[Invited Short Communication]

For English Not as an International But as an Intercultural Language among Students in Distribution Science Business English Programs

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Abstract

Purpose – The recent establishment of many varieties of English language in the globe has created many models of English such as world Englishes (WEs), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), English as a family of languages, and English as an Intercultural Language (EIcL). Among the models, the present study highlights 'English as an intercultural language (EIcL)' in relation to distribution science business English teaching to elucidate what EIcL is and why it is critical and how it can be realized in the business English classrooms.

Research design, data, and methodology – This study look into the EIcL paradigm that empowers all active users to view English as universal and at the same time enables them to develop critical skills to bridge intercultural gaps or to cross borders.

Results – Rather than just focusing on an acquisition of standardized English(es), EIcL serves as a major contextual factor facilitating success in getting competence among the different English languages.

Conclusions - EIcL is a promising and ultimately rewarding approach to the contemporary business English teaching arena. EIcL should be achieved through policies, textbooks or living abroad, and, above all, learners/teachers' active awareness and understanding' of the EIcL mainstreams.

Keywords: English as an Intercultural language, the EIcL Teaching Paradigm.

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1. Introduction: The EIcL Paradigm

English language has found itself into "the most widely taught, read, and spoken language that the world has ever known" (Kachru & Nelson, 2001, p.9). Qiong (2004) reports that, by 2050, more than half the population around the world is becoming communicatively literate and proficient in English. This rapid global prevalence of the language has incurred many new forms, functions, and norms of English(es) incubated within its sociolinguistic and sociocultural context. This also has prompted an increased focus on the study of all the Englishes under such models as World Englishes (WEs), English as an International Language (EIL), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), English as a family of languages, and English as an intercultural

language (EIcL). Each model posits a wide range of interpretations and a fair amount of disagreement about what the implications of this phenomenon are and how English should be viewed, taught, learned and used in today's globe. If seen from a more traditional view, the inner circle of Kachru's (1985, 1998) Concentric Circles of World English represents the bullseye of a target that those in the outer and expanding circles should endeavor to hit; that is, the goal of learning/educating English is to achieve and adhere to native English speaking (NS) standards, norms, and values. Sifakis (2004) illuminates this perspective when, in describing his view of EIL, he brings up the notion of N-bound comprehensibility, which is concerned with "regularity, codification, and standardness" as defined by NSs of the language (p.239). This approach ensures a certain degree of uniformity in how English is used and maintains the influence that inner circle countries have on other parts of the world.

At the other end of the spectrum are linguists/practitioners

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who focus primarily into the diversity of English as it is currently used worldwide. In this case, codified forms of localized English are of interest; the language itself is analyzed to determine the effects that local cultures have on shaping its use, and large corpus studies (see 'English as a lingua franca,' Jenkins, 2009) are conducted to bring to light regional linguistic differences. This has led to more attention to English as it is used in the outer and expanding circles, often between non-native Engilshes speakers (NNSs), and less on standards that rely on NS Englishes. As a result of the copious numbers of these investigations, ELT scholars like Canagarajah (2006) and Martin (2014) have called Kachru's model, now old, oversimplified, and no longer reflects the reality of English being used in today's world.

2. ElcL and the Contemporary Business English Teaching Classrooms

While those who stress on the study of language itself play a pivotal role in enhancing awareness of all the local varieties of English and de-constructing the conventional concept of the reliance on inner circle Englishes, it has been urged (Giroux, 2005) for a new paradigm that empowers all active users to view English as universal and at the same time enables them to develop critical skills to bridge intercultural gaps or to cross borders. For some, this new framework is English as an Intercultural Language (ElcL).

