

A Comparison between Teaching Standard English and Teaching World English in China

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Abstract: *The wide spread English is an unstoppable stream, because of the globalization. The word of "English" has been defined as American English(AmE) or British English(BrE) for years. However, AmE and BrE could be considered as two kinds of Standard Englishes(SEs)^[5]. Moreover, with the changing purpose of English learning, the unawareness of changes could be one of leading problems in English teaching system. This paper is going to learn about SE and World English(WE), explore the English teaching situation in China, present the reality of WE and SE teaching, discuss the benefits and drawbacks respectively, analyze the changing purposes of English learning and find out which one is more suitable.*

Keywords: *World English; Standard English; BrE; AmE*

1. Introduction

A salient language of English has been widely used in all kinds of international situations. As a major part of the world, Chinese realized the importance of English decades ago, and started to learn the language ever since. English teaching was added into the educational syllabus of Chinese primary schools in 2001, which is a monumental step in the progress of English education. And, the nine-year compulsory education is where most Chinese learn English from ^[14].

As English has been learned and employed around the world, its localization based on historical, political, cultural, social and many other kinds of reasons ^[11]. These changes could be beneficial to the variation of English. Besides, WE has been modeled by BrajKachru as three circles: inner circle, outer circle and expanding circle^[10]. And China, as a country belongs to the expanding circle^[4], the consideration of learning what kind of English could be essential.

2. Literature Reviews

2.1. Standard English

"Standard English is not a language, an accent, style or a register, it is a dialect" ^[12]. Thus, SE is one kind of WE. However, unlike other dialects which varied from one region to another, SE is the one presented by codifications, spoken by the most prestigious group of people in the society^[4], used by the authorities, and so on. More importantly, SE probably owns wide recognition and respect in a certain English-speaking nation^[9].

Because of the world-around application of English and the ineluctable localizing progress in different countries^[4], a variety of SE is the outcome. Moreover, English terms, sentence structures, pronunciations and so on, could be codified differently from one SE to another.

However, owing to the imperfections and limitations of teaching or learning materials, BrE or AmE is taught as an SE in the phrase of compulsory education or in other English language teaching institutions. In a word, SE is commonly considered as BrE or AmE.

2.2 World English

WE can be classified into three circles. Briefly, people take English as their mother tongue in the inner circle, take it as second language in the outer circle and regard it as a foreign language in the expanding circle^[10]. To be specific, in the inner circle, people are native English speakers, English

could be their first or only language; in the outer circle, English is hold to be an important language, it could be their official language, but not their mother tongue; and in the expanding circle, as a foreign language, it may be used in some specific circumstances for some particular purposes. However, this classification may be scientific currently, with the self-development of English in various countries or cultures, it may need rectification some day.

2.3 Standard English Teaching in China

In this section, teaching realities of SE will be presented and analyzed, then, the benefits and drawbacks will be discussed as well.

In China, scholars have been focusing on exploring grammatical rules of English (BrE mainly), codifying them and teaching these rules to English learners for decades. English has been taken as a taught subject in schools, like mathematics, chemistry, physics and etc. Standard rules and principle are always pursued and followed by English teachers and learners. In addition, due to the English assessment system, unified rules and principles of English is highly required. In this case, a series of textbooks based on BrE or AmE normally exclude other English varieties.

Advantages:

- Teaching a foreign language with fixed and unified rules of a language could help students, especially beginners, to avoid confusions aroused by various rules of different Englishes. Some lexical confusions like different spelling rules between AmE and BrE, for example: “color” and “colour”. This is a simple case, it may be easy for native speakers or advanced English learners to understand and distinguish, but it could be difficult to foreign English beginners, even mislead them. So teaching one kind of English could be helpful by some means.

- With all these years’ development of English teaching, it is much easier for both teachers and learners to get AmE and BrE teaching materials or resources. So learning these two kinds of SEs could be quite convenient.

Disadvantages:

- To students, either Standard AmE or Standard BrE could be a challenge to learn and apply. Whether for the purpose of communication with foreigners at home or for the further study abroad, SE may not be a good option as it is not even closely relevant to Academic English^[8] nor to daily circumstances. In addition, due to the AmE or BrE learning convention, some learners are highly interested in practicing “standard accent”. And their interpretation of “standard accent” is the most influencing ones like, BBC English, the Queen’s English, VOA and so on. However, “never become native-speakers without being reborn”^[1]. Hence, to most students, pursuing a standard accent could be wasting time.

- To most English teachers, the restriction of teaching an SE based on fixed textbooks and pursuing student’s higher scores in examinations will lower their creations in the classrooms and make English as a rather boring subject.

- Teaching SE, could be a limitation to the development of English. By focusing on teaching and testing Standard AmE or BrE, students may have no awareness of WE. And under the pressure of examinations, it is rare to see students create some new terms or chants in English which could help with the language acquisition. Hence, the possibility of flourish English in a Chinese way remains low.

2.4 World English Teaching in China

World English Teaching is facing a quite awkward situation in the context of China. Many English learners don’t have the awareness of this term. What’s more, some higher educated students, like university students, have none or very limited knowledge about WE^[5]. It could be a defect in English educational system. How would it be possible to learn something without knowing about it? WE could be considered as an important character of English, being aware of it may help English learners and teachers to change their mindset about English — English teaching is not just about teaching fixed grammar rules, learning English is more about gaining the competence of a language, and English could be flexible in use.

