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Learners' Identity and Perception of Pronunciation Issues and varieties of English in Three Circles of World Englishes

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abstract

Drawing on the literature on the appearance of different varieties of English in the globalized world, the present study reports the findings of a quantitative and qualitative research study with 76 native American and British, 88 Indian and Pakistani and 80 Iranian and Turkish learners as members of Inner, Outer and Expanding circles (Kachru, 1992) to explore their attitudes towards pronunciation issues and varieties of English within the framework of English as an international language and how they see themselves in relation to English in the global era. The findings demonstrate the Iranian learners' norm-bound orientation was found to be the greatest among the three groups of learners. The findings also highlight the concept of "identity" which shows that expanding-circle learners like more to have a native-like identity. This article argues that together with valuing different varieties of English, it is important to acknowledge and promote ways to raise awareness of English learners towards global spread of English.

Key words: World Englishes, EIL, Pronunciation, Intelligibility, Identity, Awareness

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Introduction

Although there is a strong belief among learners that language belongs to native speakers (Matsuda, 2003), in the context of international communication, interaction usually happens among non-native speakers of English. Indubitably, bilingual and multilingual interlocutors from the outer and expanding circles are main users of English. The use of English has now extended beyond Native Speaker (NS) and No-Native Speaker (NNS) interaction and the vast majority of communication in English does not involve any NSs of the language (Graddol, 1997, 2006). Statistically, English communication happens among more than one billion competent speakers from Outer and expanding circles (Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 2006). Canagarajah (2007) believes that majority of English users are from expanding and outer circles in which other languages play important roles in the society, so linguistic proficiency of majority of English users as multilingual speakers cannot be just measured against that of monolingual English speakers.

In terms of pronunciation instruction, Global intelligibility has been accentuated over native accent for fruitful communication in international contexts (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2005). Considering pronunciation instruction, intelligibility should be set as a goal by teachers and learners (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Munro & Derwing, 2011). Jenkins (2003) believes that EIL learners should be stimulated not to follow a native speaker (NS) norm, but try to go towards "international phonological intelligibility" (p. 86). Following Jenkins, McKay (2012) puts emphasis on language awareness among all users of English, including both L1 and L2 speakers. He believes that EIL users should be aware of notions such as language innovation, varying linguistic and pragmatic norms, negotiation strategies, and social sensitivity in language use. McKay (2012, p. 42) proposes that an EIL pedagogy should: (1) promote multilingualism and multiculturalism; (2) follow localized l2 language planning and policies; (3) raise awareness of students towards language variation and use; (4) provide an equal access to English learning for all who desire it; and (4) re-examine the concept of qualified teachers of English.

One of the challenging issues in the realm of EIL is the concept of pronunciation. The issue of pronunciation has been widely discussed by many scholars in the past few years (Jenkins, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2009; Derwing &

Munro, 1997, 2005). Jenkin (2000, p.207) also points out, "a native-like accent is not necessary for intelligibility in ELF interaction". The importance of pronunciation can be for two main reasons:

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First, putting emphasis on global intelligibility for creating an understandable discourse among participants within a communicative framework. Second, considering the principal role of pronunciation in EIL and the way that it moves learners‟ awareness towards their sociocultural identity.

Although a number of studies have been accomplished on teachers‟ and learners‟ attitudes towards EIL, there are fewer studies that are concerned with the perceptions of nonnative-English-speaking learners (NNESLs) regarding pronunciation and different varieties of English from an EIL perspective. The current study examines learners‟ perceptions towards pronunciation and accent varieties in six countries across the three circles and makes suggestions for better management of teachers‟ pedagogical goals with students‟ requirements in the ESL and EFL contexts.

Literature review The importance of EIL in the globalized world

Undoubtedly, major users of English are bilingual and multilingual speakers from the outer and expanding circles. The use of English has now extended beyond NS-NNS interaction and the vast majority of communication in English does not involve any NSs of the language (Graddol, 1997). The rapid growth of English has encouraged many scholars to look into the possibility of shifting from traditional ENL (English as a native language) pedagogy in ELT to EIL (English as an International Language (Jenkins, 2000; Kirkpatrik, 2007; Sharifian, 2009; Matsuda, 2012; McKay, 2012).

