# A CONCEPT OF INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH AND RELATED ISSUES: FROM 'REAL ENGLISH' TO 'REALISTIC ENGLISH'?

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## Preface

This text was commissioned by the Language Policy Division for the Conference on *Languages, diversity, citizenship: policies for plurilingualism in Europe* (13-15 November 2002). In the framework of a general discussion of diversification of language education policies, the need emerged to single out the "question" of the role of English teaching/learning in Europe for separate treatment. This problem has long been recognised as crucial for implementing any kind of diversified language teaching. At the Innsbruck Conference on "*Linguistic diversity for democratic citizenship in Europe*" (10-12 May 1999), the Language Policy Division was specifically asked to produce discussion papers on this particular aspect of language policy. This text, together with others in the same series, is a response to this demand from member States.

This debate should also be seen in relation to the "*Guide for the development of language education policies in Europe: from linguistic diversity to plurilingual education*". This *Guide* is both a descriptive and forward-looking document aimed at highlighting the complexity of the issues involved in language education, which are often addressed too simplistically. It endeavours to describe the methods and conceptual tools for analysing different language teaching situations and organising language education in accordance with Council of Europe principles. The present document also broaches this major issue, but given its subject-matter, it obviously cannot address it exhaustively.

The aim here is to review the issue of English in relation to plurilingualism, which many Council of Europe Recommendations have pinpointed as a principle and goal of language education policies. It is essential that plurilingualism be valued at the level of the individual and that their responsibility in this matter be assumed by all the education institutions concerned.

Jean-Claude Beacco and Michael Byram

## 1. Introduction

I understand the brief for this Study to be to provide a discussion both of the concept of 'International English' and of the way it relates to European language teaching policies and the position these take *vis-à-vis* what is widely perceived as the 'tyrannosaurus rex' of languages, English (Swales 1997).

Brumfit's book *Individual Freedom in Language Teaching: Helping Learners to Develop a Dialect of their Own* is concerned with second, foreign, and mother tongue teaching rather than with English in particular, but one chapter is dedicated to teaching English as a world language. In it, Brumfit provides an ideal introduction to the concerns of this paper as it mentions most of the issues that will be addressed below:

> The massive spread of English teaching in the years after the war led to the position that is now true: that the English language no longer belongs numerically to speakers of English as a mother tongue, or first language. The ownership (by which I mean the power to adapt and change) of any language in effect rests with the people who use it, however they are, however multilingual they are, however monolingual they are. The major advances in sociolinguistic research over the past half century indicate clearly the extent to which languages are shaped by their use. And for English, the current competent users of English number up to seven hundred million, living in every continent … of whom less than half are native speakers. Statistically, native speakers are in a minority for language use, and thus in practice for language change, for language maintenance, and for the ideologies and beliefs associated with the language – at least in so far as non-native speakers use the language for a wide range of public and personal needs. (Brumfit 2001:116)

This extracts highlights the historically unique position of English in the world, the fact that non-native users of English now outnumber native speakers, and the argument that the power to adapt and change the language rests with the people who use it. It reminds us that English is used by plurilingual and monolingual people alike (but obviously, due to the numerical predominance of non-native speakers, the plurilinguals outnumber the monolinguals), and, lastly, that it is the non-native speakers of English who will be the main agents in the ways English is used, is maintained, and changes, and who will shape the ideologies and beliefs associated with it.[1]

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[1] Crystal (1997:54) gives the following estimates for speakers of English in terms of Kachru's (e.g. 1985, 1992) 'concentric circles': Inner Circle [ie first language, e.g. USA, UK] 320-380 million, Outer Circle [ie additional language, e.g. India, Singapore] 150 – 300 million, Expanding Circle [ie foreign language, e.g. China, Russia] 100 – 1000 million. Kachru himself maintains that "[T]here are now at least four non-native speakers of English for every native speaker," (Kachru 1996:241). McArthur (1992:355) has a more conservative estimate, namely "a 2-to-1 ratio of non-natives to natives". And to cite a voice from what Kachru calls the Expanding Circle, the German author Gnutzmann (2000:357) adds another way of looking at this: "It has been estimated that about 80 per cent of verbal exchanges in which English is used as a second or foreign language do not involve native speakers of English (Beneke 1991)".

These developments have been under way for some time now, but traditional conceptions of languages and speech communities predispose us to notice some developments and fail to perceive others.

This paper will attempt to sketch just how deeply affected English has already been through its function as *the* world language. It will outline/summarize some of the recent developments of the language that have been researched and documented so far, set this work in relation to other relevant work in descriptive linguistics, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics for language pedagogy, and consider the question to what extent it is justified to refer to 'International English' as a 'variety' in its own right – an assumption which seems to lie behind the use of the term 'International English'. Finally, the crucial issue to be addressed concerns language teaching, namely what implications the existence of English as a global language may have for European language policy, the teaching of English and the teaching of modern languages in Europe generally. The paper concludes with a list of references and other resources for pursuing these questions more thoroughly than space allows me to do here.

