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Convivial communication: recontextualizing communicative competence

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The advent of the concept of communicative competence in English Language Teaching (ELT) over thirty years ago signalled a shift from grammar-based pedagogy to Communicative Language Teaching. It was generally accepted that, in addition to grammar rules, language teaching needed to take account of social context and social rules of use. The concept of communicative competence, initially developed for ethnographic research, appeared to offer an intellectual basis for pedagogic broadening. The transfer of this concept from research to language teaching has, however, produced abstracted contexts and idealized social rules of use based on (English language) native-speakerness. Drawing on recent work in the fields of World Englishes, English as a lingua franca and Second Language Acquisition, this article argues that it is imperative for ELT to take notice of real-world social, cultural and language developments in contemporary conditions and to re-engage with a set of reformulated ethnographic sensitivities and sensibilities.

Keywords: communicative competence, English Language Teaching, ethnography, native-speakerness, Second Language Acquisition

Oltre trent'anni fa l'introduzione del concetto di competenza comunicativa nell'insegnamento della lingua inglese (ELT) segnò un passaggio dalla pedagogia grammaticale al nuovo metodo della didattica comunicativa. Divenne allora opinione diffusa che al di là delle regole grammaticali l'insegnamento linguistico dovesse partire dal contesto sociale e dalle regole sociali d'uso di una lingua. Il concetto di competenza comunicativa, originariamente sviluppato per la ricerca etnografica, sembrava cioè in grado di offrire una base intellettuale per la ristrutturazione della pedagogia. Tuttavia il trasferimento di questo concetto dalla ricerca alla didattica ha avuto come risultato un' astrazione del contesto ed ha anche idealizzato le regole sociali dell'uso linguistico fondandole sulla competenza nativa della lingua inglese. Questo contributo trae spunto da alcuni studi recenti in vari settori – quello dell'World Englishes, dell'inglese come lingue franca e dell' Acquisizione della Seconda Lingua, e propone in modo categorico che l'ELT tenga conto dei reali sviluppi sociali, culturali e linguistici osservabili in quelle che sono le effettive circostanze del mondo d'oggi, al fine di confrontarsi in modo piu' accurato con le sensibilità e le sfumature etnografiche della realtà quotidiana che ci circonda.

Parole chiave: competenza comunicativa, ELT (insegnamento dell'inglese), etnografia, competenza del parlante nativo, acquisizione della L2

Introduction

The activity of English Language Teaching (ELT) aimed at speakers of different languages has been the subject of critical self-examination by various practitioners, theorists and researchers for some time now. From Phillipson's (1992) critique of ELT as a form of post-WWII neo-colonialism and Pennycook's (1994) notion of English as a "global commodity" to Canagarajah's (1999) critique of the indiscriminate exporting of metropolitan-based teaching methodologies to other educational environments and Brumfit's (2001: 117) reflexively-posed contention that ". . . it is not clear exactly what it is that one is saying in talking about somebody as a second language user", many of the educational and intellectual assumptions and certainties that appeared to have underpinned much of ELT as a transnationalized enterprise in the 1970s and early 1980s have been challenged.

The English language, both as a set of linguistic resources and as a medium for communication, has witnessed profound developments in the last few decades. It is used by huge numbers of diverse speakers in varieties of ways that could not have been envisaged in the 1960s and 1970s. It will be argued here that the concept of communicative competence, which has provided the intellectual anchor for the various versions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that appear in a vast array of ELT teacher training and teaching materials, is itself in need of examination and possibly recasting. *Inter alia*, the thorny and complex issues of language authority and norms in the conceptualization of English language teaching will be examined. The central aim of this article is to attempt to make a move towards a more sentient re-articulation of the concept of communicative competence in English as a second or additional language in contemporary conditions. Throughout this conceptual discussion my main interest is in what Widdowson (1989) refers to as "language knowledge", or more precisely, the epistemological nature of language and sociocultural knowledge implicated in the concept of communicative competence. Perhaps it should be emphasized that the arguments and comments made here are primarily concerned with conceptual issues and not with the views and practices of any particular group/s of teachers.

I will first revisit some of the seminal texts produced in the formative period of development of the concept of 'communicative competence'. The constituent parts of this concept will be examined with a view to foregrounding the explicit and implicit assumptions about language knowledge and language authority. After this the focus will shift to relevant works in areas such as English as a lingua franca (ELF), World Englishes, and critical SLA theory. The main reason for traversing these vast domains of enquiries is to extract arguments and perspectives which will suggest directions for updating and re-orienting the concept of communicative competence. In the

final sections I will suggest a reframed ethnographic orientation that is capable of making connections with emergent sensibilities in diverse contexts of English language learning, teaching and use.

The term 'English as a second language' (ESL) is conventionally used to refer to a context of use and/or learning where English is adopted as the medium of communication for at least some public or government functions (e.g. English in India and for some minority language communities in countries such as the USA and the UK), and the term 'English as a foreign language' (EFL) is used where English is not used/learned for public functions. While these terms are still quite useful short-hand labels, recent developments in the use of English in different contexts have made these terms increasingly difficult to apply, as will be made obvious later. For the future, terms such as 'English as an additional language' (EAL) and "English *for* Speakers of Other Languages" (Widdowson 2004: 363, original italics) are probably preferable because they are less weighed down with history, and because they signal the possibility of defining English from the standpoint of the users/learners. However, here I will continue to use the established terms ESL and EFL where they are consistent with and appropriate to the points being made.

