect to those varieties which, they believe, should be taught

in class, there is a preponderant preference for the AE / BE, followed, at a great distance, by other varieties. The responses to the first two questions already point to the gap between the ‘theoretical’ views on the status of EIL, and the real wishes of the students in the EFL classroom (we are seeing some sort of gap between, what we shall here call ‘idealized theory’ *vs.* ‘ideal practice’).

Q3.: Are some varieties more authentic?

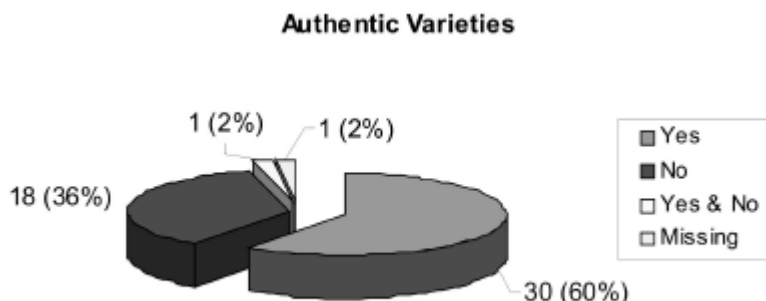


FIGURE 3 - Perceived authenticity of varieties

As shown in FIG. 3, students seem to perceive some varieties as being more authentic than others. When asked to explain their view, they list a series of arguments summed up below.

Q4: Are some varieties more authentic? Explain.

- Yes – 30 (60%)
 - a) Origin/history b) Pronunciation c) Spread d) Familiarity
- “If authentic means originality [...] then yes, BE because it is authentic at its core.”
- “the language originates from the UK so this is the original language”
- “AE and BE are more authentic to me than for example, Singapore English”
- “Some sound more authentic”
- “Standard BE and AE”
- “Indian English is not authentic and one can easily distinguish an Indian who is born in Britain and speaks like a native from an Indian who is not born in Britain....”

- **No – 18 (36%)**
 - a) Lack of exposure b) Contextualized perspective of authenticity
- “Because we have less opportunity to hear them they sound strange”
- “Every variety is authentic for its native speakers”
- “they are equally authentic to the people who use them”

Q5.: Which variety is most appealing to you?

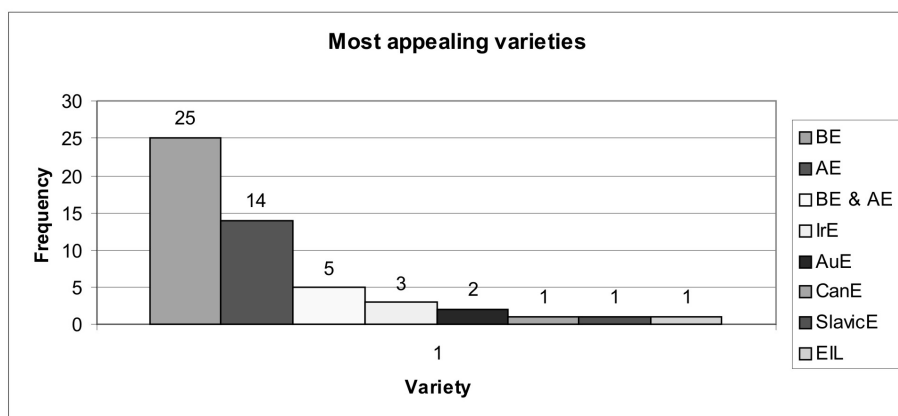


FIGURE 4 - Most appealing varieties

The most appealing varieties for students, as shown in FIG. 4, are British or American English, followed by the alternative BA / AE. Surprisingly, this data is (again) strikingly different from the one presented in FIG. 1 where they claim that both EIL and different varieties of English(es) should be learned. The reasons proposed by our respondents as underlying the appeal of these varieties are summed up below:

Q6.: Why are these varieties most appealing to you?

BE: authenticity, origin, prestige, purity, pronunciation, intelligibility, sophistication.