Advantages:

- To students, learning WE, being aware of the differences between different kinds of English and

understand the reasons if necessary, can help them recognize different English speakers. Focusing on learning restricted grammatical rules will make students feel hard to learn and over worship the official textbooks. However, learning the development of English, the variation of grammatical rules, the updated English expressions, etc., could be a way of leading students to explore by themselves. What's more, being exposed to various accents may help students to build their language confidence and speak up.

▪ From teachers' perspective, presenting some common differences and similarities between one dialect or SE to another could be a more interesting option than teaching grammar only. Moreover, adapting to a dialect may be quite mystifying to English learners, thus, teaching WE and building students' sense of WE could be a practical option.

Disadvantage:

▪ Teaching WE in China is not an invulnerable choice. It could be troublesome in some circumstances, because language is "a major means (some would say the chief means) of showing where we belong, and of distinguishing one social group from another"^[2]. So it could be hard for students to learn all of them simultaneously and distinguish them from the very beginning. For instance, some barriers exist between AmE and BrE may lead to misinterpretations between speakers of these two kinds of English, especially between foreign AmE learners and BrE learners.

2.5 Needs analysis

Under the policy of reform and opening up in 1978, English was believed to be salient, and was stipulated as one of the major courses in Chinese compulsory education. However, to most students, their main purpose for learning English was the Gaokao — College Entrance Examination, or other tests. Aside from this major need of English, learning BrE or AmE could be a stepping stone to build connection with world major economic entities, such as the UK and the USA. In this case, teaching SE—BrE and AmE, could be a rational option.

However, the situation has been changing. The authority has released a document of some proved changes in English examinations^[7]. This is not only a piece of news about cutting the score of English examination from the Gaokao, but also shows that we are changing the views of English^[15]. It not only liberates students from the burden of examinations, but also shows the trend of teaching for practical purposes which means put English on the level of communication—as an International Language or Lingua Franca. Nowadays, with the deepening of globalization and modernization in the 21st century, the increasing number of foreign workers, businessmen, students, etc. move to China. These English speakers bring Chinese with WE and it is also a notification of learning WE.

Moreover, the pattern of international trade and business cooperation is changing. For example, from the number of Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the connection between China and the other parts of the world, not only the USA and the UK, is becoming closer. For instance, as the third largest FDI country, China had financed \$16 billion in African at the end of 2011 and the number is increasing firmly^[13]. Moreover, Africa is a principle supplier to Chinese import market and a major customer to Chinese international construction companies^[6]. During the conversation with Africans, whose L1 may be African English or other languages, being aware of the localized English and all kinds of accents, could help international workers to decode English messages successfully and achieve good cooperative results.

2.6 A Comparison between Standard English and World English in China

By reviewing the understandings of SE in 2.1 and WE in 2.2, it is manifest that SE is focusing on producing a widely recognized and accepted dialect in a certain country or a region, while WE is working on welcoming all kinds of SEs. Various kinds of SEs around the world, and dialects in different regions, are all considered as one of the WE.

Furthermore, by comparing the analysis in 2.3 and 2.4, here are a couple of results could be summarized: Firstly, from the angle of students, most of them are now learning SE in quite stressed ways and their achievements maybe not as good as expected. However, WE can be learned in a more interesting way and the outcome will be more practical. Secondly, teaching SE brings quite a lot of restrictions, and limits creations as a teacher. Nevertheless, WE offers teachers plenty opportunities of showing students a dynamic English world and students may enjoy the achievements of using the language in daily life.

What's more, according to the needs analysis result in 2.5, the purpose of English learning is changing in China. Given the changing needs of English, SE is not sufficient enough to meet the requirement of ever-changing international and domestic situations.

All in all, it would be too obstinate if we stick to the old path of teaching SE. Therefore, adjustment is recommended to be made and teaching WE could be considered as a better option under the present circumstance.

3. Suggestions

According to the advantages and disadvantages, presented in 2.3 and 2.4, it is obvious to see both the SE-teaching and the WE-teaching contain benefits and drawbacks. In addition, base on the needs analysis in 2.5, WE would be more useful nowadays.

WE-teaching can be processed as informing students how language varies, comparing the variations and etc. In this way, students will be enlightened to contribute some language creations. For example, they may add some Chinese elements into English, build some new terms for fun, feel free to slip and fall in language use and etc. As a result, students may find English is much more interesting than it was and they may be stimulated to explore the language by themselves.

However, it doesn't mean SE should be abandoned. In order to confront with the drawbacks, during the teaching process of WE, some confusions may be aroused by the differences between SEs. So it could be wise to start the process with teaching one kind of Standard English, no matter choosing AmE, BrE, Australian English, Canadian English or another, can help avoiding some confusion. Thus, letting students know about the English variation and teach them in a "balanced way"^[3], can be the option.

What's more, during the teaching process, teaching environment should be considered first, then, students' performance of practicing English should be highly regarded. Additionally, teachers should give students sufficient exposure of different SEs and train them with language tactics to comprehend these different SEs^[3].

4. Conclusion

Generally, in this paper, the terms of SE and WE are explained first, teaching reality of SE and WE in China are discussed secondly. Then, by comparing the teaching realities and analyzing the modern needs of English in China, the result comes out that WE can be taken as a better option. However, it doesn't mean that SE-teaching should be given up. So in the suggestion part, SE is reconsidered as a teaching-option in some circumstances, also, a few motions and regulations for WE-teaching are presented. Last but not least, it is rational to believe WE can be considered as a satisfactory option to shorten the distance between English learners and the target language which may also benefit the learners with an easier starting point.

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