Communicative competence

In the English-language applied linguistics literature, the emergence of the concept of communicative competence was generally associated with a break with an overly grammar-based paradigm for language studies. The works of Austin (1962), Halliday (1973, 1975), Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964) and many others in the 1960s and early 1970s in the fields of language studies and language teaching had paved the way for a paradigm shift. Hymes' (1972, 1977, 1994) ethnographically-oriented exploration of and elaboration on communicative competence – itself a critique of Chomsky's (1965) highly abstracted notion of competence – serves in many ways as a clarion call for language educators to pay attention to social rules of use, a dimension of language use "without which the rules of grammar would be useless", as Hymes (1972: 278) says in an oft-quoted remark. (See also Campbell and Wales 1970; for a discussion, see Howatt with Widdowson 2004: 326–37.) This inclusion of the 'social' makes it necessary to engage with questions of context of communication and aspects of culture when working towards an integrated theory of language in use. In this connection, Hymes (1972: 281) suggests that four empirical questions must be raised:

1) Whether (and to what degree) something is formally **possible**;
2) Whether (and to what degree) something is **feasible** in virtue of the means of implementation available;

3) Whether (and to what degree) something is **appropriate** (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
4) Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually **performed**, and what its doing entails. [emphasis in original]

I will return to some of implications of these questions for ELT later. For now it is sufficient to note that in this attempt to formulate the concept of communicative competence, the constituent parts are context-sensitive, and they are to be described and ascertained empirically through observation and research. For instance, in relation to language as a code, Hymes (1977: 4) has to this to say:

> one cannot take a linguistic form, a given code, or even speech itself, as a limiting frame of reference. One must take as context a community, or network of persons, investigating its communicative activities as a whole, so that any use of channel and code takes its place as part of the resources upon which the members draw.

And later, slightly recast:

> [Ethnography of communication] would approach language neither as an abstracted form nor as an abstract correlate of a community, but as situated in the flux and pattern of communicative events. It would study communicative form and function in integral relation to each other. (Hymes 1994: 12)

There is little doubt that this socio-culturally alert concept of communicative competence has had a profound influence on ELT. Indeed the term Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was coined around this period in the mid-1970s to mark a major shift in curriculum and pedagogic approaches.[1] The following statements from two popular ELT teacher education books bear witness to this point:

> in the early 1970, a 'sociolinguistic revolution' took place, where the emphasis given in linguistics to grammar was replaced by an interest in 'language in use' . . . The sociolinguistic revolution had a great effect on language teaching . . . [It] was responsible for the development of a type of syllabus which aimed to cater for the teaching of language in use – of communicative competence. (Johnson 2001: 182–3)

> The communicative movement in ELT . . . has, as one of its bases, a concept of what it means to know a language and to be able to put that knowledge to use in communicating with people in a variety of settings and situations. One of the earliest terms of this concept was *communicative competence* . . . (Hedge 2000: 44–5; italics in original)

The recontextualization[2] of the concept of communicative competence for second and foreign language teaching can be seen to have been significantly represented by the theoretical work of Canale and Swain in the 1980s. Building on the works of Hymes and others, they produced a series of articles which can be regarded as a reference point for the formation of the concept of communicative competence in second and foreign language pedagogy (see Canale 1983, 1984; Canale and Swain 1980a,b).[3] In these early 1980s articles Canale and Swain suggest that communicative competence comprises four areas of knowledge and skills:

1) *Grammatical competence*. This competence is concerned with "knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology" (Canale and Swain 1980a: 29). This type of knowledge and skill will allow the learner to understand and produce accurately the literal meaning of utterances.
2) *Sociolinguistic competence*. This competence, broadly speaking, deals with what Hymes (1972, 1974) would call the rules of use:

   > [it] addresses the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors such as status of participants, purposes of the interaction, and norms or conventions of interaction . . . Appropriateness of utterances refers to . . . appropriateness of meaning and appropriateness of meaning concerns the extent to which particular communicative functions (e.g. commanding, complaining and inviting), attitudes (including politeness and formality) and ideas are judged to be proper in a given situation. (Canale 1983: 7)

   I take this last point to include what Hymes means by "whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done", in other words, probabilistic rules of occurrence concerning whether something is "sayable" in a given context.
3) *Discourse competence*. This competence is concerned with what Halliday and Hasan (1976) would refer to as cohesion and Widdowson (1978) as coherence. It deals with the knowledge and skill required to combine grammatical forms and meanings to produce different types of unified spoken or written texts, e.g. oral and written narratives, business reports and so on:

   > Unity of a text is achieved through cohesion in form and coherence in meaning. Cohesion deals with how utterances are linked structurally and facilitates interpretation of a text. For example, the use of cohesion devices such as pronouns, synonyms . . . Coherence refers to the relationship among the different meanings in a text, where these meanings may be literal meanings, communicative functions and attitudes. (Canale 1983: 9)

4) *Strategic competence*. This type of competence refers to:

> mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action for two main reasons: (a) to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to limiting conditions in actual communication (e.g. momentary inability to recall an idea or grammatical form) or due to insufficient competence in one or more of the other areas above; and (b) to enhance the effectiveness of communication (e.g. deliberately slow and soft speech for rhetorical effect). (Canale 1983: 11)

Communicative competence, in this formulation, represented a considerable broadening of the conceptual base of second language curriculum and pedagogy. The attempt to embrace social, discoursal and interactional dimensions in language teaching was both challenging and stimulating. Although there were different interpretations within the professional and academic research community at the time and in subsequent years – see e.g. Brumfit (1984) for a collection of views and Bachman (1990) for an expanded model of communicative competence – it would not be an exaggeration to say that the theoretical framework presented by Canale and Swain very quickly acquired, as Brown (2000) points out, the status of a central doctrine for ELT, which in various manifestations in applied linguistics and ELT teacher education handbooks and manuals has persisted to this day.