- “I like the way it sounds on BBC”
- “It sounds sophisticated and it is more understandable than others”
- “It’s the mother tongue of all English varieties”

AE: Familiarity, exposure, learnability

- “It’s the variety I hear the most”
- “I’ve been listening to it on TV and can speak it better”
- “Force of habit”

Q7.: Do some teachers use more acceptable varieties?

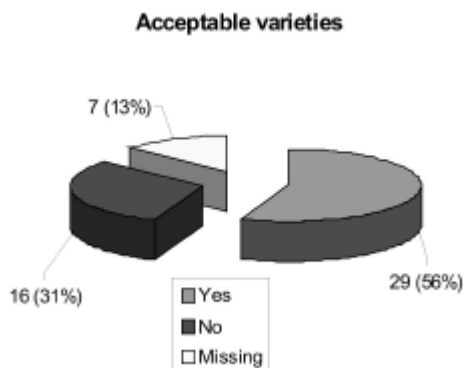


FIGURE 5 - Teachers’ use of varieties – acceptability

The majority of our respondents believe that some teachers use more acceptable varieties than others. They explain their views as follows:

A: Yes:

- “They all use either BE or AE”
- “It depends on their education, especially the place of it, were they educated in Croatia or abroad”

A: No:

- “They already use BE and AE”
- “Ts should speak as they want but need to have a clear pronunciation”

Q8.:Please explain how you understand the notion EIL.

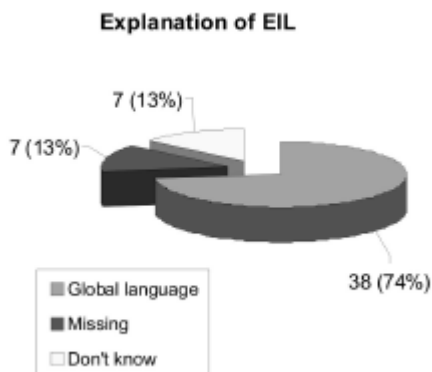


FIGURE 6 - Students' understanding of EIL

- “English on the world level, some variety that everybody can use.”
- “Intelligible to everyone, world-wide communication, accessible to all, standard for NNS.”
- “Means of communication used world wide.”
- “That people from every part of the world understand.”
- “I understand it as a way of communicating with the whole world.”
- “The bad English politicians use.”

Students' understanding of the notion of EIL is shown in FIG. 6. Then, in FIG. 7, we review students' understanding of the role of EIL in the English Studies programme.

Q9.: Please explain the role EIL plays in your English Studies program

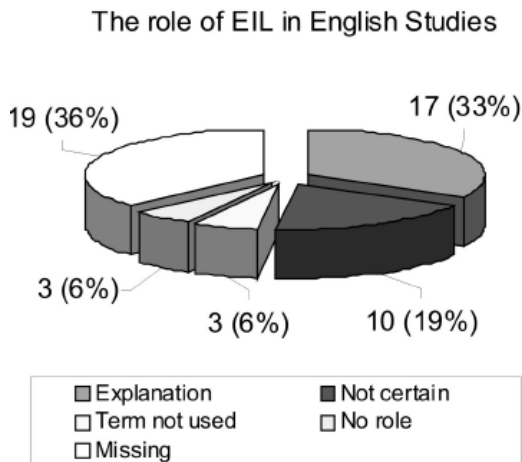


FIGURE 7 - Students' understanding of the role of EIL in the English Studies programme

Some indicative explanations:

- "I don't think we deal with English as an international language much"
- "The term is never explicitly used"
- "It is important to be more implicated into studies as a sort of connection between countries"
- "Learning how to use English in different cultures, various situations, among various people"
- "We all speak our "our" English which, I believe, is a little more complex than EIL"
- "It's the most important variety"
- "Helps us to communicate with the world"
- "It is important that teachers speak it without special accents"

Q10.: Is it important to learn different varieties to communicate with others?

