

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Ingrid MADÁROVÁ

Abstract

English language is identified as one of the most spread languages for the worldwide communication. The intensive globalization of the world in the last decades requires international communication within the wider range of nations and cultures. It is important to recognize the continuous shift of the role of the English language from a foreign/second language into the global nature of the English language, in the context of worldwide communication, stressing the fact, that English as a foreign/second language has become international language with estimate that "only one out of every four users of English in the world is a native speaker of the language (Crystal, 1997)". The estimations in 2015 year exceed 1, 5 billion English speakers including only 375 million native speakers (Statista, 2016). Within the concept of English as a language used for international and intercultural communication, it is consequently important to consider the inseparable role of culture in a language as the cause of the shift from the cultural aspect in English as a foreign/second language into the intercultural aspects in English as an international language including consideration of its possible impact on teaching English as an international language.

Key words: foreign language, intercultural communication, global language

Abstrakt

Anglický jazyk je považovaný za najrozšírenejší jazyk komunikácie vo svete. Intenzívna svetová globalizácia posledných desaťročí prináša nutnosť komunikácie v širšom meradle čo sa týka národností a kultúr. Je dôležité rozpoznať nepretržitý posun v úlohe angličtiny ako cudzieho/druhého jazyka na jazyk globálnej povahy a to v kontexte svetovej komunikácie, s dôrazom na fakt, že angličtina ako cudzí/druhý jazyk sa stala medzinárodným jazykom s odhadom, že "iba jeden zo štyroch užívateľov angličtiny vo svete je pôvodom rodený užívateľ angličtiny" (Crystal, 1997). Odhaduje sa, že v roku 2015 používatelia angličtiny presiahli počet 1,5 miliardy vrátane 375 miliónov rodených užívateľov angličtiny (Statista, 2016). V rámci konceptu angličtiny ako medzinárodného jazyka interkultúrnej komunikácie je následne dôležité uvedomiť si neoddeliteľný vzťah kultúry a jazyka ako príčiny posunu z kultúrnych aspektov angličtiny ako cudzieho jazyka na interkultúrne aspekty v rámci angličtiny ako medzinárodného jazyka, vrátane zváženia možného dopadu na vyučovanie angličtiny ako medzinárodného jazyka.

Kľúčové slová: cudzí jazyk, kultúra a interkultúrna komunikácia, angličtina ako medzinárodný jazyk

1 English as an international language

In this work the attention is paid to English language as the means for intercultural communication and its role within worldwide communication is discussed introducing English as an international language. Related to the role of English as a foreign language, its main characteristics are identified and followed by the presentation of EIL status from the point of view of the varieties of the English language. Different views in standards of English varieties are also discussed, with the respect to the global status of English language. Further, the attention is

paid to the nature of EIL user and his/her characteristics, explaining the main issues related to the controversy in discussions about the questions of language proficiency compared to the concept of language competence of the EIL user, including the inconsistency in the definitions of the researchers, related to this topic. Finally, the possible EIL teaching implications are introduced, resulting from the above mentioned issues.

From the point of view of varieties of English, the Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (Richards et al., 2013) defines Standard English as the variety of a language, which has the highest status in a community or nation and which is usually based on the speech and writing of educated speakers of the language. A standard variety is then described generally as (a) used in the news media and in literature and (b) described in dictionaries and grammars. In addition, from the point of view of non-native speakers, the attention is paid to the fact, that the standard variety is taught in schools and taught to non-native speakers when they learn the language as a foreign language. (Richards et al., 2013).

These definitions describe Standard English as a certain variety of language, which implies the existence of other varieties of English language. The question remains to which extend is EIL considered as a variety of English language or if it could be considered as an independent language with its own standards.

Within the recognition of EIL, the researchers bring very different views of standards in EIL. Although Widdowson (1994) believes in the independent status of EIL, "as soon as you accept that English serves the communicative and communal needs of different communities, it follows logically that it must be diverse. An international language has to be an independent language," he further suggests preserving a common standard of English, explaining, that "it does not follow logically, however, that the language will disperse into mutually unintelligible varieties. For it will naturally stabilize into standard form to the extent required to meet the needs of the communities concerned. Thus it is clearly vital to the interests of the international community that they should preserve a common standard of English in order to keep up standards of communicative effectiveness," (Widdowson, 1994).