## 2.  What is 'International English'?

'International English' can be read as shorthand for 'English as an international language' (EIL). The longer term is, however, though more unwieldy, more precise because it highlights the international use of English rather than suggesting, wrongly, that there is one clearly distinguishable, unitary variety called 'International English'.[2]

McKay (2002), in her book entitled *Teaching English as an International Language*, also makes use of the shorthand term and defines it like this:

> International English is used by native speakers of English and bilingual users of English for cross-cultural communication. International English can be used both in a local sense between speakers of diverse cultures and languages within one country and in a global sense between speakers from different countries. (p. 132)

This means, of course, that in addition to English learnt by speakers from the Expanding Circle (see footnote 1), the uses of English internationally include speakers of English as a native language (ENL) / English as a mother tongue (EMT) in all its dialects (i.e. Kachru's Inner Circle), as well as speakers of New Englishes/World Englishes/ indigenised/nativized varieties (i.e. Kachru's Outer Circle; for a comprehensive overview see McArthur 1998): wherever English is

[2] The term 'International English' is sometimes also used to refer to the English used in territories where it is a majority first language or an official additional language, e.g. Todd & Hancock 1986, Trudgill & Hannah 1982/2002. The same approach is also taken by the 'International Corpus of English' (ICE) – viz. Greenbaum 1996:4: "Excluded from ICE is the English used in countries where it is not a medium for communication between natives of the country." This definition of 'International English', limiting itself as it does to contexts with an *institutionalised intranational* role of English, is thus not only different but actually in complementary distribution with the perspective taken in this paper and by many other scholars elsewhere.

chosen as the preferred option for cross-cultural communication, it can be referred to as EIL.

Other terms used more or less interchangeably with EIL include:
  English as a *lingua franca*: (e.g. Gnutzmann 2000)
  English as a global language (e.g. Crystal 1997)
  English as a world language (e.g. Mair, in press)
  English as a medium of intercultural communication (e.g. Meierkord 1996)

Obviously, the various additions to 'English' in all of the above terms serve to indicate that something is in operation here that requires the signalling of a difference from the default conception of a language, namely the code and conventions employed by its native speakers. These terms variously emphasize what are perceived as relevant aspects of the use of English in different contexts and for different purposes, but what they have in common is that they signal some sort of recognition that in the use of EIL conditions hold which are different from situations when a language is clearly associated with its native speakers and its place of origin, whether it is spoken by those native speakers or by people who have learnt it as a foreign language: different attitudes and expectations (should) prevail, and different norms (should) apply.

Another term for EIL has recently been introduced: *World English* (Brutt-Griffler 2002). This is a very striking and innovative denomination, and it goes hand in hand with a striking and innovative treatment of the topic in that it takes significant steps towards a much more powerful and comprehensive account of EIL than has hitherto been available. Brutt-Griffler identifies "four central features of the development of global language":

(1) Econocultural functions of the language;
[i.e., World English is the product of the development of a world market and global developments in the fields of science, technology, culture and the media]

(2) The transcendence of the role of an elite *lingua franca*;
[i.e., World English is learned by people at various levels of society, not just by the socio-economic elite]

(3) The stabilization of bilingualism through the coexistence of world language with other languages in bilingual/multilingual contexts;
[i.e., World English tends to establish itself alongside local languages rather than replacing them, and so contributes to multilingualism rather than jeopardize it]

(4) Language change via the processes of world language convergence and world language divergence
[i.e., World English spreads due to the fact that many people learn it rather than by speakers of English migrating to other areas; thus two processes happen concurrently: new varieties are created and unity in the world language is maintained]
(Brutt-Griffler 2002:110; glosses in square brackets added)

It would go beyond the scope of the present paper to elaborate on the significant ways in which Brutt-Griffler's perspective challenges accounts of 'linguistic imperialism' and 'linguistic genocide'. In a nutshell, she demonstrates that English owes its global spread as much to the struggle *against* imperialism as to imperialism itself (op.cit.: chapter 4). What needs to be emphasized in the present context, however, is that in Brutt-Griffler's account, bi- or

plurilingualism is an intrinsic design feature of World English. She provides a carefully researched and well-argued basis for acknowledging the active role of EIL users as *agents* in its spread and in its linguistic development: they are not just at the receiving end, but contribute to the shaping of the language and the functions it fulfils. This is a perspective with very considerable implications for educational questions concerning the conceptualisation of English in European curricula.

## 3. English in European language policy: issues arising

During the Conference "Languages, Diversity, Citizenship: Policies for Plurilingualism in Europe" organised by the Language Policy Division (Strasbourg, 13-15 November 2002), the issue of "Diversification and English" was discussed[3]. Six statements were offered as starting points for the discussion, as they reflect widely held assumptions and express important preoccupations. The first two statements were the following:

- If diversification is to succeed, the teaching of English should be considered as a separate question. Once the position of English has been determined, the diversification of the curriculum of other languages can be addressed more successfully.
- If democratic citizenship in Europe is to be internationally based, it is crucial to ensure diversification in language teaching so that citizens in Europe can interact in their own languages, rather than through English as a *lingua franca*.