Recontextualization

The transfer of Hymes' ideas to ELT has involved some recontextualization of the original meanings. From the point of view of this discussion, it is important to note that in the recontextualization process, Hymes' research-oriented ideas have gone through an epistemic transformation: from empirically oriented questions to an idealized pedagogic doctrine. As Dubin (1989: 174) observes:

> it is apparent that over time there has been a shift away from an agenda for finding out what is happening in a community regarding language use to a set of statements about what an idealized curriculum for L2 learning/acquisition should entail . . . [The concept of communicative competence] has moved away from being a societally-grounded theory in terms of describing and dealing with actual events and practices of communication which take place within particular cultures.

This conversion of research concerns to a pedagogic doctrine was a collective, cumulative and, in all probability, a non-conscious process. In

many ways the process of recontextualization unavoidably implicates some sort of transformation of the original because the different fields of intellectual activity and enquiry involved have different priorities and concerns. In this case language teaching professionals (including linguists *qua* language educators) are not necessarily interested in ethnographic research accounts of how communication is accomplished in different settings; they are more directly concerned with what information or content should be included in the curriculum and how such content should be worked on in the classroom. Once the questions raised by Hymes were incorporated into a conceptual framework, curriculum discussions had to attend to guidelines for developing teaching and learning content and activities. The need to specify what is to be taught and learned inevitably turns research questions, which allow the possibility of both instability in existing knowledge and emergence of new knowledge, into pedagogic guidelines and principles which have to assume a degree of stability, transparency and certainty in existing knowledge. This is, of course, not a zero-sum game; it is a matter of degree. For instance, in Canale and Swain's 1980 article the pedagogising of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence is presented in terms of what is to be selected and included in the curriculum from the existing stocks of knowledge. The discussion is not couched in terms of whether we have such knowledge or whether our existing knowledge is relevant, adequate and/or appropriate. On the issue of discourse competence the authors are less certain but nevertheless suggest that

> [u]ntil more clear-cut theoretical statements about rules of discourse emerge, it is perhaps most useful to think of these rules in terms of the cohesion (i.e. grammatical links) and coherence (i.e. appropriate combination of communicative functions) of groups of utterance. (Canale and Swain 1980a: 30)

The process of recontextualization of the concept of communicative competence can be seen quite clearly in the discussions of curriculum or syllabus development. For instance, in a discussion on the development of a communicative syllabus, Yalden (1983: 86–7) suggests that the designer has to determine some aspects of the syllabus components:

> The components [of a communicative syllabus] could be listed as follows:
> 1. as detailed a consideration as possible of the **purposes** for which the learners wish to acquire the target language;
> 2. some idea of the **setting** in which they will want to use the target language . . .
> 3. the socially defined **role** the learner will assume in the target language, as well as their interlocutors . . .
> 4. the communicative **events** in which the learners will participate . . . [emphasis in original]

The purposes, settings, roles and events were sometimes established by carrying out student needs surveys. Such surveys and analyses are not generally interested in the type of information and data discussed by Hymes, i.e. how communication is performed and what patterns of meaning-making and meaning-taking occur in specific contexts. Curriculum developers are concerned with working out students' projected communication purposes and contexts, e.g. learning English as a school subject or learning to use English in an English-speaking work environment. The general idea here is that once the students' purposes and contexts of use are established, curriculum/syllabus designers can draw on their knowledge of language teaching/learning (i.e. theory and technical know-how) and language use (i.e. the 'what' and the 'how') to specify the teaching programme with respect to the various parts of the overall competence to be taught.[4] The language content is thus built on idealized typifications of what native speakers may say and do in specified contexts.

In ELT teacher training materials the process of recontextualization is also visible. In an early discussion on the principles of CLT, Morrow (1981: 60–1) advised the teacher to:

- focus on enabling students to learn "how to do something" and avoid concentrating on formal knowledge such as the past tense for its own sake – ". . . the starting point (and end point) of every lesson should be an operation of some kind which the student might actually want to perform in a foreign language. In reading, this might be understanding a set of instructions . . .";
- promote an ability to handle language use in the spoken and written modes as whole texts, above "the sentence level" in "real" time with "real language in real situations" [the notion of "real" here refers to simulated forms of actual communication as represented by classroom activities];
- encourage active use of language in the classroom and "replicate as far as possible the processes of communication, so that practice of the forms of the target language can take place within a communicative framework".

Twenty years later, Brown's (2001: 43) characterisation of CLT includes the following:

- a focus on "the components (grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic) of communicative competence";
- the use of language teaching techniques and student tasks "to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes";
- the positioning of the teacher as "a facilitator and guide . . . Students are therefore encouraged to construct meaning through genuine linguistics interaction with others".

More recently, McDonough and Shaw (2003: 21) list the implications of the cumulative discussions on the communicative approach in the past thirty years that have "helped to form the kinds of teaching materials we work with and our attitudes to managing our classrooms". These include a concern for

- the "meaning potential" (pragmatic meaning in the context of use) and function/s of language as well as for language form/s when designing classroom work;
- appropriacy of language "alongside accuracy" in given contexts;
- use of language "beyond the sentence level".

There is a certain commonality in the way CLT is described in the popular ELT teacher training texts cited above. The common concerns are: pragmatic language meaning in context (sociolinguistic competence), knowledge and use of language above the sentence level in spoken and written discourse (discourse competence), and active language use in learning activities (strategic competence). These can be seen as an attempt to extract what is useful in the original Canale and Swain formulation of communicative competence for practical purposes in ELT. But this kind of operationalization of the concept of communicative competence does not fit comfortably with what was initially proposed by Hymes. The Hymesian ethnographic project advocated the need to investigate and understand language use in specific social and cultural contexts. In this perspective, as Grillo, Pratt and Street (1987: 274) observe,

> [t]here can be no a priori universalism. There may be universal forms of speech and language, but these need to be discovered by research in specific cultures and comparison between cultures. Only fieldwork, only ethnography, will suffice to tell.[5]

It is therefore somewhat ironic to see that a kind of scaled-down universalism, i.e. the language and communication inventory drawn up on the basis of teachers' and materials writers' knowledge of what is likely to be said, returns in an educational guise.[6] The social now resides in the pedagogic projections of the expert knower, the expert teacher. The immediate question is: what has made this expert-generated universalism possible?