Lee (2009, 2012, 2013) raised English teachers' awareness of what ElcL is. Then, he posits how it can contribute to the development of the language proficiency and be actually realized into the contemporary ELT classrooms by providing some of the teaching activities conducted in his classes. More recently, Green and Lee (2016) concisely elaborate the ElcL paradigm by identifying the following principles:

(1) ElcL sees English as a heterogeneous language with multiple norms and grammars with the focus on its diversity users speak/listen to. The multiple nature of English should allow that all the varieties of English relate to one another on a single level rather than on the three hierarchies as in Kachru's three concentric circle of English. Thus, the notion of both 'being-native' and that competency determined by native speakers/listeners of the language is the primary goal and educational criteria, should be rejected;

(2) it is used chiefly within the C-bound approach in which mutual 'communication, comprehensibility, and culture' have always been needed to be characterized as the main phenomenon in English today. ElcL prioritizes the process of cross-cultural comprehensibility between learners as a communicative goal in itself rather than on notions of accuracy and standards, since the language has

predominantly been 'user-dependent,' 'situation-specific,' and 'comprehensible-oriented' in the globe. Therefore, ElcL supports English being 'descriptive" of how it functions today for communication for the world, not prescriptive of how the language should/ought to be used – empowering all the varieties of English today.

(3) it is "multicultural" in that speakers of more than one country and culture are almost always involved; therefore, it should accommodate the active role of users of all the varieties as "agents" in the spread and development of English(es). They are contributing to the shaping of the language and the functions it fulfils in future;

(4) it aims to create 'multidialectical users of Englishes with intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitude in communication.' Here, the ultimate aim of ElcL – creating 'multidialectical users of Englishes with intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes in interaction – needs to be elaborated. From the ElcL paradigm, the communicative approach (ie., the mere exchange of information) is not the objective of language learning/teaching. Instead, ElcL seeks to focus more on the construction of social and personal identities in language learning/teaching; in this case, a constructivist, ethnographic approach is more appropriate. Although communication is a vital aspect of ElcL, the communication in and of itself (too often based on inner circle expectations about how conversations should unfold) is not the final goal.

Another major focus of ElcL is the development of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). This begins with an understanding that culture is a dynamic, contextual, and multidimensional process, not a fixed set of rules, values and behaviors and that language and culture are inherently intertwined and inseparable (Choudbury, 2013; Paige, Jorstad, Paulson, & Klein, 1999). Cultures should not be viewed as superior or inferior, merely different (Corbett, 2003; Robinson-Stuart & Nocoon, 1996). In the development of intercultural competence, Byram's (1997) framework of the four mainstream aspects of saviors (i.e., knowledge, skill, attitudinal, and critical/cultural awareness aspects) is one framework that has been utilized. Other important intercultural skills (Choudhury, 2013) to develop are "the ability to ask questions, to listen and seek clarification, to negotiate and identify common ground, and to avoid prejudging or stereotyping" (p.23). To do that, ElcL advocates that users of English(es) seek to instill notions of empathy pre/during/post interaction. Practitioners of ElcL are therefore encouraged to suspend judgement about cultures other than their own and attempt to view the world through the eyes of others.

Needlessly saying, in light of today's glocalized economic and business affairs, English has become the language of an absolute means to communicate among peoples from the diverse sociocultural and sociolinguistic contexts. In every reality, all the varieties of English have been being actually

realized within any business and economic contexts in that speakers of more than one country and culture are almost always involved. For this, many colleges and universities around the world have set off business English teaching programs (ie., majors of practical English, business English, or international trade English) (McKay, 2003). In this respect, EIcL should make an invaluable contribution to any business English teaching programs. It asserts that the main goal of business English teaching is not to train learners to be a parrot of standardized English(es), but to equip them with ability/competence to communicate fully with his/her sociocultural English in the intercultural communication environment and to improve strategies in dealing with international business affairs. EIcL will change the conventional domains of business English teaching – that is, change from an abstract and formalistic linguistic study/competence based upon what we called native varieties of English and simple business regularities to concrete and practical cultivation of English(es) competence and workable business skills in this ever-growing intercultural economic and business arena. The following is how EIcL can be realized in business English teaching classrooms.