The concepts and assumptions underlying these statements can now be analysed in the light of our discussion so far by formulating questions they give rise to:

| Assumptions | Questions |
|---|---|
| The de facto special status of English is recognized. | Which/whose "English" is being referred to here, i.e. which *concept* of English underlies this assumption? Does the special status require a special concept? |
| The special status of English is perceived as a problem. | Is it assumed that "English" is automatically an obstacle to diversification? |
| The position of English needs to be determined. | In determining this position, which conceptualisation of "English" for the curriculum is most likely to further rather than impede diversification? |
| Citizens' own languages are seen to be competing with English as a *lingua franca.* | Why, in the second statement, does it say "in their own languages, *rather than* through English as a lingua franca" – why not *both*? |

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[3] The study prepared as an input to the Conference was subsequently modified to take account of the proceedings.

If conceptual work on EIL (such as Brutt-Griffler's as discussed above) is included in deliberations on a comprehensive language teaching policy, then it would seem that some of the above assumptions require further specification and clarification and even reformulation and reconsideration.

Whatever happens in the long term, EIL as the product of a world market and other global developments will be a *fait accompli* for some time to come – estimates concerning the future significance of English (i.e. its econocultural functions in the world) vary, but a general consensus seems to be emerging that sees its position fairly securely established for the next 50 years or so (Graddol 1997; see also Grin 2001, Truchot 1999). It therefore has to be assumed that the demand for 'English' in schooling will remain strong in the foreseeable future – and indeed, English is being learned by people at various levels of society, not just by the socio-economic elite (i.e., in Brutt-Griffler's terms, it transcends the role of an elite *lingua franca*) (see also van Els 2000). If the position of English, on a global scale, is recognized for what it predominantly is, namely EIL, it follows that EIL is likely to establish itself alongside local languages rather than replace them, and to be shaped by all its users (i.e., in Brutt-Griffler's terms, the stabilization of bilingualism through the coexistence of EIL with other languages, and language change brought about by all EIL users) (see also Deneire 2002). This expectation is, of course, also strengthened by research into bi-and plurilingualism, which shows that if different languages fulfil different roles in societies, if they function differentially in various domains, different attitudes develop *vis-à-vis* the different languages involved, and different allegiances to these languages are formed. As a consequence, bi - or plurilingualism tends to get stabilized in such sociolinguistic situations.

From the above considerations it follows that the most crucial concern must be to understand how 'English' functions in relation to other languages. Sociolinguistic research indicates that if – and this is a vital condition – English is appropriated by its users in such a way as to serve its unique function as EIL, it does not constitute a threat to other languages but, precisely because of its delimited role and distinct status, leaves other languages intact. Properly conceptualised as EIL, 'English' can be positioned, quite literally, *hors concours*.

The main thrust of the present discussion paper is, then, that EIL needs to be considered for European curricula, as an alternative option to ENL in some contexts and as the default option in others. For the foreseeable future, the demand for 'English' is here to stay, whether this is a welcome fact or not. The most constructive response to this, and the only proactive course of action, would seem to be a reconceptualization and appropriation of this 'English' as EIL.

## 4. The status of 'English as an international language' (EIL) in European curricula

There seem to be at least four relevant ways of considering EIL:

- functionally: the role of English in the world. This is generally acknowledged as a fact, welcomed by some and deplored by others.

- conceptually: this concerns people's perspective on and attitudes towards this global role of English; the question here is whether ways of thinking about English have kept pace with the rapid development in the functions of the language, whether concepts in people's heads have changed as the role of English in the world has changed.
- linguistically: an (open) empirical question – what does EIL actually look like and sound like? How is it spoken and written? Are there salient linguistic features which can be said to characterise EIL (perhaps regionally, e.g. in Europe)?
- pedagogically: an (open) educational question – what would/could teaching EIL actually mean, and how would it differ from teaching English as a foreign language or English as a second language?

Generally speaking, the state of discussion regarding these four perspectives on EIL is the following:

- **Functionally**: EIL is acknowledged. This means that curricula typically mention the global role of English as econocultural fact and give basically one or both of the following kinds of motivation for learning it: the utilitarian one, i.e. importance for international business, and the idealistic one, i.e. the potential it affords for furthering cross-cultural communication and mutual understanding.

What might be noted in passing is that the discussions on the meta-level of the global functions of English seem to have moved into a new phase recently: the late 1980's and early 1990's might be described as the era of linguistic imperialism views, focussed on reckoning with the past (cf. Phillipson 1992, Pennycook 1994 and 1998, Canagarajah 1999). Now, in the early 2000's, it appears that we have entered an era in which a kind of functional realism and pragmatism view seems to establish itself (cf. Jenkins 2000 and 2002, McKay 2002, Seidlhofer 2001, Brutt-Griffler 2002; but see Skutnabb-Kangas 2000 and Phillipson forthc.). The focus on the current work in this area is on confronting the global impact of EIL and arguing for procedures for dealing with it descriptively and pedagogically (see below).

It should be possible for European language teaching policy to build on insights which have emerged from research in both of these phases in finding *proactive* ways of enabling learners to benefit from the function of EIL, in Europe and globally.