Language knowledge and language authority: the native speaker perspective

In addition to the point made by Dubin (see earlier quote on p. 124), one may add that the "idealized curriculum for L2 learning" was often built on the perspective of an imagined or idealized native speaker of English. It may

well be that a native speaker's language knowledge has been seen as a convenient source of ethnographic insight. The persistent over-use of the concept of native speaker as a pedagogic reference point has been discussed and critiqued over the years (e.g. Cook 2002; Rampton 1990; Widdowson 2003: ch. 4). But the native speaker has proved to be a remarkably resilient concept, and it is still part of the bedrock of transnationalized ELT. Perhaps this is not surprising, because we can see traces of the native speaker in the Canale and Swain's influential early discussions. In a passage on sociocultural rules, the authors suggest that "... it is not clear that native speakers of the second language [English] expect second language learners at the early stages of a programme ... to have mastered sociocultural rules bearing on appropriateness" (Canale and Swain 1980: 12). In another passage on the probabilistic rules of occurrence it is stated that "[k]nowledge of what a native speaker is likely to say in a given context is to us a crucial component of second language learners' competence to understand second language communication and to express themselves in a native-like way ..." (ibid.: 16). In a discussion on scoring student responses in a French as a second language assessment project, Canale (1984: 116) recommends the following:

> Appropriateness. The concern here is the extent to which both the information and form of information are socially appropriate and natural/authentic (e.g. appropriate degree of politeness and formality, most likely form of message that native speakers use) depending on contextual variables such as topic, role of participant, setting and purpose.

The durability of the norming effect of the concept of the native speaker can be found in an emergent field of study where one might have expected a degree of built-in resistance. One of the pedagogic issues in the field of English as an international language (EIL) or English as a lingua franca (ELF) is: what kind of English should be adopted as the model or norm for teaching? Even in this newly created intellectual space where the notions of norms and standards could be discussed and critiqued more freely (in theory), the controlling hand of the abstracted and idealized (English) native speaker is easily felt. For instance, in a reasoned argument about the need for an EIL corpus, Prodromou (2003: 11), having asked rhetorically "On what data can we base alternative models for teaching EIL?", describes his own work in this way:

> My own corpus differs from previous work on non-native speech in focusing on natural, spontaneous speech produced by **proficient** non-native users of English as a foreign language. The data I will describe consists exclusively of naturally occurring conversation by highly accomplished users of EIL". [emphasis in original]

It seems clear in this case that tacit judgements have been made with some unspecified native-speaker norms in mind. How else could one identify "**proficient** non-native users" when an EIL model apparently does not yet exist? The pervasive influence of native-speakerness seems to have drifted onto centre stage, perhaps without the scriptwriter noticing. In a discussion on what teachers should know when they teach EIL, Sifakis (2004: 239) draws a distinction between communication-bound issues (the means with which interlocutors accomplish "cross-cultural comprehensibility") and norm-bound issues (e.g. English grammar and pronunciation) which, in the author's view, should adhere to native speaker "codification and standardness". Again, the native speaker's right of entry is untrammelled. (I will return to the significance of EIL/ELF as a field of enquiry later.)

The process of drawing up curriculum specifications has in effect treated Hymes' research questions as some sort of metaphoric *pro forma* headings under which details of what and how language is used are supplied. These details are selected and supplied on the basis of a combination of informed expertise attained through professional training and professional work such as student needs surveys (which could be carried out by native and non-native speakers alike) and a native speaker's experience and/or intuition on matters of grammaticality and socio-cultural practices in language use. Judgement-making remarks such as *We'd say "I'm very well, thank you" when people ask you how you are, we wouldn't reply by saying "Good"*, and *We wouldn't say "the tree is ill"* are examples of this kind of claim to native-speaker authority. Of the two claims to authority, professional expertise and native-speakerness, it is quite clear that in the professional world of ELT the second is generally regarded as more preferable and more valuable. For example, as part of a policy to improve the quality of English teaching in schools, there is now a Native-speaking English Teachers (NET) scheme in Hong Kong. The Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) scheme in Japan waives the professional ELT qualification requirement if the applicants are from English-speaking countries.[7] (For a further discussion see McKay 2003: 8–13.) But what is the basis of this native-speaker authority, and what does this approach to authority in English leave out of the account?

The appeal to native-speakerness as a source of language expertise and authority is grounded in an observation that people tend to generally know their first/native language better than any other language/s they may speak in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar patterns and rules of use. There is also an implicitly posited link between one's first/native language and one's tacit knowledge of what is grammatically allowable, whether or not it is actually said. In addition to this, Davies (2003: 110) observes that native speakers, *inter alia*, "can decide what is now in use", and "[have] more awareness of . . . context" which can assist the interpretation of intended meaning.

At the level of broad generalisation, these observations seem to be consistent with common experience. But these broad generalisations do not yield

the context-derived descriptive information needed for curriculum development, if Hymes' notion of communicative competence were to be at the heart of such enterprises. The problem lies in the tendency to assume that there is an almost hard-wired relationship between the status of being a native speaker of a language and a complete knowledge of and about that language (see Leung, Harris and Rampton 1997; Rampton 1990) and that all native speakers share the same knowledge. If we ask the question *How much grammar does a native speaker of English know and how much of this knowledge can s/he use?*, it becomes obvious that one cannot really answer this question without shifting the terms of reference by saying *It depends on which native speaker/s and in what context*. In other words, the abstract construct of the native speaker ceases to be useful as soon as we try to extract descriptive details from it.