Subscribing to Kachru‟s (1992) three concentric circles: inner Circle (IC) includes countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), America, Canada and Australia where English is used as the first language. The Outer Circle (OC) involves countries like India, Nigeria and Singapore which are multilingual and English has the status of a second language along with other languages. Finally, the Expanding Circle (EC) includes countries–such as Iran, China and South Korea where English has the status of a foreign language in teaching and learning. These three circles are the standard framework of world Englishes and they demonstrate the spread and the practical distribution of English in different cultural contexts (Jenkins, 2003).

Canagarajah (2006) and Sharifian (2009) believe that because of the spread of outer-circle and expanding-circle Englishes into the inner-circle countries no longer World Englishes should be divided into three circles proposed by Kachru. He explains that now vast majority of speakers from the Outer-Circle and Expanding-Circle countries live in the Inner-Circle countries, even native

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speakers of English are more exposed to World Englishes. So, the emphasis of EIL should be on intercultural communication (Sharifian, 2009) and mutual Intelligibility (Derwing & Munro, 2005).

EIL and Pronunciation

For many years, it was thought that English belongs just to the inner circle. British and American Englishes, as two dominant varieties of English, have been considered as the most acceptable standards for English language teaching in different parts of the world especially in expanding circle countries. However, the appearance of ELF (English as Lingua Franca) or EIL as the most important and debatable approach (Graddol,2006) has called the default acceptance of these two dominant varieties of English into question and has highlighted the acceptability of different verities of English used by non-native speakers around the world (Jenkins, 2007; Kirkpatrik, 2010; Seidlhofer,2004). In attending to the voices of nonnative speakers, we realize that English language learners still place their standards for inner circle norms (Derwing, 2003; Li, 2009; Timmis, 2002).

In terms of pronunciation instruction, Jenkins‟ (2000) Lingua Franca Core (LFC) can be considered as a functional feature to the training of pronunciation in the beginning. While sustaining all the most key traits of phonology, Jenkins‟ model informs learners about those features which are less important for global intelligibility in educational circumstances. However, it is not still clear how EFL learners notice accents and pronunciation instruction, especially in an EIL environment. This model helps educators and learners to recognize problematic areas and not blindly follow a particular pronunciation version.

EIL and Intelligibility

With the appearance of globalization, the notion of intelligibility has been emphasized over achieving a native-like accent (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2000, 2006). Jenkins (2000), as the originator of the ELF core, considers that learners of English as an international language should not blindly follow native speaker norms but should fine-tune their speech to suit an audience of mainly nonnative speakers. Smith (1992) views intelligibility as the speaker‟s awareness of a variety or accent of English: the greater the familiarity, the more likely the user will understand, and be understood by, speakers of that variety. Intelligibility constructs a comprehensible discourse among participants within a given communicative framework. Derwing and Munro (1997) found that intelligibility does not correlate closely with "accentedness" (as measured by inner circle speakers), recommending that learners of English from Japan or elsewhere do not need to mimic inner circle pronunciation in order to be understood by speakers from countries such as America or the UK.

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EIL and Identity

One of the challenging issues that has generated much controversy in the dominion of EIL is native and non-native speaker accent, especially its relation with identity. A wrong assumption is that native speakers have no difficulty understanding each other‟s accents because they speak Standard English. Unfortunately, ELT materials usually construct a highly positive image of native speakers, so non-native speakers attempt to assimilate those identities by imitating NS accent.

When English is learned by millions of bilingual speakers as an additional language for international communication, it is necessarily denationalized and acculturated to local specific needs. Hence it is unacceptable that NS-based norms should prevail and serve as the yardstick for measuring NNSs‟ phonological accuracy, lexico-grammatical correctness and discourse-pragmatic appropriacy (lee, 2012).

Of course, Teachers‟ actions play an important role in preserving their own identity. Raising learners‟ awareness towards varieties of English cab be really helpful to encourage learners‟ confidence in their own varieties of English and in turn it can help them to believe that native model is not the best pedagogic model to be followed.

This study aimed at investigating learners‟ perceptions towards pronunciation and accent varieties in the environments of speaking English in three circles of world Englishes and makes comprehensive comparisons of their need and opinions in the global context. To explore this area of interest further, the following research questions are formulated:

What are learners‟ beliefs about the significance of NS accents and their functions in pronunciation standards in three circles of world Englishes? What are learners‟ preferences and expectations in relation to pronunciation norms in three circles of world Englishes?