3. EIcL in Business English Classrooms

Striving to delineate intercultural mainstreams in second/foreign language teaching and learning has been actively fruitful since the early 1990s. Cormeraie (1998) contends that the development of intercultural language competence needs to be concerned particularly with knowledge, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. This intercultural mainstreams teaching and learning (i.e., knowledge, behavior, and attitude) is further adequately schematized within such term as "savoirs" in Byram and Zarate's (1997) model of intercultural competence. The following is the four mainstreams of savoirs (i.e., knowledge, behavioral, attitudinal, and critical awareness aspects):

(1) savoirs: it is "knowing" or knowledge of culture (both oneself and otherselves), including sociolinguistic competence; awareness of the small "c" aspect of culture such as values, beliefs, meanings (knowledge aspect),

(2.1) savoir comprendre: it is knowing how to understand via skills to interpret documents from other countries and explain and relate it to one's own culture (behavioral aspect),

(2.2) savoir apprendre/faire: it is knowing how to learn/to do (or integrate) via skills for discovering new knowledge and for interacting (or integrating the knowledge into interaction) to gain new ability (behavioral aspect),

(3) savoir être: it is knowing how to be via having equipped with attitudes involved in relativizing the self and valuing the other (i.e., 'ethnorelative attitude') by setting aside ethnocentric attitudes and perceptions (attitudinal aspect),

(4) savoirs' engager: it is knowing how to commit oneself to the development of critical and political awareness to think about things actively and intelligently rather than just accept them (critical awareness aspect).

Byram (1997) later recapitulates the four mainstreams in a figure titled, "What ICC [intercultural communicative competence] Requires Learners to Acquire." Based upon the approach, Clouet (2008) further stresses that intercultural competence is a combination of social and communicative skills to train - the skills are: (1) empathy, (2) ability to deal with conflict, (3) ability to work collaboratively, (4) flexibility, (5) foreign language awareness, (6) awareness that culture causes different discussion styles, speech speeds, interpretation and thought patterns, (7) techniques for handling interactional difficulties, (8) reflection on one's own cultural background, and (9) tolerance of ambiguity.

The intercultural models discussed here feature dynamic elements interplaying one another in the intercultural mainstreams. In particular, those four intercultural mainstreams (i.e., knowledge, behavioral skills, attitude, and critical awareness) are all necessary to facilitate success getting competence in EIcL. Thus, when preparing their classes, EIcL teachers should pay greater attention not only to knowledge (savoirs), but also to behavioral skills (savoir-comprendre/faire), attitudes (savoir-être), and critical awareness (savoir-engager).

Along with the intercultural mainstreams, another important challenge that should be identified is to understand the nature of EIcL process. The starting point to do this lies in a closer look at the definition of culture learning/teaching. Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, and Colby (1999) provide the following: Culture learning is the process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures. It is a dynamic, developmental, and on-going process which engages the learner cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively. (50) From the definition, Paige with his colleagues see culture as a 'dynamic and constantly changing entity' interlinked with communication and interaction between individuals belonging to different 'intercultural contexts.' The learning/teaching goal from this perspective shifts from a rote memorization of cultural facts (i.e., visible historical facts, arts, and literature) to the acquisition of the culture-general (i.e., intercultural) competence and learning how to learn about culture. The process of EIcL, therefore, is not static. It actively involves transformation of learners (i.e., his/her ability) to communicate and to understand communication, and of his/her skills for ongoing learning through observation and participation inside and outside the language class. This will help speakers/users of EIcL to acquire a deeper understanding of the concepts of culture, cultural adaptation

and intercultural communication, to develop strategies for dealing with cultural differences in communication, and finally to become more autonomous in the process of learning and to position him/herself at an intermediate intercultural zone among cultures.