Of course the opposite would be true if we were to ask *How much and what sort of grammar does John the journalist need to know?* Here we have, at least in principle, a question that allows empirical investigation. In fact, with respect to the four components of communicative competence discussed earlier, the notion of the native speaker as a heuristic-cum-descriptive device would only make sense if we specify individual/s or group/s of native speakers and the contexts of language use. So the written discourse competence required of journalists working for tabloids, as opposed to those who work in television, can in principle be described empirically. Thus, in so far as one may wish to refer to native speakers as a reference point for a specific curriculum, they have to be specified in terms of a whole range of attributes such as social/community position, context and modality of language use, gender, age and so on. So while there are clearly native speakers of English (as there are native speakers of other languages), there isn't a universal model of native speakers' use of language. This is in fact a key reason behind the points made by Hymes in the early 1970s.

A related problem is the abstracted concept of English (as a language) in the formulation of 'the native speaker of English'. Of the four sub-components of communicative competence discussed earlier, the domain of grammaticality seems to be the least complexified by social and cultural factors.[8] But even here the conferred straight-forwardness isn't quite as secure as it might seem at first glance. Consider the following expression: *We're goin' cinema*. Most middle-aged and middle-class native speakers of southern 'standard' English in Britain (not necessarily living in southern England) would probably find *We're goin' cinema* ungrammatical; but the *Ø-to* form of expression of motion or direction is commonly used by London youths, particularly in everyday informal conversations. The differences in respect of locality, age and social background point to the need to recognize the importance of language varieties (of the same language). As Davies (2003: 34) observes: "grammaticality is not language-based but variety-based . . . even structurally related varieties of one language cannot have exactly the same grammar". So there isn't a unified and bounded phenomenon called English, except in the sense of English being a set of codified lexical and grammatical resources

which can be exploited and used for speech and writing or, as Widdowson (2003: 51) calls it, "a virtual language".

What is important here is that the notion of language variety has strong social and cultural associations. In the field of ELT, the 'native speaker' variety presented is generally the standard English used (or putatively used) by a minority group of "self-elected elite" (Widdowson 2003: 37) of education and language-teaching professionals. While it is possible to list some of the lexical, syntactic and semantic differences between the standard varieties and the non-standard varieties of English (for examples, see Jenkins 2003: 64–71), it is not possible to produce a Hymesian-minded second language curriculum with just a code-oriented account of linguistic features of a particular native-speaker variety. As Canale and Swain's formulation of communicative competence makes amply clear, knowledge of a linguistic code is just one of the components of overall competence. The social and cultural dimensions are in many ways at the heart of the concept of communicative competence. The operative word here is *appropriate* or *appropriateness*.

In the original Hymes schema appropriateness in language use is primarily an empirical issue; one has to go out, as it were, and find data to show what appropriateness is in different settings and with different participants. Some generalizations may be developed through detailed observation and analysis of actual social interaction. In this way accounts of generalisable patterns of language use in certain social contexts, e.g. ways and means of presenting a request by a socially powerful person, can be built up.

In the recontextualization process, however, appropriateness has turned into a pedagogic space where specific forms of language use are selected and projected as being appropriate according to some normative assumptions of language practice set in an imagined social exchange. For instance, on the topic of good manners, students are advised that

> Americans sometimes find it difficult to accept the more formal Japanese manners. They prefer to be casual and more informal, as illustrated by the universal 'Have a nice day!' American waiters have a one-word imperative 'Enjoy!' The British, of course, are cool and reserved. The great topic of conversation between strangers in Britain is the weather – unemotional and impersonal . . . (Soars and Soars 1996: 41)

The problem with this kind of projection is threefold. First, such an exercise in script-writing necessarily demands "a fundamental idealization of a culturally homogeneous speech community" (Levinson 1983: 25), the existence of which is in itself debatable. The difficulty here is that building up a curriculum on the basis of such idealized projections may turn out to be no more than working with teacher intuition – no doubt a useful resource but not a source of generalizable non-trivial observation.

Second, while it may be possible to introspectively develop an account of how some native speakers may go about using language in supposedly

appropriate ways, it is far from the case that members of any real native-speaking community would always use the same agreed set of rules in actual engagement. Fairclough (1992: 34) observes that "[i]n no actual speech community do all members always behave in accordance with a shared sense of which language varieties are appropriate for which contexts and purpose". We can extend this observation beyond language variety to say that members of a native-speaker community do not necessarily adhere to some shared rules of use with respect to co-operation, directness, explicitness, politeness and other considerations in all instances of social interaction. Non-observance of these rules is the stuff of life.

Third, if the projection of social norms were to be seen as anything other than probabilistic guidelines, then the kind of invented description supplied by Soars and Soars would actually be a form of prescription. At best, the pedagogic value of such prescription is likely to be short-lived because novice speakers of English may soon learn to abandon prescribed social routines and language expressions since in real-life encounters their use value is limited. At worst, a strong and insistent form of this kind of prescriptivism may serve to mislead students as to what constitutes appropriateness among speakers of English.

Furthermore, the notion of appropriateness is often invested with a good deal of pragmatic power. There is an assumed correspondence between appropriate language use in accordance with shared social rules and felicitous communication outcome, and vice versa. In reality, flouting of the social rules may be communicatively effective:

> in general, if there is some communicative convention C that one does in context Y, then suppose instead one does B in Y, or does A but in context Z, one will not normally be taken to have simply violated the conventions C and produced nonsense. Rather, one will generally be taken to have exploited the conventions in order to communicate some further pertinent message. (Levinson 1983: 26)

In English-speaking communities around the world, the cultural and literary notions of irony, sarcasm and indeed humour would not exist if everyone always behaved "appropriately". It may well be the case that some learners of English are not in a position to exploit such cultural resources in their second language. But one has to be at least cautious about how much weight one should give to such projected and idealized descriptions and prescriptions of appropriateness in a pedagogic language model.