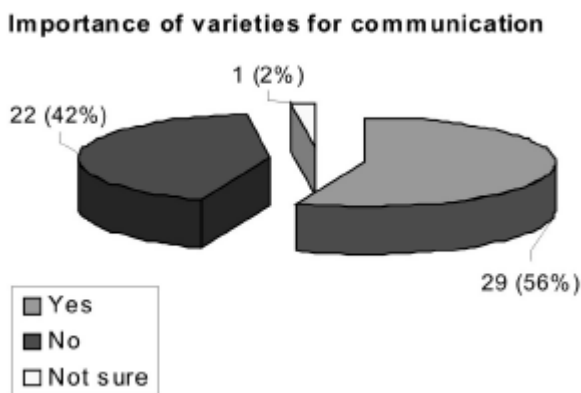


FIGURE 8 - The perceived importance of varieties for communication

Our respondents also perceive that some varieties are more important for communication than other varieties, as is shown in FIG. 8. The explanation of this view is given below (Q11):

Q11.: Explain why is it (not) important to learn different varieties to communicate with others

A: Yes

- “it gives us more opportunities”
- “different people speak different varieties, it is important to understand them”
- “we can adapt to another environment more easily”
- “it enables us to communicate with a wide variety of English speakers”

A: No

- “Everyone should understand the basic standard”
- “Not knowing them shouldn’t be a great threat to communication”
- “English is English”

A: Yes & No

- “It’s good to know them but it’s not necessary to communicate”

Q12.: Please list all the English varieties you can recognize as such.

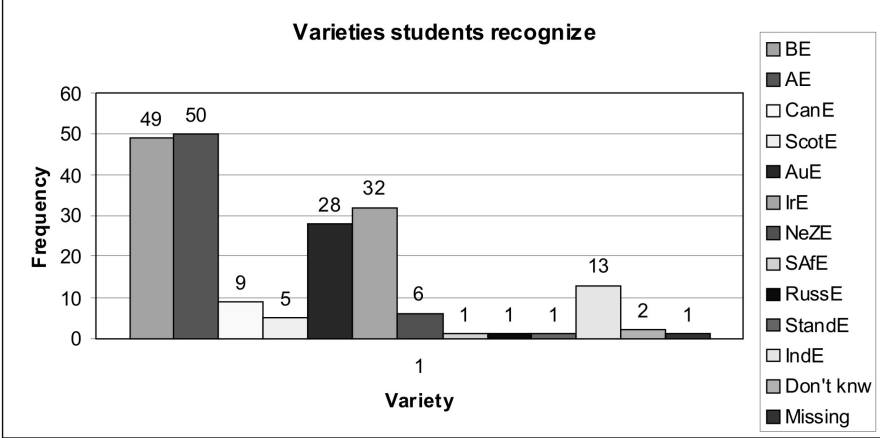


FIGURE 9 - Varieties recognized by students

Q13.: Which variety of English would you like to master?

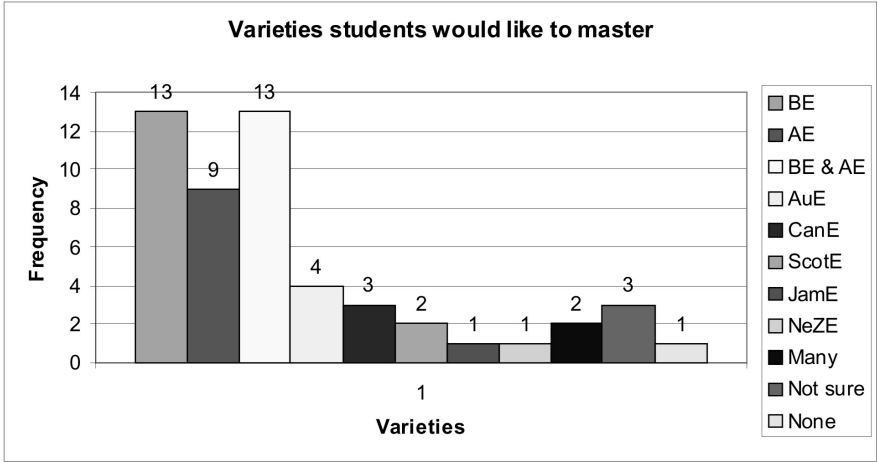


FIGURE 10 - Varieties that students would like to master

Q14: Which English varieties have you been exposed to outside the classroom?