- **Conceptually, linguistically and pedagogically**: EIL is practically non-existent in language teaching curricula and materials - that is to say, generally speaking EIL has not had any major impact on how the subject 'English' is actually conceptualised, linguistically described and pedagogically prescribed for learning. Instead, the focus has so far remained very much on 'cumulative' proficiency (becoming better at speaking and writing English as native speakers do) and on the goal of successful communication with native speakers (and for some levels, approximating native-like command of the language). It is true that a general shift in curricular guidelines has taken place from 'correctness' to 'appropriateness' and 'intelligibility', but by and large 'intelligibility' is taken to

mean being intelligible to native speakers, and being able to understand native speakers. This orientation is also discernible in some descriptors of language proficiency developed for the Council of Europe European Language Portfolio[4] :

> I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views. (Spoken Interaction / B2)

> I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent. (Listening / C2)

In a similar vein, Hoffman (2000:19) describes the English of European learners as spanning "the whole range from non-fluent to native-like", as though fluency in English were not a possibility for those whose speech does not mimic that of a native speaker.

In curricula, textbooks and reference materials, the focus is still largely on Anglo-American culture(s), plus sometimes 'exotic optional extras' such as postcolonial literature and New Englishes, but again through a predominantly British 'lens'. Standard British English or American English norms are taken for granted, the advocacy of 'authentic' materials constitutes a kind of pedagogical mantra, and teachers are expected to help their learners cope with 'real English', which is taken to be the English used by native speakers in their speech communities in e.g. the UK or the US. This 'real English' can, of course, now be described with unprecedented accuracy due to the availability of huge corpora of native English and the required technology for analysing these corpora (eg the Bank of English/COBUILD, Longman-Lancaster Corpus, British National Corpus). This has yielded a substantial crop of corpus-based teaching materials and reference works (e.g. Biber *et al.* 1999, Sinclair 1995, etc.).[5]

For the teaching of mother tongue English and, even more so, the (largely monolingual) teaching of English as a foreign language in the traditional sense (i.e. analogous to the teaching of other modern languages) this innovation/revolution in descriptive linguistics constitutes a potentially enormously important and welcome resource (but see Seidlhofer, in press: chapter 2; Widdowson, in press). However, these descriptions have also been adopted in completely different contexts, where the teaching should predominantly prepare for EIL rather than ENL use, without their relevance having been scrutinized and questioned. This seems to be mainly due to the fact that no comparable descriptions of salient features of EIL are available to date, as well as to economic interests.

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[4] See http://culture.coe.int/portfolio
[5] Some reference works, such as the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, actually use the term 'international' in their titles, but mean this simply to reflect usage in Britain, the US and Australia.

## 5.  Conceptual considerations

Traditionally, the notion of a language is so closely and automatically tied up with its native speakers that it is very difficult to open up 'conceptual space' for EIL.

Coulmas (1981) points out,

> It is interesting to note that the nativeness criterion is maintained across theoretical boundaries and contrasts … Within the framework of field linguistics, the native speaker is a human being who is able to give information about his or her language. In theoretical linguistics, by contrast, he often figures as an abstract idealization. Yet, notwithstanding these fundamental differences, the speaker whom the linguist is concerned about is invariably claimed to be a *native* speaker. He is the one who can legitimately supply data, and his language is what grammatical analyses are meant to account for. Thus, nativeness is *the* only universally accepted criterion for authenticity. (Coulmas 1981:5)

More than 20 years after Coulmas made these observations, the general thrust of his argument still holds, but at least two additions are called for: from today's point of view, next to "field linguistics" in the quotation above there should also be "corpus linguistics". And 'nativized' varieties (i.e. Kachru's Outer Circle) should be included in the considerations. These varieties, e.g. Indian English, Nigerian English, are interesting because the terms generally employed to refer to them reflect the problematic and crucial role of the nativeness criterion: on the one hand, they are called 'nativized' or 'indigenised' varieties, on the other hand they are also referred to as 'non-native' varieties, even by Kachru himself. At any rate, what this nomenclature shows is how deeply ingrained the notion of nativeness is in any considerations of language theorising, description and teaching, and hence how urgent, and how difficult, it is to shed the conceptual straightjacket of English as a native language when tackling the task of working out appropriate frameworks for EIL (cf. Seidlhofer 2001, 2002b, Seidlhofer & Jenkins, in press). It seems that a quarter of a century after the groundbreaking work on Outer Circle English entered the mainstream, the same conceptual work needs to be done for Expanding Circle English now.

## 6.  Linguistic considerations

Even when functional and conceptual consensus about EIL will have been reached, this cannot have an impact on the teaching of EIL as long as no comprehensive and reliable description of salient features of EIL is available. Such a description is also important because establishing a 'linguistic reality', named and captured in reference works alongside ENL and Outer Circle English, is a precondition for acceptance. This is to say that what is needed is a description of EIL features as a basis for eventual codification.

This may sound controversial and utopian, but in fact empirical work on various levels of language has been under way for several years now. It stands to reason

that this research is being preliminary undertaken on *spoken* data, since this meets two criteria: the language is at one remove from the stabilizing and standardizing influence of writing, and spoken interactions are overtly reciprocal, allowing not just production but also reception to be captured, thus facilitating observations regarding the mutual intelligibility of what interlocutors say.

