

IN-DEPTH DEBATE INTO LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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Abstract

In this paper three different debates which are related to language and culture will be discussed with illustrations of how each debate impacts on the chosen context. The chosen context is Iraqi students; who currently are studying English language as a foreign language at the secondary school. Firstly, a comparison of between EFL and EIL will be given. Secondly, a discussion about teaching non-verbal signals to support language learning will be provided. Thirdly, the use of technology to teach English will be outlined to show the different points of view regarding this point. Finally, there will be a recommendation by the author who will draw on his own experiences and understanding of the educational contexts he is familiar with.

Keywords: EFL and EIL, technology to teach English and teaching non-verbal signals, Iraqi students

Main text:

The EIL and EFL Debate

The English language is commonly spoken and taught across the world. It has become a *lingua franca* and is considered by many to be the international language (Crystal, 1997 cited in Torghhabeb, 2007). The use of language by a nation has been categorised in three ways;

1. An inner circle of use: Comprised of native speakers, such as North Americans, the British, Australia and New Zealand.
2. An expanding circle of use: This consists of countries such as India, Japan and China.
3. An outer circle: Nations such as Iraq, Egypt and Iran make up this category (Kachru, 1985 cited in Acar, 2009).

Kachru (1992 pp. 357-8 cited in Xu 2002) listed six fallacies to illustrate what happen in Expanding and Outer circles,

1. That in the Outer and Expanding Circles, English is necessarily learned to interact with native speakers of the language.
2. That English is necessarily learned as a tool to understand and teach American or British cultural values, or what is generally termed the Judeo-Christian traditions.
3. That the goal of learning and teaching English is to adopt the native models of English (e.g.,RP or GA).
4. That the international non-native varieties of English are essentially “interlanguages” striving to achieve “native-like” character.
5. That the native speakers of English as teachers, academic administrators, and material developers provide a serious input in the global teaching of English, in policy formation, and in determining the channels for spread of language.
6. That the diversity and variation in English is necessarily an indicator of linguistic decay; that restricting the decay is the responsibility of the native scholars of English and ESL programs.

The awareness of the three circles and the six fallacies has a great implication in the teaching and learning of English, especially the context I am familiar with. Recently, English teachers and learners have gradually freed themselves from native variety-oriented teaching and learning methodologies. They have come to realize the diversity and functional validity of non-native varieties of English (Xu 2002).

EIL (English as an International Language) has been proposed as a teaching method instead of the traditional EFL (English as a Foreign Language)(Smith, 1983 cited in Acar, 2007). Smith’s view claims that;

“We are witnessing a rapid increase in the use of English as a language of wider communication. It is the language of air-traffic controllers at international airports all over the world. It is the language used most frequently for international mails at international conferences. It is the principle language of international commerce and internal aid” (Xu, 2002, p. 7).

It is the language of the industrial revolution and remains the language of science and technology. As such, it is the language of the computer and the Internet and it is the favored language of tourist all over the world (Acar, 2009). This is the key difference that discriminates between EFL and EIL.

The distinction between EIL and EFL has been an important one in language pedagogy for many years because in each case the context in which teaching happens has different material, syllabus and pedagogy needs (Yildirim, 2009). The notion of EIL is quite distinct from, though related to, EFL and ESL (English as a Second Language), as they are for non-native English speakers of the same country.

EIL stresses the broader use of English teaching to interact with native speakers at a more day to level. Thus, the use of English to communicate with other non-native English speakers of other nations expands the uses of different types of English (Xu, 2002).

In contrast, EFL instruction aims for the student to achieve a competent level of English to communicate, when necessary, with native English speakers. For the international perspective, a variety of English communication systems is the goal (Smith, 1983 cited in Acar, 2009). It has been noted though that Iraqi students are not good imitators of a variety of English systems (ALseady, 2006). Several pronunciation problems are commonly detected in their oral production of English, such as /b/ for /p/ in 'people' /pi:pl/ (*bi:bl/) or /*faif/ for /faiv/, etc. ALseady (2006) points out that happen because there is no interaction takes place between these Iraqi students and native speakers in / outside the school such as an anticipated interaction that happens in EIL context.