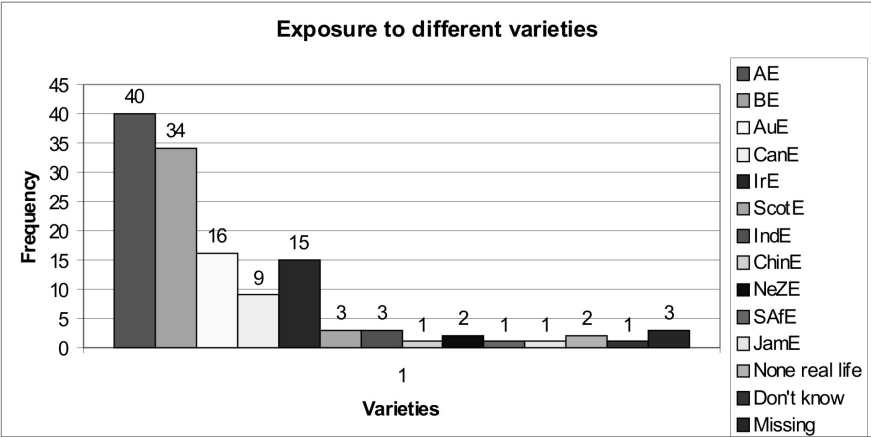


FIGURA 11 - Exposure to different varieties

FIG. 9, 10 and 11 sum up the final three questions that we wanted to include in this paper, i.e. students’ familiarity with different varieties of English, their interest to master different varieties, and their exposure to them outside the classroom. The results relative to these three issues (where, again, British and American English have no rival varieties), are – together with the insights gained through other questions reviewed above – discussed in the next section of the paper.

Discussion

Having looked at a number of study questions and our subjects’ responses, let us now focus on a few issues which have been informed by our investigation. First of all, let us look at the issue of ‘English variety preference’. It is very interesting to observe that in the introductory part of the study, when asked about English varieties at a theoretical, ‘declarative’ level, our students do not just acknowledge the existence but express their ‘rational’ favour for learning different English varieties. Moreover, they state it is (most) important to learn EIL. However, when asked about concrete varieties which should be taught in the classroom and with which they are acquainted with i.e. concrete varieties they would like to learn in formal settings, they show an absolute preference for the British and American varieties of English. This discrepancy

between theory and practice is possibly due to the lack of awareness i.e. direct experience with varieties and lack of familiarity with EIL and what it actually is. At present, however, this latter view is based mainly on our intuition, i.e. speculation and fragmented evidence scattered through the literature. The gap between theory and practice (i.e. between the data in FIG. 1 *vs.* FIG. 2.), on the other hand, is potentially a very significant one, and we believe that it should be investigated into further detail and possibly thoroughly explained, as its understanding would necessarily bring about a more substantial treatment and positioning of EIL both in theory and practice.

Next, but related to what has just been discussed, we take a look at how the notion of EIL is conceptualized. Somewhat surprisingly, our respondents seem to have a very vague notion of EIL. They seem to view it as a vague 'mix' of varieties (a 'hybrid' as one of the students has put it), "the international circulation of NS norms" (JENKINS, 2007), i.e., a franchise of the same product distributed across the world (WIDDOWSON, 1997). This seems to yield a negative view when it comes to teaching / learning it. Furthermore, our subjects express a clear preference for 'the standard' (as if all the varieties were not 'standard varieties'), while clearly leaning toward BE and AE (as 'best models of the standard'). Fully in line with this, and with the views proposed in the preceding paragraph, while being 'open to all varieties in the classroom', when asked about the variety they would like to be taught, most students opt for either BE or AE.