A number of descriptions and analyses of selected aspects of EIL use have been, and are being, conducted, in particular in the area of the (intercultural) pragmatics of 'non-native – non-native' communication in English (e.g. Firth 1996; Meierkord 1996 and 2002; Wagner & Firth 1997, House 1999 and 2002, Lesznyak 2002). These studies analyse data from a wide range of first language backgrounds and their findings obviously vary with the research questions posed and the contexts in which the data were captured (e.g. dinner conversations, group discussions and business telephone calls). Nevertheless, some generalizations about the pragmatics of EIL can be made: misunderstandings are not frequent; when they do occur, they tend to be resolved either by topic change or, less often, by overt negotiation using communication strategies such as rephrasing and repetition; interference from L1 interactional norms is very rare – a kind of suspension of expectations regarding norms seems to be in operation. As long as a certain threshold of understanding is obtained, interlocutors seem to adopt what Firth (1996) has termed the 'let-it-pass principle', which gives the impression of EIL talk being overtly consensus-oriented, cooperative and mutually supportive, and thus appearing fairly robust. House (1999, 2002) sounds a more sceptical note, pointing to the danger that superficial consensus may well hide sources of trouble at a deeper level, a caveat that certainly needs to be taken seriously and investigated further. Other features of EIL pragmatics that House has pointed to are the tendency of interlocutors to behave in a fairly 'self-centred' way and to pursue their own agendas and to engage in series of 'parallel monologues' rather than dialogues.

It will be apparent that some of the findings summarized here actually appear to contradict each other. The explanation for this would seem to be that that work on EIL pragmatics is still very much in its initial phase, and the findings available to date result from research on a fairly limited database. It is therefore conceivable that further research might show the present findings to be a function of the type and purpose of the interactions investigated. Indeed, the differences in the analyses available to date would seem to underline the need for a large corpus and a 'thick description' of the same data from various angles.

While pragmatics is a fairly open-ended area and thus requires particularly large databases, phonology is a much more 'closed system' (although it does have fuzzy edges). It is therefore not surprising that the first book-length study of characteristics of EIL interaction should be available in this area, namely Jenkins' *The Phonology of English as an International Language* (2000). Jenkins' work (see also Jenkins 1998; 2002) centres around "a pedagogical core of phonological intelligibility for speakers of EIL" (2000:123) which she was able to propose after establishing which pronunciation features impeded mutual intelligibility in her empirical studies of what she terms 'interlanguage talk' among 'non-native' speakers of English. This procedure provided an empirical

basis for her suggestion "to scale down the phonological task for the majority of learners by ... focusing pedagogic attention on those items which are essential in terms of intelligible pronunciation" (ibid.) and to prioritize features which constitute more relevant and more realistic learning targets for EIL speakers. These features constitute Jenkins' Lingua Franca Core. What is worth emphasizing in the present context is that Jenkins' Lingua Franca Core does not include, for instance, some sounds which are regarded, and taught, as 'particularly English' ones (and also as particularly difficult) by most learners and teachers, such as the '*th*-sounds' and the 'dark l' allophone. In the conversations analysed by Jenkins, mastery of these sounds proved not to be crucial for mutual intelligibility and so various substitutions, such as /f, v/ or /s, z/ or /t, d/ for the '*th*-sounds' are permissible, and indeed also found in some native-speaker varieties. The '*th*-sounds' and the 'dark l' are therefore designated 'non-core'.

The same is true of the following features:

- Vowel quality
- Weak forms
- Other features of connected speech such as assimilation
- Pitch direction to signal attitude or grammatical meaning
- Word stress placement
- Stress-timing

Jenkins argues that divergences in these areas from native speaker realizations should be regarded as instances of acceptable L2 sociolinguistic variation.

On the other hand, there were features which proved decisive for EIL intelligibility and which therefore constitute the phonological Lingua Franca Core:

- The consonant inventory with the exception of the '*th*-sounds' and of 'dark l'.
- Additional phonetic requirements: aspiration of word-initial /p/, /t/, and /k/, which were otherwise frequently heard as their lenis counterparts /b/, /d/, and /g/ and the maintenance of length before lenis consonants, e.g. the longer /æ/ in the word *sad* contrasted with the phonetically shorter one in the word *sat*.
- Consonant clusters: no omission of sounds in word-initial clusters, e.g. in *proper* and *strap*; omission of sounds in word-medial and word-final clusters only permissible according to L1 English rules of syllable structure so that, for example, the word *friendship* can become *frienship* but not *friendip* .
- Vowel sounds: maintenance of the contrast between long and short vowels, such as the long and short *i*-sounds in the words *leave* and *live* ; L2 regional vowel qualities otherwise intelligible provided they are used consistently, with the exception of the substitution of the sound /ɜ:/ (as in *bird)* especially with /ɑ:/ (as in *bard*)

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- Production and placement of nuclear (tonic) stress, especially when used contrastively. (e.g. *He came by TRAIN* vs. *He CAME by train*).

According to Jenkins, it is these core features that the teaching of English for international communication should concentrate on.

James (2000) offers a conceptual discussion of the place of English in bi/multilingualism, making reference to a project, currently in its pilot phase, entitled 'English as a *lingua franca* in the Alpine-Adriatic region'. He also sets out hypotheses as to what findings the future analysis of this use of English by speakers of German, Italian, Slovene and Friulian might yield. The advantage of James' research focus is precisely its delimited range of first languages aiming at a description of EIL in a specific region.