The interactors idea is especially able to compare EIL and EFL (Smith, 1978 cited in Xu, 2002). In an EFL class the context of language interactors are always the same. The non-native speaker is ready to listen, talk, write, or read materials written by native speakers. In an EIL context the interactors are nationals of different countries. Local non-native English learners interact with non-local and non-native speakers. Furthermore there are native speakers of different countries interacting with one another (Smith, 1978 cited in Xu, 2002). The norms and standards which are utilized in EIL and EFL are also different. In an EIL context it is difficult to define the standard and norms of English (Trudgill, 1983 cited in Xu, 2002). However, some linguists have attempted to give definitions of Standard English. Standard English is a variety of English that is popularly used in print and which is normally taught in schools, including non-native speakers. It is also the type of English which is normally spoken by educated people and used in news broadcasts and other similar situations (Trudgill, 1983, p. 17 cited in Xu 2002).

"In an international situation any educated English speaker is acceptable.

It may be a native speaker, a local variety speaker or an educated speaker of a regional variety" (Smith 1978, cited in Acar 2009, p. 8).

On the other hand the norms and standards in an EFL situation are always those of the educated native speaker of English. The stress placed on English speaking culture is also highly insightful as a distinguishing factor between these two styles of teaching. In an EFL context the English speaking culture is emphasized. In the EIL context the cultures of specified countries which are of relevance to the student become the focus (Smith, 1978 cited in Xu, 2002).

Additionally, the purpose of learning EFL and EIL is different. Smith 1978 (cited in Xu, 2002) states that the job opportunities and increasing possibilities of attaining a higher education are low priorities in the EFL context. However, in an EIL context the purpose of learning English is to be able to take part in international interactions when English is commonly used.

Presently, Iraqi purposes for learning English are not limited to that of an EFL teaching method. Non-native teachers of English in Iraq need no longer be ambassadors of British or American cultures, values, ideologies, and social conventions alone. There is no need to impose a foreign model on our learners. Asian teachers of English can use their own respective standardized variety of English as a model for teaching and testing purposes (Patil, 2006). It is easy to do this, because (i) The majority are local teachers; (ii) The teachers are in influential, decision-making positions; and (iii) Teachers usually set examination papers and evaluate student answers.

The shift from EFL to EIL appears to be crucial for countries in the outer circle (Xu, 2002). The student is pushed to integrate their first language norms and values, and to use EIL for local as well as international situations. It discards the unrealistic goal that students should struggle for native-speaker-like proficiencies.

“There is no reason to see systematic deviations from Anglo-American norms at the pragmatic and discourse levels as errors. Rather, there is room to analyze these as non-native speakers’ attempts to use L2 in such a way as to conform to their L1 pragmatic and values” (Li, 1998 cited in Xu, 2002, p.39).

It is highly desirable for Iraqi students to use EIL to cater for their own needs, and to incorporate Iraqi norms and values, also known as indigenization or nativization of a language (Li, 1998 cited in Xu, 2002).

“Traditional methodologies based on the native speakers usually define language learners in terms of what they are not or at least not yet. Or, one might add, not ever” (Cook 1999, p.189 cited in Xu 2002).

The students’ knowledge and use of the mother tongue will not be repelled by using EIL. Instead, together with other tongues EIL produces multi-competent users of English (Xu, 2002). Traditionally while learning English, “Students are always translating into and out of their own languages-and teachers are always telling them not to” (Swan, 1990, p. cited in Xu, 2002). However, EIL values the students’ knowledge and use of their mother tongues. Swan’s notion (cited in Xu, 2002) foreigners have mother tongues: they identify as much as we do about how human beings communicate in English. Mother tongue experiences remains pertinent though there exist a lot of culturally different, even conflicting attitudes, values and norms.

EIL helps both teachers and students raise their consciousness of the large number of English varieties available to use. Therefore it stimulates and facilitates extensive exposure of students to these varieties in classrooms (Xu, 2002). All English textbooks across Iraq focus on British culture norms and values. Thus, textbooks exclude all other varieties of English. As result, both teachers and students in Iraq lack awareness of the large number of English varieties, such as New Zealand English, Indian English, and Australian English. That is why, when exposed to the outside world in context where EIL is appropriate, student and teachers of English find it hard adjusting to different varieties of English, as they had no exposure to them while learning English(Alseady 2006).