The third theoretical issue that is informed by our results is the issue of how attitudes about English inform teaching and learning. In relation to this we observe that students seem to recognize that part of the problem they have with in practice is lack of exposure to different varieties and uncertainty as to what EIL is. A complementary study to this one (VODOPIJA-KRSTANOVIC; BRALA-VUKANOVIC, 2009), has shown that teachers, too, seem not to see EIL as an appropriate 'teaching model' and that lack of EIL awareness in teachers is reflected in the attitudes of students. It thus seems quite obvious that the change needs to start with a change in the attitudes of the teachers, who, in turn, need to sensitize their students.

Carrying on, we ought to consider the extent to which the socio-cultural context inform attitudes about English. We propose that the socio-cultural models largely influence the preferences and linguistic practices of teachers and students. In fact, our student' have been mainly exposed to BE and AE throughout their education and the media. The American role model in the

socio-economical sense, and the British one in the linguistic, seem to be at the core of most of the results that his study has yielded.

Now, in final analysis, it would seem appropriate to state that lack of awareness of the notion of EIL has very clear and direct implication for English studies. In fact, in order to establish teaching EIL it would be necessary to:

- a) to clarify the notion so that (prospective) teachers gain a better understanding of the new paradigm
- b) raise awareness and foster a change of attitudes towards English and EIL
- c) work out a description of EIL, i.e., what, in fact, are those concrete pragmatic aspects of English as an International Language.

We conclude this section by observing that unless EIL can be codified and described, which is unlikely given that it is not a unitary variety of English (SEIDLHOFER, 2000; SHARIFIAN, 2009), we are uncertain as to how it can be taught. At the same time, and much to our worry, we cannot but agree with James (2008) who states that the new Englishes used in international communication are created in informal domains in *ad hoc* situations. Hence, and it is highly unlikely that there exists a codifiable kind of EIL which could serve as a norm in the international teaching of English. We are thus faced with a paradoxical and, yet, very real problem which, given its implications on everyday EFL practices, cannot be left unsolved. Moreover, researchers are reluctant to advise teachers as to what is appropriate for their learners (NNEST Blog, JENKINS, 2011). The fact that a simple solution does not seem to be at hand is a challenge for the academic community to further analyze and identify current EIL issues and weave research into the very fabric of teaching.

Concluding remarks

Having reviewed both the theoretical issues underpinning our study, as well as the results of our investigation into current EFL students' attitudes toward EFL (models), we find ourselves facing daunting questions: is the current theoretical EIL debate within applied linguistics 'applicable' in practice, i.e. can EIL truly be considered a new viable paradigm for teaching in foreign language contexts? Can the current debates relative to English and EIL shape language and education policies?

We have seen that there exist a wide and worrying gap between the support that EIL enjoys among students (and teachers) in theory on the one

hand, and their propensity to learn (teach) “(an) international variety (ies)” in practice on the other. In fact, the results of our study clearly indicate that the idea to learn English as an International Language did not find many supporters among our subject, which is not surprising as there are doubts as to whether EIL can be considered a variety (SEIDLEHOFER, 2000; SHARIFIAN, 2009). Language varieties enjoying the highest prestige continue to be BE and AE. The fact that most student-teachers seem to not just acknowledge the existence of EIL, but look at it as a reality that cannot but be accepted, is obviously not reflected in practical attitudes and that stereotypes and prejudice linked to assumptions relative to different varieties / (NNS) accents, are hard to root out from the EFL practice.

If we are to bridge this gap, i.e. marry the theoretical recognition of EIL and its establishment in the EFL classroom, we would first need to codify it. This, as said, raises the difficult (if not impossible) issue of codification of the kind of English that is employed in international contexts, which could serve as a norm in the international teaching of English. Indeed, “can international codification be applied to a language which has more than 700 million users across the globe” (KACHRU, 2003, p. 30). To put it differently, “we would have to invent the language we should teach” (DECKE-CORNILL, 2002). The problem seems never to have been more diversified. Perhaps the initial hope for its solution has a multifaceted nature as well: multiple views and voices from different local contexts are essential for gaining insights into perspectives on the multifaceted English language and ELT.

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Recebido em 28/7/2011. Aprovado em 21/3/2012.