However, there is also a need for a broadly based corpus for achieving a more general description of features of EIL. It is hoped that it will be possible to meet this need through a new research initiative which aims at the compilation of a sizeable and feasible corpus dedicated to capturing the use of English as an international language from a wide variety of first language backgrounds and a good range of settings and domains. The compilation of this corpus is now in progress at the University of Vienna under the present author's direction: the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) (cf. Seidlhofer 2001, 2002a).

Like the other data discussed so far, VOICE is a corpus of spoken EIL. Its focus is on unscripted, largely face-to-face communication among fairly fluent speakers from a wide range of first language backgrounds whose primary and secondary education and socialization did not take place in English. The speech events being captured include private and public dialogues, private and public group discussions and casual conversations, and one-to-one interviews. The size aimed for at the first stage is approximately half a million words, transcribed and annotated in a number of ways.

As a first research focus, it seems desirable to complement the work already done on EIL phonology and the few initial findings on EIL pragmatics summarized above by concentrating on lexico-grammar and discourse – an aspect which tends to treated as particularly central to language pedagogy. It is hoped that this corpus will make it possible to take stock of how the speakers providing the data actually communicate through EIL, and to attempt a characterisation of how they use, or rather co-construct, 'English' to do so. Essentially, the same research questions as Kennedy (1998) regards as central to corpus-based descriptive studies of ENL could also be addressed through the VOICE:

> What are the linguistic units, patterns, systems or processes in the language, genre or text and how often, when, where, why and with whom are they used? (Kennedy 1998: 276)

The overall objective will be to find out what (if anything), notwithstanding all the diversity, emerges as common features of EIL use, irrespective of speakers' first languages and levels of proficiency. Questions investigated will include the following:

- What seem to be the most relied-upon and successfully employed grammatical constructions and lexical choices?
- Are there aspects which contribute especially to smooth communication?
- What are the factors which tend to lead to problems, misunderstandings or even communication breakdown?
- Is the degree of approximation to a variety of L1 English always proportional to communicative success?
- Or are there commonly used constructions, lexical items and sound patterns which are ungrammatical in Standard L1 English but generally unproblematic in EIL communication?
- If so, can hypotheses be set up and tested concerning simplifications of ENL which could constitute systematic features of EIL?

The objective here, then, would be to establish something like an index of communicative redundancy, in the sense that many of the niceties of social behaviour associated with native-speaker models and identities might not be operable and certain native-speaker norms might be seen to be in suspense. Indeed, it may well be that mutual accommodation (in the sense of Giles & Coupland 1991) will be found to have greater importance for communicative effectiveness than 'correctness' or idiomaticity in ENL terms. The potential for pedagogy would, as with Jenkins' suggestions, reside in knowing which features tend to be crucial for international intelligibility and thus should be taught for production and reception, and which ('non-native') features tend not to cause misunderstandings and thus do not need to constitute a focus in the teaching for production. As Jenkins puts it,

> There is really no justification for doggedly persisting in referring to an item as 'an error' if the vast majority of the world's L2 English speakers produce and understand it. (Jenkins 2000:160)

Of course, it is early days yet and no reliable findings based on quantitative investigations can be reported at this stage. But even a quick analysis of a few dialogues suffices to point to some hypotheses. For instance, typical learners' 'errors' which most English teachers would consider in urgent need of correction and remediation, and which consequently often get allotted a great deal of time and effort in EIL lessons, appear to be generally unproblematic and no obstacle to communicative success. Such 'errors' include:

- 'dropping' the third person present tense –s,
- 'confusing' the relative pronouns *who* and *which*,
- 'omitting' definite and indefinite articles where they are obligatory in native speaker language use, and

- failing to use 'correct' forms in tag questions (e.g. *isn't it?* or *no*? instead of *shouldn't they?*)

On the other hand, there seems to be a tendency for particularly idiomatic speech by one participant – a kind of 'unilateral idiomaticity' characterised by e.g. metaphorical language use, idioms, phrasal verbs and fixed ENL expressions such as *this drink is on the house* or *can we give you a hand* to cause misunderstandings. In this respect, it may be worth noting that some specifications in the self-assessment grid of European Language Portfolio might not be relevant, or might even be counter-productive, if an individual is learning English for use in international contexts. For example, the first part of the following descriptor might have to be reconsidered (while the last part might even be elaborated on):

> Spoken interaction/ C2:
> I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.