Obviously, all the aspects have to be taken into account in the ElcL classrooms where learning can definitely rely not only on the acquisition of knowledge about culture(s) but also on involving reflection and comparison between two sets of practices or more. Although the amount of culture and actual socialization with other cultural beings that can be dealt with within the context of formal language classrooms are rather limited, there has been some amount of precious research on developing methodologies (Byram, 1988, 1989; Crawford-Lange & Lange, 1984; Crozet, 1996; 1998; Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001; Sercu, 2002) for teaching intercultural language competence in language classrooms in a way that develops comparison, reflection, and integration of authentic intercultural experiences into the cultural identity of learner. Among those methodologies, Liddicoat and Crozet's (2001) model for intercultural language learning/teaching consists of four steps: (1) awareness raising (the stage where learners are introduced to new linguistic and cultural input), (2) experimentation (the stage to help fix learners' newly acquired knowledge via experienced learning), (3) production (the stage to apply in the real life situation, and feedback), and (4) feedback (the stage to reflect on the experience of acting like a native speaker in the production phase and to allow students to discover their place between their first language and culture and their second). Notably, each step comes with roles which could be played by learners and teachers optimally in any classrooms along with materials and activities. Likewise, all of the models have common features which can be seen as the basis for a methodology known as 'intercultural language[English] learning/teaching.' These common features are; cultural exploration, cultural comparison, cultural acquisition, negotiation (integration) of one's own 'third place' between cultures. Materials and contents should be employed in order to make learners aware of the ElcL mainstreams, encouraging them to compare and contrast foreign cultures with their own. Materials that do this will, as Valdes (1990) suggests, prove to be successful with learners. Coursebooks such as New English File (Oxenden & Latham-Koenig, 2000), New Interchange (Richards, 2000), and World English (Milner et al., 2014) show good examples of contents that provide a plenty of opportunities for learners to examine other cultures and their own from a 'third place' perspective through varieties of Englishes.

Some more in-class activities (Corbett, 2003; Green, 2017; Lee, 2012) to engage students actively in the target culture and English(es) can be role plays along with simulations, reading activities and quizzes, listening activities, writing activities, discussion activities, guest speakers along with panel discussions, or even singing. All such activities and materials should be deliberately chosen to portray different aspects of culture and English(es), highlighting attractive aspects vs. shocking ones, similarities vs. differences, facts vs. behavior, historical vs. modern, old people vs. young people, and city life vs. rural life, etc.

4. Conclusion

This article has articulated what ElcL is, consists of, and why it is pivotal for today's ever-growing business English teaching arena. Such ElcL mainstreams as knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, and critical awareness have been reported to be essential for being competent in getting success in ElcL. The mainstreams can be achieved in its classrooms; that is, some methodologies entailing cultural exploration, comparison, acquisition, and negotiation (integration) of one's own third place between cultures. ElcL serves as a major contextual factor facilitating success in getting competence/proficiency among Englishes. ElcL has become indispensable, for real intercourses via many recognized varieties of Englishes are unavoidably all situation-specific and user-/nonnative speaker-centered since the postmodern era, rather than just focusing on an acquisition of standardized English(es). Active and positive research on ElcL can shed light on the way learners from different speech and cultural backgrounds communicate with other NNSs or NSs in English or on more elaborate ways of establishing mutual comprehensibility while withholding speaker'/user's cultural identity and upholding the place of the 'intercultural zone' when they can safely/comfortably put themselves into the realm of the 'ethnorelative attitude' and truly enjoy the comprehensibility.

Some further considerations/research on ElcL have been actively suggested. Sifakis (2004) has questioned learners' attitudes regarding (1) the issue of ownership of English and its status in intercultural communication and (2) 'standard English pronunciations (i.e., RP (i.e., received pronunciation, meaning the standard accent of England) or General American?, Is a native-like important to them?, how do learners view his/her own accent or react to other NNSs' accents?, do they prefer his/er national/cultural identity to be evident or concealed through their own accent?). Other researchers (Alred et al., 2002; Jenkins, 2003; Liaw & Johnson, 2001) have also mentioned about the scarcity of ElcL materials and called for the availability of appropriately-designed in-class and out-of-class coursebooks. ElcL is a promising and ultimately rewarding approach to the contemporary business English teaching arena. ElcL can be achieved also through 'policies' (Sercu, 2003) and 'materials or living abroad' (Byram & Zarate, 1996). However, most importantly, without 'learners/teachers' awareness and

understanding' of the EIcL mainstreams, learners'/speakers'/ users' intercultural knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes along with their critical thinking are all put into danger.

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