From the point of view of English varieties, Seidlhofer (2003) mentions Kachru's definition of three circles as three groups of countries, stressing the English language role within these countries. English used as the "primary language" is defined within Inner Circle countries used mostly the inhabitants of USA, UK with his estimation from 320-380 million users. English used as a second language is the criteria for the group of Outer Circle countries, e.g. India, Singapore with the estimation from 150 - 300 million. Expanding Circle represents the countries where English is taught as a foreign language, mostly located in countries e.g. China and Russia with the estimation of 100 - 1000 million users. As the role of English can change within the country, the division of the countries within these groups or circles is not rigid. Kachru himself proclaims, "There are now at least four non-native speakers of English for every native speaker," (Kachru, 1996). McArthur (1992) mentions a lower estimation, "a 2-to-1 ratio of non-natives to natives". The German author Gnutzmann (2000) cites that "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)". Based on the emerging role of English as the language for global communication with all its varieties, compared to the standards of EIL as described by Widdowson, Kachru (1985) suggests reviewing the Inner-Circle standards of English as a foreign language to the standards of EIL. He explains its role with the relation to Outer Circle users and in his view, that "the global diffusion of English has taken an interesting turn: the native speakers of this language seem to have lost the exclusive prerogative to control its standardization; in fact, if current statistics are any indication, they have become a minority. This sociolinguistic fact must be accepted and its implication recognized. What we need now are new paradigms and perspectives for linguistic and pedagogical research and for understanding the linguistic creativity in multilingual situations across cultures," (Kachru, 1985). McKay (2002) supports Kachru's view doubting the fact, that different norms developed in different varieties of EIL could lead to a lack of mutual intelligibility, and she explains, that it is the interpretability, "that causes the greatest problems in the use of EIL for cross-cultural communication since interpretability entails questions of culture and context" and argues, that "it is important to note that when English is used cross culturally, it is very possible that the speakers will work together to achieve interpretability." Supporting the ideas of the EIL as an independent variety of English, Crystal (1997) recognizes three levels in English language; the base level, with the family dialect, the second level, as the Standard variety of English, and he also recognizes the third level of the English variety, used for worldwide communication and within the future of English language, he also predicts the International Standard English as near reality.

In spite of the recognition of the existence of English as an international language as a fact, explained earlier, there is certain inconsistency in the terminology related to this topic and even the leading researchers describe their different views on the definition of this acknowledged phenomenon. As the existence of different "Englishes" (Kachru, 1992) or "World Englishes" (Crystal, 1997) is described, there are various terms referring to English as an international language (Jenkins, 2000) recognized; the term English as a Lingua Franca (Gnutzmann, 2000), English as a global language (Crystal, 1997). Consequently, the possible questions may rise, whether these terms refer to the same phenomenon.

In spite of the inconsistency in terminology, the need to use languages of wider communication is noticed. Reyes (2008) explains, that "the acquisition of languages other than the first or second is becoming a common process in the European context. In fact, the increasing links among European and world countries, as the result of historical, political, economic and technological development, have produced the need to use languages of wider communication, mainly English, which are not always the language or languages of one's own community." Supporting the idea of English as the language used for worldwide communication, Crystal (2003) mentions, based on Kachru estimation, that only one out of every four users of English in the world is a native speaker of the language

The above mentioned diversities in English language used globally imply the questions about the nature of EIL user. Except the earlier mentioned inconsistency in terms related to the EIL, there is also the controversy noticeable in the definitions of the standards EIL and debates related to the aims of EIL teaching. As the main issue could be considered the shift from defined language proficiency in foreign language acquisition, aiming the “native-speaker” level in language teaching into the concept of language competence of EIL users. From the point of view of the globalized world, within the research presuppositions, there is also disagreement on definitions of a “native speaker”, which also shows the complexity of the definition issues. Controversy in definition of EIL, its standards, including the different views on the foreign language user, also causes difficulties to state the definition of EIL user.