The work referred to above has concentrated on spoken EIL, for it is in the immediacy of interaction and the co-construction of spoken discourse that variation from the standard norms becomes most apparent. English has, of course, become international across modes of written discourse as well, particularly as these have developed to serve specific academic and other institutional purposes, and a good deal of descriptive work has been done on identifying their typical generic features (e.g. Swales 1990, Bhatia 1993). Although lexically and generically distinctive, these modes of written EIL have, so far at least, conformed to the norms of standard grammar. Clearly in written language use, where there is no possibility of the reciprocal negotiation of meaning typical of spoken interaction, there is more reliance on established norms, and these are naturally maintained by a process of self-regulation whereby these norms are adhered to in the interests of maintaining global mutual intelligibility (Widdowson 1997). Even here, however, questions have arisen about the legitimacy of these norms, and the extent to which written English (in articles in learned journals, for example) should be subjected to correction to conform to what are still taken as being native speaker conventions of use, thus allowing ENL journals to exert a gate-keeping function based not on academic expertise but purely on linguistic criteria whose relevance for international intelligibility has not actually been demonstrated (Ammon 2000). As these written modes become increasingly appropriated by non-native users, one might speculate that, in time, self regulation might involve a detachment from a dependence on native user norms so that these written modes also take on the kind of distinctive features that are evident in spoken EIL.

For the moment, however, non-conformity in written English is not generally attested in use. Where it does occur, of course, is in *learner* language, and there is a large scale project which focuses on that which is produced by learners of

the language coming from a great variety of first language backgrounds. This is the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE for short; see e.g. the contributions to Granger 1998 and Granger, Hung & Petch-Tyson, forthc.). However, the main thrust of this research enterprise is to identify characteristics of learner English from different L1 backgrounds, with the intention to facilitate comparisons between these foreign-language productions and native-speaker writing, and so to highlight the difficulties specific L1 groups have with native English in order to make it easier for those learners to conform to ENL if they so wish – hence the designation "*Learner* English". There are also other, smaller and less structured *learner* corpora, notably those compiled by publishers big in English language teaching, such as the Cambridge Learners' Corpus and the Longman Learners' Corpus. While such projects are undoubtedly innovative and very useful in their own terms, they are obviously quite different from the present concern. The main difference lies in the researchers' orientation towards the data and the purposes they intend the corpora to serve, namely as a sophisticated tool for analysing learner language so as to support them in their attempts to approximate to native (-like) English. However, it is conceivable that some of the data in learner corpora could also contribute to a better understanding of EIL. For instance, what is frequently reported as 'overuse' or 'underuse' of certain expressions in learner language as compared to ENL could also be regarded as a feature characterizing successful EIL use, or the 'deviations' from ENL norms reported in learner corpora research could be investigated to establish whether they can serve as pointers, or sensitizing devices, in the process of profiling EIL for curricula.

Descriptive work on EIL will also be able to build on research on (native) language variation and change, nativized varieties, pidginization and creolization as well as on work on simplification in language use and language pedagogy (Tickoo 1993), plus older conceptual and empirical work on English as an international language (e.g. Basic English, see Seidlhofer 2002c).

Eventually, work on corpora such as VOICE will allow us to consider what it might mean to explore the possibility of a codification of EIL with a conceivable ultimate objective of making it a feasible, acceptable and respected alternative to ENL in appropriate contexts of learning and use. This function of codification is also at the centre of Bamgbose's discussion of "the ambivalence between recognition and acceptance of non-native norms":

> I use codification in the restricted sense of putting the innovation into a written form in a grammar, a lexical or pronouncing dictionary, course books or any other type of reference manual. … The importance of codification is too obvious to be belaboured. … one of the major factors militating against the emergence of endonormative standards in non-native Englishes is precisely the dearth of codification. Obviously, once a usage or innovation enters the dictionary as correct and acceptable usage, its status as a regular form is assured. (1998:4).

Of course, Bamgbose is referring to indigenised varieties of English in parts of Africa, i.e. contexts which are sociolinguistically very different from Europe.

Nevertheless, his point about the important role of codification for the recognition and acceptance of linguistic innovations is a general one which also holds for the concept of EIL in Europe. That this scenario is not quite as unlikely or remote as it may sound is indicated by the fact that Oxford University Press is supporting the VOICE project at Vienna University described above:

> Oxford University Press is very interested in the implications for English Language Teaching of research into English as an international language and for this reason we have supported Professor Seidlhofer's initiative in building the VOICE corpus. When sufficient corpus evidence is available to show that a particular usage is widely used and understood by competent non-native speakers from a variety of language backgrounds, we would wish to refer to this development in our major English Language Teaching dictionaries, such as the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Moira Runcie, Editorial Director, OUP ELT Dictionaries, personal communication).

It would seem, then, that the idea of EIL meeting with increasing acceptance both on a conceptual as well as on a linguistic level. However, the bulk of the work still remains to be done.

## 7.  Pedagogic considerations

The desirability of at least considering EIL as a realistic learning goal has been broached from various angles in publications for well quite some time now (see some contributions to Brumfit 1982 and Smith 1983, and e.g. Beneke 1981, Hüllen 1982, Smith 1984, Piepho 1989). However, as discussed above, these fairly scarce exhortations to rethink the teaching of English have not had any significant impact on mainstream curriculum planning over the last two decades or so. It would be interesting to speculate why this is the case. One factor to be taken into account in this respect is certainly the enormous influence of research in ENL countries that has been, partly rather uncritically, assumed to be of a priori relevance to teaching in Europe, notably work on second language acquisition and corpus linguistics in the US and the UK, which generally take the primacy of standard native speaker norms as self-evident. This could be regarded, to use Widdowson's terms (Widdowson 1980, 2000), as a case of 'linguistics applied' taking precedence over developments in applied linguistics which otherwise might have evolved continuously from the early 1980's.