To what extent do learners from three circles take an EIL perspective in response to the ownership of English?

Method

Participants

There were altogether 244 English learner participants, who were all selfselected by responding to an email invitation to participate in this study. The email invitation was linked to a website where details of the study including research goals, what participants were expected to do could be found. Of the 244participants, 76 were native learners from the USA and Britain as members of inner-circle

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community; 88 were from India and Malaysia as members of outer circle and the last 80 were from Iran and Turkey as participants of expandingcircle community. Table 1 gives an overview of the general profile of all participants.

Table 1

General profile of participants

Participants" general information	Iranian Learners	Turkish Learners	Indian Learners	Malaysian Learners	America Learners	British Learners
Gender						
Male	10	18	12	12	28	16
Female	30	22	32	32	12	20
Educational Background						
BA degree	18	14	24	18	18	16
MA degree	16	20	14	22	14	14
PhD	6	6	6	4	8	6
Age						
21-30	20	18	22	18	16	10
31-40	12	12	14	14	20	20
41-50	5	6	2	10	2	4
50 +	3	4	6	2	2	2

Instruments

This study made use of semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was a modified version adopted from Sifakis and Sougari (2005) and Li (2009).The questionnaire contained both close-ended and open-ended questions. Moreover, interviews were conducted with 10 Native English learners, 10 Indians and Malaysian and 10 Iranian and Turkish learners who had previously answered the

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questionnaires and had volunteered for the interviews. Basically, the interviews aimed at supplementing the findings of the questionnaires

The questionnaire has two parts: firstly, learners‟ background information (age, gender and educational background) and secondly, attitudes towards pronunciation and accent-related matters. Items 1 to 3 asked about asked about respondents‟ views regarding accent-related issues. Item 4 asked about preferred identity of learners and their attitudes towards non-native accents. Item 5 asked about the ownership of English.

Procedure

Before the actual administration of the questionnaire, it was piloted with 10 English learners in order for the purposes of content and linguistic validity. Five researchers were also consulted about whether the items in the questionnaire and the interview were clear and the scales were appropriate. Based on the feedback obtained, several modifications were done. Regarding the open-ended sections, learners‟ responses were coded to yield quantitative data. An independent rater was also requested to code these sections to ensure reliability. The interrater reliability was .92; the questionable parts were reconsidered until reaching a point of agreement. The data were analyzed using SPSS software.

Concerning research ethics, the learners were informed that they can withdraw at any time during the process of the study. Participants were assured that all the data collected were just for research only, and their confidentiality was protected during the study. All the interview data collection was recorded with the participants‟ permission. Researchers considered credibility and dependability by collecting data from as many contexts and situations as possible and using as two methods of data gathering Triangulation can help to credibility, transferability, conformability and dependability.

Results

Q.1 asks participants about their satisfaction with their own accent. In case of expanding circle participants, of the 80 valid responses, 66 (78.6 %) were not much satisfied with their accents and only 10 (12.5 %) were fairly satisfied with their accents.

In contrast, a total number of 66 Indian participants (75%) were fairly satisfied with their accents and there were about 20 percent of participants who claimed to be “very proud” or “extremely proud”.

The interesting point is that majority of native speakers (more than 90%) believed that focus should be on intelligibility and not accent in communication.

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Outer circle participants‟ satisfaction with their accent can have some closely related reasons: (1) their more attention to communication than pronunciation and (2) their willingness to have their own English accent in the world. Here are some outer circle participants‟ remarks regarding their satisfaction with their accents: Indian (15): I‟m fairly proud of my accent because other nations accept my pronunciation.

Malaysian (22): I‟m fairly satisfied because I don‟t have a problem in communicating with others.

Malaysian (30): I‟m fairly satisfied with it because conveying message is superior to having native-like accent.

Iranian participants‟ responses indicated that most of them like to have native-like pronunciation and because of that they are not satisfied with their accents. Those who were also fairly satisfied with their accents mentioned that they should do their best to have native-like accent.

Iranian (20): I should have just American accent to be satisfied with my accent.

Iranian (48): I‟m satisfied with my accent but I should practice more to seem like them.