Thus, the explanation is necessary to add, that in this work, the EIL user is considered from the holistic point of view and in the context of this work, EIL users could be considered a to be either bilinguals or plurilinguals. This conviction is based on the Grosjean (2010) suggestions stating, that “bilinguals use their two (or more) languages, separately or together, for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people.” The idea of EIL users defined in this work as bilinguals (or plurilinguals/multilinguals) is further supported by Grosjean, (2010) who explains, that “bilinguals are rarely equally or completely fluent in their two or more languages resulting from the fact the needs and uses of the two languages are usually quite different and levels of fluency in a language will depend on the need for that language and will be domain specific”.

In spite of the fact that "there is no standardized use of these terms" (Stern, 1992), related to the definitions of the bilinguals or plurilinguals, Baker (1988), admits the idea, that someone is bilingual if he/she is fluent in one language and, at the same time, less than fluent in his/her other language and he suggests, that “we should make an initial distinction between bilingualism as an individual characteristic and bilingualism in a social group, community, region or country," (1988, p.2).

Grosjean (2010) also disagrees, that bilinguals have equal and perfect knowledge of their languages. In addition, he explains, that: "There are two contrasting views of individual bilinguals. First, there is a fractional view of bilinguals, which evaluates the bilingual as ‘two monolinguals in one person’. There is a second, holistic view which argues that the bilingual is not the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals, but that he or she has a unique linguistic profile." (in Baker,1988). Resulting from the above mentioned status of EIL and definitions of bilinguals or multilinguals, based on the holistic point of view, the EIL users are considered either bilinguals or multi/plurilinguals within this work.

According to Pokrivčáková (2013), in Slovakia as an European country, “bilingual education is seen generally as one of the means of protecting European linguistic diversity (currently, citizens of the EU speak in more than 60 different languages and 23 of them are official languages) and European multilingualism, which is a required ability of all Europeans to communicate in at least in 3 languages, as stated in documents various European documents

(European Commission, 2005, 2009; European Council, 2008).” In Slovakia, the research focus is mainly on bilingual education within this context and the only area of bilingual research that has already brought relevant data, though still "in its infancy", could be considered the research of the CLIL method (Pokrivčáková, 2013). It is noticeable, within the concept of bilingual schools in Slovakia, the term bilingual is understood as explained also by Baker (1988), who admits that bilingual is someone who can be fluent in one language but less than fluent in his/her other language.

As it was outlined above, within this chapter, the issues related to the EIL are controversial, including its status, standards, EIL users characteristic and aims in EIL acquisition. Despite the mentioned controversies in EIL research, the researchers agree that the existence of the EIL is proved and the EIL user definition is examined within the related EIL teaching research.

2 Teaching implications with the impact on intercultural aspects in EIL

Considering the controversy about the issues relating to the EIL research including the inconsistency in definitions of EIL status, standards, the nature of EIL users, it is natural, that, consequently, there is also disagreement in researchers' findings related to the EIL teaching, including its goals, user's competence, assessments problems and many other issues. In spite of this process of searching of the consensus, it is obtainable, that prevailing majority of researchers within the topic of EIL teaching recognize the importance of the cultural aspect in EIL teaching.

Cultural dimension of a language has been always to some extent present in foreign language teaching. Teaching material is often presented in cultural context. A few decades ago the researchers as e.g. Hymes' (1972) emphasis on the importance of sociocultural knowledge. Within the context of the language user's competence, especially the communicative competence, Byram's findings should be considered. Byram (1997) concentrates on the intercultural communicative competence as the extension of communicative competence. Although he approaches the intercultural communicative competence from an abstract point of view, as it is "this complexity which decided me against trying to make variety of factors into consideration throughout the text" (Byram, 1997, p.5), he also believes that it can be an advantage "if someone acquires intercultural competence as a consequence of being taught in a formal sense," (Byram, 1997, p.22). And further, relating intercultural competence to communication, he points out that "there is a strong argument for the inclusion of non-verbal communication in intercultural communication" and he cites Poyatos's proposal "that foreign language teaching should include training in non-verbal communication". Although Byram concentrates on the role of cultural awareness in foreign language teaching, Will Baker (2012) argues, that with the English language now used as a global lingua franca in a huge range of different cultural contexts, a correlation between the English language and a particular culture and nation is clearly problematic. Realizing, that most of the English users are no more native-speaker, Kramsch (1993) argues in relation to foreign language teaching, that this has fundamental implications and the goals of traditional language teaching have been found wanting in this new era of globalization.