Views from other perspectives

We have now seen that the concept of communicative competence, as it was formulated some thirty or so years ago, has gathered up a package

of theoretical and epistemic assumptions and social values in the recontextualization process. These assumptions and values have permeated the ELT profession through textbooks, examination and test syllabuses, teaching manuals and teacher training materials which, in their turn, have influenced curriculum specification, teaching practice and learning experience. Critics of the status quo have argued for the need to reconceptualize ELT (see e.g. McKay 2003; Pennycook 2000). One way of making a contribution to this process of (self-)critical examination is to look at some recent developments in adjacent fields of enquiry to see what, if any, relevant insights can be found, particularly with respect to the primacy of native-speakerness and the associated notion of (standard) English in the concept of communicative competence. Developments in at least three fields of enquiry can throw some light on this discussion.

Englishes in the world

It is estimated that there are between 320–380 million native speakers of English and between 300–500 million ESL speakers in countries such as India, the Philippines and Nigeria where English has been institutionalized (e.g. a medium of the legal or education system). In addition to the ESL speakers, it is estimated that there are about 500–1000 million people around the world who use English for a variety of purposes and for whom English is neither their native/first nor their second language; in more traditional terms these would be regarded as EFL speakers (Crystal 2003; for a discussion on the these estimates and categories see Jenkins 2003: section A, and Graddol and Meinhof 1999). These numbers are interesting in that they point to the fact that native speakers of English are a minority in the English-using world, and they provide a backdrop against which we can begin to appreciate the nature and scale of language preference, displacement and shift involving English.

There is now a considerable literature on the existence of national or regional varieties of English which are non-native varieties, e.g. Indian English, Nigerian English, Malay English, Singapore English and so on. Historically these varieties tend to be found in parts of the world where contact with English had been established as part of earlier colonisation, in other words the 'outer circle' in Kachru's (1985, 1992) well-known three-circle division of the world in terms of the statuses and functions of the English language. According to Kachru, these Englishes are used for public communication in their 'home' societies and can be characterized in a number of ways:

> (a) they have an extended range of uses in the sociolinguistic context of a nation; (b) they have an extended range of register and style range; (c) a process of nativization of the registers and styles has taken place, both in

> formal and in contextual terms; and (d) a body of nativized English literature has developed . . . (Kachru 1992: 55)

Even a quick glance at the literature in this field would suggest that fundamental questions such as *Who owns English?* and *What do these new varieties comprise?* are being addressed theoretically and empirically (see e.g. Chisanga and Kamwangamalu 1997; Davies 1991, 2002; Jenkins 2003: section B; Kachru 1992; Wee 2002; Widdowson 1994). The salience of these discussions for us is that they have highlighted the need to pay attention to the existence of different ways of knowing and using English as a set of linguistic resources. In one sense the phenomenon of nativization is neither new nor recent; the existence of Australian English, Scottish English and so on has long been acknowledged. But accounts of regional Englishes have pointed to the increasing pace and intensity in the diversification of form and use and, as a correlate, the spread of nativization of English in different places, for instance:

- phonological reductions, e.g. seven-vowel contrasts in Hong Kong English as opposed to eleven in British RP (Hung 2002);
- lexical and syntactic additions and extensions, e.g. *lobola* for the property or money brought by a bridegroom to the bride's parents[9] and *is it?* as a universal tag question indicating speaker interest without reference to gender, number or person in the preceding turn in Southern African English (Chisanga and Kamwangamalu 1997);
- genre hybridisation, e.g. the blending of traditional mantras such as "family and God" with the contemporary discourse of "individual effort and market forces" in Malaysian advertisements. (Hashim 2002)

These and other similar observations tell us that there are structural, semantic and discourse innovations in the ways English is understood and used. Epistemologically the term 'nativization' neatly returns us to the ethnographic concerns with the local, which was one of the original inspirations for the conceptualization of communicative competence. In a world where students of English are not necessarily learning it to interact with native speakers of English, as McKay (2003) observes, there are sound pedagogic and practical reasons to pay attention to the existence of different varieties of English as a key curriculum and classroom teaching consideration.[10]

English as a lingua franca

English is often referred to as a global language. It is the preferred language for international political, business and professional communication, even in contexts where alternative (and politically powerful) local languages are available (Phillipson 2004). In these communications or interactions, all (or

practically all) participants are non-native speakers of English. In this sense English is used as a lingua franca (ELF).[11] The occurrence and use of ELF signal a language-contact situation where, without the community-wide moment-by-moment monitoring and control by native speakers, English is potentially amenable to development and change, or as Seidlhofer (2004: 212) argues more decisively, "ELF has taken on a life of its own, independent to a considerable degree of the norms established by its native users". Sociolinguistically it is important to note that many of these interactions tend to occur in what House (1999) refers to as "influential frameworks", e.g. multilateral business meetings involving multinational corporations, European Union policy meetings, and international academic/professional conferences; in other words, the use of ELF can be and is often associated with high status and elite situations and users.

Research in ELF is beginning to produce descriptions of some of its linguistic and pragmatic features and to explore these observed features theoretically. Jenkins (2000, 2002, 2003) has developed a phonological lingua franca core that shows that accurate production of some consonant sounds, vowel length and the placing of tonic stress appears to be important for intelligibility. For instance, substituting the vowel /aː/ with /ɜː/ (e.g. *bath* vs. *birth*) is reported to cause difficulties for interlocutors (Jenkins 2002: 88). Other phonological features appear to be much more tolerant, as it were, of variations from native-speaker pronunciation, and these include consonant sounds such as /ð/ and /θ/, and the absence of the use of weak forms (ibid.). Seidlhofer (2004) suggests that the various ongoing projects studying different aspects of lexico-grammar of ELF, including the Vienna–Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE), are beginning to show that some features, such as the dropping of the third-person present-tense *–s*, do not appear to hinder communication, whereas the use of idiomatic speech can cause intelligibility problems for interlocutors.