Nonverbal Communication Debate

Nonverbal aspects of communication have a very important role in human social interactions and this has been known for a long time (Loscher, 2002). However, nonverbal phenomena have hardly been investigated. Recently they have come to the attention of a variety of disciplines such as, anthropology, sociology, pedagogies and linguistics (Loscher, 2002). Non-verbal communication accounts for about 70% of human interaction (Ellis, 2006). Nonverbal communication has been distinguished from verbal communication in two ways. First in a negative way, that verbal communication has been defined and everything else which is considered to have a communicative value is called nonverbal communication. Second, an appositive definition which distinguishes nonverbal phenomena such as gestures, mimicry, proxemic behavior, speech pauses, pitch, etc. from written or spoken language has not been adequately elaborated so far.

The concept of nonverbal communication still requires scholarly consideration. Authors who favour a broader concept of communication generally concede that nonverbal signs are not always coded in unambiguous way and are not always transmitted in an international way. They often utilize the concept of nonverbal in this way (Lyons 1977; Scherer, 1980 cited in Lorsch, 2002).

Different authors have different definitions of the object of nonverbal communication. According to Argyle (1972, cited in Lorsch 2002) ten phenomena can constitute nonverbal communication:

1. Bodily contact
2. Proximity
3. Posture
4. Physical appearance
5. Facial and gestural movements
6. Direction of gaze
7. Timing of speech
8. Emotional tone of speech
9. Speech errors
10. Accent

Knapp's adds to this definition (cited in Lorsch, 2002):

1. Body motion or kinesics behavior
2. Physical characteristics
3. Touching behavior
4. Paralanguage
5. Proxemics
6. Artefacts
7. Environmental factors

The debate of the importance of nonverbal communication has divided scholars into two camps. According to Crystal (cited in Lorsch, 2002) pitch, stress, juncture phenomena and intonation are often not considered to be paralinguistic phenomena. In contrast Varner (2005) states that the pitch, stress, intonation or melody are considered nonverbal phenomena. According to the German psychologist Scherer (cited in Lorsch, 2002) distinguishing between verbal and nonverbal phenomena is important, but so is making a distinction between vocal and non-vocal phenomena. That means a gesture would be a

nonverbal-non-vocal form of behavior; whereas speech quality would be considered nonverbal-vocal.

Language teachers are teachers of culture that has often become invisible to them (Kramsch, 1993 cited in Laing, 2007). Teachers should explain the meaning and functions of the nonverbal behaviors of a target culture, and the differences of those behaviors between students' home culture and the target culture. To achieve such a duty, teachers are expected to follow evidence-based techniques.

English and Technology

The global spread of modern technology, including information and communication technology (ICT), is commonly regarded both as an indicator of the postmodern era of globalization and as the very precondition for that era of intensive worldwide interactions of people and exchanges of goods, services, information, and capital (Zhao, 2004).

The traditional and formal modes of communication, such as newspaper and TV, are culture-bound, because they portray native speakers according to their identities as defined by their geographical and historical context. Contrary to this, new modes of communication, such as internet communication, are not specified by one specific culture, culture-free (Hornby, n.d.). Hornby states that the world language English can be viewed from diverse perspectives. For example, there is the free-floating *lingua franca* ('International English') that has mostly lost way of its original cultural identity, its idioms, its unseen connotations, its grammatical subtleties, and has become a reduced standardized form of language for supra-cultural communication (p. 109)

In two fundamentally different modes in terms of time, communication can happen: asynchronous, in which there is some postponement of when the message is sent, received, and responded to; and synchronous, in which communication happen in bona fide time.

The conversations which take place in face to face situations represents the synchronous end of this continuum, traditional post-office letters represent the asynchronous end this continuum. In new communication modes, e-mail represents asynchronous communication, while Internet relay chat represents synchronous communication (Zhao, 2004).

The receiver may experience great social pressure to answer straight away in synchronous communication as opposed to asynchronous situations. During real-time synchronous communication, there is less time to contemplate the content of a message and reply to it. On the contrary, asynchronous communication permits more time to work on

responses, which may prompt a more in-depth understanding of the information and more considerate responses. Bernhardt and Kamil (cited in Zhao, 2004) notice that during asynchronous communication, the students start to pick up on commonalities across related messages and make connections that would not be as salient in real-time communication.