Consequently, its main issues (monolingual native speakers, homogeneous national cultures, pure standard national languages, instrumental goals of education, and functional criteria of success) have all become problematic in a world that is increasingly multilingual and multicultural. Based on the conclusions streaming from EIL research including the debates over the teaching of EIL rather than as a foreign language, Penny Ur (2012) suggests the change in the ultimate goals of English teaching. Besides preferring full competence rather than 'native like' mastery, including acknowledgement of the fully-competent user of English as the model and a change in criteria for selection of language to be taught, she stresses the change in criteria for content of materials - with the focus on 'international' situations, text, culture and fewer focus on 'inner-circle' (Kachru, 1996) texts, culture. Straková (2000) examines the cultural aspects of the textbooks used for teaching English as a foreign language within Slovak educational context with the impact on the importance of cultural context in foreign language teaching content.

Following the purpose of this paper, based on the above mentioned findings related to intercultural communication, effective communication in English, especially within the context of English as an international language, it is not provided only by knowledge of its lexis, grammar, or phonology anymore. Understanding of the wide variety of cultural dimensions is needed to be achieved for successful intercultural communication. The conclusions of Will Baker (2012) explain, that conceptions of cultural awareness stress the need for learners to become aware of the culturally based norms, beliefs, and behaviours of their own culture and other cultures. He points out the goal of increased understanding of culture and language leading to successful intercultural communication. From the point of view of the perspective research project, presented in the next chapter, his definition of twelve features of intercultural awareness in three levels as a transition process from cultural to intercultural awareness is considered as the essential base. Related to the desired intercultural awareness of EIL users, these three levels are described later in details in this work, within the cultural awareness training of the research participants, aiming the transition process from basic cultural awareness through advanced cultural awareness into intercultural awareness.

The above mentioned findings resulted into the conviction, presented in this work, that English for "wider communication", recognized as English for an international communication, is influenced not only by the wide varieties of the first language of the users, but especially by the diversity of their cultures. This conviction also influences the nature of the research introduced further in this work, focusing on the possible correlation of the cultural competence of the EIL users and his/her communication style in EIL.

Conclusion

Discussing the intercultural communication, an English language could be identified as one of the most spread languages for the worldwide communication. Within the concept of English as a language used for international and intercultural communication, it is important to consider the inseparable role of culture in a language as the cause of the shift from the cultural

aspect in English as a foreign/second language into the intercultural aspects in English as an international language.

For the teachers of English as a foreign language it is important to realize that the last decade the role of English language is considered to be as a global language for communication, which resulted into its status of English as an international language. Consequently, the status of global language implies the multicultural settings of the English as an international language and within the context of foreign or "international" language acquisition, it is also essential to understand that a skilled language teacher should be the one who could help to eliminate the negative impact of the potential cultural misunderstandings within intercultural communication by the qualified, well-structured introduction of the intercultural studies to students. The language teacher should be their good guide to help them to reach consciously competent (Storti, 1999) stage of cultural-awareness, including equipping the students with the basic knowledge about cultural specifications within pre-defined categories of intercultural differences to avoid or at least decrease the confusion and frustrations of students streaming from intercultural misunderstandings. An awareness of the multilingual and multicultural settings of English use is considered by Baker (2012) to be a key element of any attempt to teach communication.