However, a more obvious obstacle to the adoption of EIL for teaching has been the absence of sufficient (if any) descriptive work on EIL, which would be a necessary requirement as a component of EIL-focussed curricula. With the linguistic research (described above) now being carried out with increasing intensity, this lack is gradually being remedied. In addition, both the perceived rate of globalisation in general, and the spread of English as the epiphenomenona accompanying it, have speeded up in recent years, particularly due to the pervasive influence of the Internet. Lastly, the spate of literature on indigenised varieties of English in postcolonial contexts coupled with that on linguistic imperialism and critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough & Wodak 1997) are

likely to have contributed to a more widespread awareness of and resistance to traditional assumptions.

At any rate, it seems to be the case that a 'critical mass' has been gathering which will enable all these fields to contribute to an eventual reconceptualisation of the subject 'English' in terms of EIL (cf. Burger 2000, McKay 2002). It is beyond the scope of this discussion paper to make detailed pedagogical suggestions, hence what follows is only a broad outline of likely consequences of an orientation towards EIL.

What needs to be emphasized first of all is that whatever implications the eventual availability of EIL descriptions may have for teaching is a pedagogic and local matter. However, it seems reasonable to assume that excellent proposals and practices already available in the public domain (but so far not taken up in mainstream English teaching) will be recognized as supremely important components of English curricula once the subject is approached from an EIL perspective.

First and foremost, a re-orientation of 'English' away from the fascination with ENL and towards the cross-cultural role of EIL will make it easier to take on board findings from research into *intercultural communication* (eg Buttjes & Byram 1990, Byram & Fleming 1998, Byram & Zarate 1997, Knapp & Knapp-Pothoff 1990, Vollmer 2001) and *language awareness* (eg Doughty *et al* 1971, James & Garrett 1991, van Lier 1995). Abandoning unrealistic notions of achieving 'perfect' communication through 'native-like' proficiency in English would free up resources for focusing on skills and procedures that are likely to be useful in EIL talk. These are discussed in work on *communication strategies* (eg Kasper & Kellerman 1997) and *accommodation skills* (g Giles & Coupland 1991, Jenkins 2000: ch. 7) and include the following: drawing on extralinguistic cues, gauging interlocutors' linguistic repertoires, supportive listening, signalling non-comprehension in a face-saving way, asking for repetition, paraphrasing, etc. Needless to say, exposure to a wide range of varieties of English and a multilingual/comparative approach (in the spirit of the *Eveil aux Langues* project, cf. e.g. Candelier & Macaire 2000; KIESEL materials, etc.) are likely to facilitate the acquisition of these communicative abilities. Such a synergy achieved through the meeting of languages in classrooms would also make overlong instruction in English (conceptualised as ENL) superfluous. Indeed, it would no longer be self-evident that a subject 'English' needs to remains in all language teaching curricula – for some contexts, it might be worth considering whether 'English' courses in secondary school that sometimes range over up to eight or even nine years could give way to a subject 'language awareness' which includes instruction in EIL as one element. The focus here would be on teaching *language* rather than *languages*. (cf. Edmondson 1999).

This proposal should not be misunderstood as a suggestion to abolish modern languages in school curricula; rather, in contexts for which a conceptualisation of EIL is deemed appropriate, it advocates the shift of the bulk of 'English' teaching away from a separate subject 'English' and into 'language awareness', precisely because of the unique status of English as an international language discussed

above. The assumption underlying this proposal is that the demand for English will be self-sustaining and cannot, and need not, be met within the confines of a school subject. What can be done is to provide a basis which students can learn from, fine-tuning *subsequently* (usually after leaving school) to any native or non-native varieties and registers that are relevant for their individual requirements (cf. Widdowson, in press).

Setting off EIL from ENL also has advantages for ENL, and ENL speakers, in that it leaves varieties of native English *intact* for all the functions only a first language can perform and as a target for learning in circumstances where ENL is deemed appropriate, as well as providing the option of code-switching between ENL and EIL. This takes pressure off a monolithic concept of 'English' pulled in different directions by divergent demands and unrealistic expectations, a state of affairs frustrating for proponents of both ENL and EIL.

And finally, a shift, where appropriate, from ENL to EIL would have beneficial effects for the 'non-native teachers', i.e. the majority of teachers in Europe, especially in the public sector. Once an alternative description of English is available and accepted, one which is not tied to its native speakers, 'non-native' speaker teachers will no longer need to think of themselves as something they are not. Rather, they will have a positive means of asserting their professional roles as competent and authoritative speakers and instructors of EIL, not with a borrowed identity but with an identity of their own as international users of an international language.

## 8. Conclusion

There seems to be a consensus that realistic policies for plurilingualism in Europe 'plurilingualism' do not imply a simplistic, quantitative approach aiming at 'proficiency in as many language as possible'. Especially with reference to English, the qualitative concept implied in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* "not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence" (Council of Europe, 2001: 168) is most likely to be realised by relinquishing the elusive goal of native-speaker competence and by embracing the emergent realistic goal of intercultural competence achieved through a plurilingualism that integrates rather than ostracizes EIL.

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