As technology more and more takes centre-stage of lives, there are compelling reasons for incorporating technologies into the classroom to make sure that students will be able to function in the societies of the 21st century. Incorporating e-mail into the classroom is a good step in familiarizing students with computer literacy. The utilization of e-mail can supply students with a specific writing task whilst being guided through the stages of the writing process.

My Reflections

I want to recommend that a change from EFL to EIL teaching instruction in Iraqi classrooms. It is critical to view the student as a bona fide EIL user, not as an incomplete inter-language speaker. If English teachers can raise the students' consciousness that through learning EIL they can communicate with English native speakers as well as the rest of the world without losing their own identity or being treated as deficient learners, they are more likely to accomplish a higher level of EIL use (Xu, 2002).

In order to be taught in a foreign language classroom, nonverbal phenomena need to be a teaching method. First, teachers are required to make list of nonverbal behaviors and messages that appear in to explain to the students and to encourage the students to memorize and practice. Second, making good use of the multi-media and bringing to the students' attention the nonverbal behaviors of q target language will help them to realise its importance in meaning making in English. Third, teachers should not only teach the linguistic rules, but also the communication rules, including verbal and nonverbal communication, of target culture.

Finally, the guidance of students to collect nonverbal communication examples and to make comparison between the target culture and Iraqi culture is needed (Liang 2002). Accordingly, teachers need to be innovative in using textbooks martial and multi-media resources. However, there can be a shortcoming in using movies, as there has been noted a lack of students moving from being participants to observers (Thanasoulas 2001). To accomplish these tasks, teachers' development in the use of multi-media and nonverbal communication is essential.

The traditional EFL teacher education program depends on the practice of language and this is recognized as a key problem (Freeman &Johnsan, date cited in Liang, 2007). Currently, a popular model of teaching EFL is embodied in a Communication Language Teaching approach (CLT). CLT has become very influential worldwide; it is the dominant theme of EFL teacher training programs and is usually what is requested by the commission government and independent bodies for in-service training in the world (Liang 2007).

According to McKay (cited in Liang 2007), there are three central reasons for this: CLT is viewed as ‘modern’ and ‘advanced’; is a well respected foreign language that educators have supported in its use; and it is a commercially produced teaching material. Furthermore, CLT is dependent on a view of language as a structure for expressing meaning and its aim is to train learners to use the language for real life communication.

The nonverbal aspects which are related to the context of this paper are particularly, vocal qualifiers and vocalization. The term vocal qualifiers refer to volume, pitch and overall intonation or melody of the spoken word (Varner, 2005). In the present context, the foreign language teacher I will try to explain to my students, for example, that when native-speakers raise or lower their voice at the end of the sentence they want to emphasis something or are asking a question. In English, as it spoken in the United States, a speaker raises the pitch at the end of a question, signifying a nonverbal question mark (Varner, 2005).

Another phenomenon is vocalization, Varner (2007) states that all cultures use non-word noises like “ahem”, “um”, “er” sucking in one’s breath, and one’s tongue. In my context I teach my student that these nonverbal phenomena may be utilized by native speaker as connectors between ideas; they also may be used to indicate that someone is ready to say something or that more time is needed to think thing over.

In my context, I will use two kinds of technology which are called The Palace and ChatNet by Zhao (2004). Palace is a multimedia (with sound, images, avatars, etc.) and is two-dimensional. This type of technology will enhance my student’s pronunciation and show them some verbal and nonverbal communications which are carried out by the native speakers.

ChatNet is a written text, by which I will try to improve my students writing. Mansor(n.d.) states that the students’ writing performance by the use of e-mail discussions can reveal improvements in their content, organization and writing style. All the participants involved in this study attained higher grades. Thus the results of this study, which incorporates collaborative learning via email discussions and a writing process approach involving argumentative genre, were fruitful.

Overall, the study took a student-centered approach and the role of the instructor was to trigger and support the students' ventures as they manifested themselves. Once the correspondences were up and running, the social intervention from the instructor was minimal, only focusing on technical assistance. The students pursued the discussions progressively striving in accomplishing the task within the duration specified.

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