Work on the pragmatics of ELF to date suggests that this is likely to be an area of considerable complexity. House (1999), for instance, reports that in her data for a group of German-, Dutch- and Hungarian-speaking students engaged in a game, there was little evidence of the participants undertaking explicit repairs when misunderstanding occurred, and there was much evidence of very short turns and parallel talk. Firth (1996) reports a 'let-it-pass' principle in ELF business talk in that participants appear to be prepared to tolerate ambiguity and not to seek reformulations or negotiation of meaning. Meierkord (2002) observes that in ELF face-to-face talk, participants may not deploy their first language communicative norms in relation to turn length, pausing and overlapping speech; she also finds evidence that there is some kind of construction of 'third culture' or 'interculture' when participants in ELF talk use laughter as a substitute for back-channel verbal signals such as *really?* The complexity shown by the work in ELF pragmatics is a good indication of the diverse contexts in which ELF is being used as a recognisable variety/ies. In so far as pragmatics is

an aspect of language use which is particularly susceptible to the influences of local cultural practices and local norms of engagement generated by participants, these diverse findings can be seen to reflect that ELF is developing "a life of its own". Indeed the capacity to accommodate and incorporate change is a hallmark of a global language. As Bruthiaux (2003: 21) observes:

> a language with global ambitions [must] be amenable to unplanned change, a process unlikely to take place freely if the language is strongly associated with a single dominant culture with powerful centralizing and standardizing tendencies.

In different ways, the research in this area is pointing to the need for ELF to be treated as *sui generis*. It also alerts us to the need to recognize emergent varieties of English.

The 'social' in second language acquisition: widening perspectives

The tendency to interpret 'communicativeness' in terms of active use of functionally oriented language by students in simulated classroom tasks has been supported by what might be referred to as the mainstream research paradigm for the past thirty years or so. A good deal of SLA research during that time has framed the notion of the 'social' in terms of teaching and learning. Block (2003: 26–30) characterizes this as the Input-Interaction-Output model. The general principle is that language acquisition involves (a) purposeful and active language use which creates the opportunity for the learner to make sense of the target language (input and interaction) and (b) production or rehearsal of language in classroom tasks (output). (For detailed discussions, see e.g. Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982; Crookes and Gass 1993a,b; Krashen 1982, 1985; Nunan 1991; Skehan 1998; Swain 1985, 1995.) In this perspective the notion of the social is tacitly understood in terms of social interaction in the context of pedagogic activities. It is argued that interaction offers learners an opportunity to use and work out meaning even when the actual language forms encountered may be beyond their current level of linguistic competence. In general, then, the idea of communicating with others is often seen as a pedagogic device and 'communication' as a bounded phenomenon of language-learning activity. One of the consequences of this is that the social dimension – the dynamic and co-constructed processes of actual communication – has been narrowly rendered into a form of guided social practice to be learned by students in the CLT teacher training literature, as we saw earlier.

This classroom-bound pedagogising of the 'social' has led to what Pavlenko (2002: 280) refers to as a "reductionist, static and homogenous view of culture" and, one might add, language practices (recall the earlier

example of the alleged characteristic of Americans being informal or the British being impersonal). Such reductionist and static idealizations are at best partial representations of social reality. There is no one fixed way of greeting people, any more than there is one way of talking to a bank clerk or an airline worker. So, even if we were to assume ideal learning conditions and perfect learner capacity to take advantage of classroom input and practice, we would still be working with a partial representation of what the 'social' is.

Another aspect of the narrowing of the 'social' is the projection of social interaction as a freely engaged, untrammelled and decontextualized human activity in classrooms everywhere. The assumption seems to be that teacher-designed learning activities can engender uninhibited social interaction in the classroom. The reality is, of course, quite different. Social interaction between teachers and students, and among students themselves, is unavoidably influenced by participants' perception of their role and interest in context, participant power differentials, localized social practices and cultural values, and a whole host of other contingent matters, as many teachers would readily testify (Leung, Harris and Rampton 2004; Morita 2004). Furthermore, the Input-Interaction-Output model of SLA cannot account for what goes on outside the classroom, where language learners can encounter even more complex contexts and rules of social interaction. Norton's (2000) study of a group of immigrant women in Canada shows that the opportunity to speak English can be tied up with one's social position. For instance Eva, one of the participants in Norton's study, found her fellow workers had little interest in engaging in conversation with her when she was regarded as an outsider and when she was assigned menial low-grade jobs. In some situations, as Pavlenko (2002: 287) puts it, "some target language speakers may simply refuse to interact with L2 users". In another study, Gordon (2004) shows that in a particular US community, gendered division of domestic responsibilities has created opportunities for immigrant Laotian women to come in contact with their children's schools and social services. In turn, these encounters create the opportunities for the women to develop a knowledge of the genres of English appropriate for dealing with these institutions (an opportunity their husbands have not encountered in their manual jobs). The point here is that the 'social' is far more complex than what is normally projected in CLT teaching literature. And any attempt at understanding, describing and teaching what is socially appropriate and feasible language must look beyond the designed interaction stipulated by the learning task and beyond the classroom.

Re-engaging the social: convivial communication

This discussion has been, by and large, conceptually oriented, and it would seem that there is much re-orienting to be done at the heart of the concept of

communicative competence. The interpretations and operationalization of the concept of communicative competence over the past thirty years or so, as evidenced by the mainstream of ELT literature, have psychologized and reified the social dimension. This is not a debate about the importance of individual psychological and cognitive processes in learning, about which there is no question. But if the concept of communicative competence is to serve ELT in the world today in the spirit of empirical receptivity in which it was conceived, then we need to recast some of the possibly unwitting epistemic and pedagogic assumptions. In this connection the three essential qualities in an ethnographer's experience described by Roberts et al. (2001: 93) are germane to this discussion:

> Epistemological relativity . . . involves recognizing one's own assumptions about knowledge, and how it is legitimised in one's own society, so as to be able to view the knowledge of other societies with a more open mind . . . Reflexivity . . . refers to the ability to reflect critically on the way in which one's own cultural background and standpoint influence one's view of other cultures . . . Critical consciousness . . . views ethnography not simply as a convenient tool for studying and research but as itself a product of particular dominant societies at a particular period.