References

- Baker, C. (1988). *Key Issues in Bilingualism and bilingual educations*. Clevedon, Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters. ISBN 0-905028-95-3.
- Baker, W. (2012). *From cultural awareness to intercultural awareness: Culture in ELT*. In: *ELT journal* 66 (1): p. 62-70. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISSN 1477-4526.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon, Philadelphia : Multilingual Matters. ISBN: 185359377.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-52-153032-3.
- European Commission. (2006). *Follow-up of the Action Plan on language learning and linguistic diversity* [online]. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. [cit. 17 January 2015]. Sweden: European Commission. Retrieved from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:ef0003>.
- European Commission. (2008). *Multilingualism - an asset and a commitment* [online]. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. [cit. 17 January 2015]. Brussels: European Commission. Retrieved from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52008DC0566>.
- Gnutzmann, C., (2000). *Lingua franca*. In: M. Byram and A. Hu, eds. *The Routledge encyclopedia of language teaching and learning*. London: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-203-10151-3.

- Grosjean, F., (2010). *The bilingual as a competent but specific speaker-hearer*. In: M. Cruz-Ferreira, ed. *Multilingual Norms*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. ISBN 978-3-631-59637-1.
- Hymes, D. (1972). *On communicative competence*. J. B. Pride and J. Holmes, eds. *Sociolinguistics*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Education. ISBN 978-0-14-080665-6.
- Jenkins, J., (2000). *The Phonology of English as an International Language. New Models, New Norms, New Goals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press [online]. [cit. 10th January 2016]. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jennifer_Jenkins4/publication/271642936_Teaching_pronunciation_for_English_as_a_Lingua_Franca_A_sociopolitical_perspective/links/54cfb59c0cf29ca8110029ac.pdf
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). *Standards, codification, and sociolinguistic realism: the English language in the outer circle. English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures* [online]. In: R. Quirk- H.G. Widdowson, eds. *English in the World*. [cit. 15 November 2015] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0521315220. Retrieved from: http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/ec/files/F044%20ELT-60%20English%20in%20the%20World%20%20Teaching%20and%20Learning%20the%20Language%20and%20Literatures_v3.pdf
- Kachru, B. B., Nelson, C. L. (1996). *World Englishes. Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching*. Ed. Sandra McKay and Nancy H. Hornberger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-52-148434-3.
- Kramsch, C., (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0 19 437187 5.
- McKay, S. (2002). *Teaching English as an International Language: Rethinking Goals and Approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0194373647.
- Pokrivčáková, S. (2013). *Bilingual education in Slovakia: A Case Study. Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 2(5), p.10 [online]. [cit. 10th November 2015]. ISSN: 2167-9053. Retrieved from: www.theartsjournal.org/index.php/site/article/.../104.
- Reyes, I. (2008). *Bilingualism in Holistic Perspective* [online]. [cit. 25th February 2016]. Retrieved from: http://www.u.arizona.edu/~ireyes/bibDoc/Reyes_Bilingualism%283%29.pdf
- Richards, J.C., Schmidt, R.W. (2013). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics*. London and New York: Routledge. ISBN 978-1-40-82 0460-3.
- Seidlhofer, B. (2003). *A concept of International English and related issues: from real English to realistic English?* Language Policy Division, DG-IV - Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education, Council of Europe [online]. [cit. 15 March 2016]. Retrieved from: <https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SeidlhoferEN.pdf>
- Statista - *TheStatisticsPortal*, (2016) [online]. [cit. 15 March 2016]. Retrieved from: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/266808/the-most-spoken-languages-worldwide>
- Stern, H.H. (1983). *Fundamental concepts of language teaching*. London: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-437065-3
- Storti, C., (1999). *Figuring Foreigners Out: A Practical Guide*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press. ISBN 978-1-87-786470-4.

Straková, Z., (2000). *Kultúrne a didaktické aspekty učebnice anglického jazyka*. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského.

Ur, P., (2012). *English as an international language: implications for classroom teaching*
In: Youtube [online]. Published 10 July 2012 [seen: 25 February 2016]. Retrieved from:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTidAm0dRR0>.

Widdowson, H.G. (1983). *Learning purpose and language use*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
ISBN 978-0-19-437072-1.

Author: Ing. Mgr. Ingrid Madárová, part-time PhD. student, Institute of British and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Presov, Slovakia. E-mail: imadarova@gmail.com