At first sight such ethnographic sensitivities and sensibilities are not relevant to ELT. The ELT profession does not require its practitioners to become ethnographers. But by the nature of their professional work, ELT practitioners often find themselves at the interfaces of cultures and languages where professional judgements and evaluation (e.g. good/bad, acceptable/not acceptable and so on) are made. It is in these moments of professional decision-making that ethnographic sensitivities are potentially helpful. Epistemological relativity, for an ELT professional, means that one accepts that there are infinite ways of using language and that differences do not automatically call for judgmental evaluation. The notion of reflexivity can be interpreted to mean a preparedness to interrogate the ethno-cultural and sociolinguistic basis of one's own judgements on one's own and others' preferred language forms and ways of using language. Critical consciousness calls for an alertness about the culturally specific ways of describing and analysing both language and language teaching and learning in primarily English-speaking countries. These three sensitivities are germane to the whole spectrum of pedagogic issues in ELT – from lexical choices to discourse pragmatics, and from definitions of a good language learner to teacher–student relationships – and if adopted they would potentially enable the ELT professional to re-engage with the socially dynamic uses of English and to continuously re-work the contextualized meaning of the concept of communicative competence.

This is not a call for "anything goes", nor is it an endorsement of abdication of a teacher's professional responsibility to teach language forms and language

use. Under contemporary conditions, it seems absolutely necessary for the concept of communicative competence to attend to both the standard and local Englishes, and to tune in to both established and emergent forms and norms of use. Through the adoption of different sets of intellectual sensitivities and sensibilities, such as the ones suggested by Roberts et al. (2001), we can begin to de-reify culture-, context- and time-bound notions of linguistic correctness, social and cultural appropriateness, real-life feasibility and possibility in a convivial mood. In the light of what we now know in terms of World Englishes and ELF, it is quite clear that, from the point of view of curriculum conceptualization, the unquestioned and routine adoption of a particular native-speaker variety of English and a particular set of idealized social rules of use is no longer educationally satisfactory or desirable. It may well be that, for instance, General American (pronunciation) and formal North American registers are appropriate as pedagogic reference points for an academic English programme in a US college, but they may not be suitable for a similar programme in Singapore or India. The pedagogic language model for any English-teaching programme should be related to its goals in context. An idealized native-speaker model should not be an automatic first choice. As Widdowson (2004: 361) argues:

> one objection to insisting on conformity to native-speaker norms is that to do so sets goals for learners which are both unrealistic and unnecessary . . . It also has ideological implications . . . it can also be seen as the authoritarian imposition of socio-cultural values which makes learners subservient and prevents them from appropriating the language as an expression of their identity.

The objectification and reification of curriculum knowledge largely based on native-speaker idealizations and the reduction of the social to mean classroom interaction have effectively insulated the concept of communicative competence from the developments in English and the myriad ways in which it is now understood and used in different contexts. Theoretically as well as pedagogically, there is every reason to reconnect with the social world if the concept of communicative competence is to mean anything more than a textbook simulacrum of Englishes in the world.

Notes

1. It is not suggested here that prior to the advent of communicative competence and CLT all ELT classroom teaching and materials were entirely grammar-based. The shift is more in terms of intellectual orientation and professional discourse. See also Savignon (2005) for a view on the formative period of CLT.
2. I am using the term 'recontextualization' in a sense that echoes Bernstein's (1996: 116–18) usage: the selective appropriation and transfer of knowledge from one field to another.

3. Some of Canale and Swain's work on communicative competence during this period often focused on French as an L2 in the Canadian context.
4. It is not suggested here that all curriculum writers shared an identical schema. See Piepho (1981) for an example of a more student-oriented stance within a communicative approach.
5. For a discussion of the methodological-cum-theoretical trajectory of this perspective, see Rampton (1998).
6. Gumperz ([1981] 1997: 40) sounded an early note of caution when he stated that "[m]any sociolinguistic studies of communicative competence, in fact, aim at little more than statements of regularities that describe the occurrence of utterances or verbal strategies isolated by traditional methods of analysis in relation to types of speakers, audiences, settings and situations. This leads to a highly particularistic notion of competence . . .".
7. For details of the NET scheme see http://www.emb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeid=1286andlangno=1, and for details of the ALT scheme see http://www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/jet/position.html.
8. This can, of course, be traced back to an over-interpretation of Chomsky's (1965: ch. 1; 1986: chs. 1 and 2) concept of idealized native speaker and Pinker's (1994: ch. 3) idea of 'mentalese'.
9. Lexical additions drawing on a local language can be found in other nativized 'native speaker' varieties of English, e.g. *billabong* in Australian English.
10. A practical example of attempting to work with local language practices and language norms can be found in Brown and Lumley (1998). This is an account of a local development of an English language proficiency test for teachers of English in Indonesia in which the authors attempt to operationalize communicative competence in terms of contextualized local English language use and cultural norms.
11. The most widely accepted interpretation among ELF researchers is that ELF interaction includes native speakers but that they do not include native speakers in their data collection, while a small minority do not include native speakers in ELF in any respect (Jenkins, personal communication, March 2005). My pedagogic focus here allows a more inclusive approach, if for no other reason than a pragmatic one that native-speaking English teachers often find themselves in ELF situations in places such as Hong Kong where all other participants are L1 speakers of other languages and where local ELF norms operate.

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