Q.2 asks about the importance of getting a native-like accent. The results in table 2 show that it is more important for expanding circle learners, in comparison with outer and inner circle learners, to get a native-like accent. The reasons towards this preference are explained in question 3. Table 2

Learners' attitudes towards the importance of getting a native-like accent

Nationality	Extremely	very	Fairly	Not much	Not at all	Total
Iranian	24 (60.0%)	12 (30.0 %)	4 (10.0 %)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	40 (100.0%)
Turkish	21 (52.5%)	13 (32.5 %)	6 (15.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	40 (100.0%)
Indian	6 (13.6%)	12 (27.3 %)	15 (34.1%)	11(25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	44 (100.0%)
Malaysian	7 (15.9 %)	12(27.3 %)	18(40.9%)	9 (15.9%)	0 (0.0%)	44 (100.0%)

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American	4 (10.0%)	10 (25.0%)	24 (60.0%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	40 (100.0%)
British	4 (11.1%)	14 (38.9%)	14 (38.9%)	4 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%	36 (100.0%)
Total	64 (26.2%)	76(31.1%)	88 (36.1%)	16 (6.6%)	0 (0.0 %)	244 (100.0%)

Q. 3 asks participants to indicate their preferred English accent: Whether they like to keep the accent of their own country or to sound like native speakers. In case of expanding circle participants, of the 80 valid responses, 69 (86.3%) would like to speak English with a native-speaker based accent (see table 3). In contrast, a total number of 62 outer circle participants (73.8 %) make it clear that native speaker accent is unacceptable to them as role model and they like to have their own local accent as the role model in communication. Majority of inner circle participants believe (92.1) believe that English speakers should keep their own accent.

Table 3

Participants' preferred accent when they speak English

Q.3	If possible, When speaking English, learners should	Inner Circle Participants	Outer circle Participants	Expanding Circle Participants
(1)	Keep the accent of their own country	70 (92.1)	62(73.8 %)	11 (13.8%)
(2)	Sound like native speakers	6 (7.9)	16 (19.0%)	69 (86.3 %)

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(3)	Other (please specify)	0.0%	6 (7.1%)	0.0%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

An analysis of the reasons for having NS-based accent by Outer and Expanding circle learners can reveal some attributes associated with native-based accent.

Table 4

Reasons for preferring NS-based accent by Outer and Expanding circle Learners

Attributes of NS-based accent	Outer Circle Participants	Expanding Circle participants
Beautiful/nice/pleasant	12	30
Correct/accurate/perfect	8	22
Can be easily understood	14	10
Prestigious	8	32

Here are some participants‟ remarks regarding the preference of a NSbased standard.

Turkish (28): I don‟t like to be understood as a non-native speaker when I speak English.

Iranian (34): It‟s more prestigious when you speak like native speakers and this wouldn‟t happen until I speak like a native.

Some reasons by participants supporting their own country‟s accent can be mentioned as follow:

Malaysian (50): I‟m comfortable with it when I speak English with the accent of my own country.

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Indian (14): English is for communication and I have no problem when I speak English with my friends from different countries.

Indian (44): It is better to speak a language the way it is originally spoken.

Interviews with some native teachers revealed this interesting point that clarity and intelligibility should be the focus of attention for English learners:

American (20): English is an international language, there are more nonnative speakers of English then there are native so why should one accent prevail over another. Further, a clear neutral accent is important.

British (48): In my opinion we also must consider that with increased globalization, with exposure to a variety of places and cultures, it may not be possible anymore to simplify the choices of English accent to "American" and "British".

British (36): They main thing is intelligibility. Here in the US, obviously Standard American English (SAE). In the UK, RP, in Australia, Australian English, and so on and so forth. Actually, if a NNSE intends to stay in particular region of one of those countries, then of course, he/she can and should learn the regional accent. Here, I am talking about the mode of instruction. It is completely fine that some learners speak with a less native-like accent.

Upon closer scrutiny of those participants whose preferred English accent is a NS-based one, it can be understood that it seems more beautiful for most Iranian and Turkish learners to have American accent while most Indians and Malaysians like to have British accent.

Q.4 asks participants preferred identity when speaking English. In case of Indian and Malaysian participants as members of outer circle, their remarks are indicative of a concern for both native-like English proficiency and their Indian and Malaysian identities as symbolized by a native-like accent.

Indian (6): To interact with non-native speakers I speak Indian accent, to talk with foreigners I speak with native accent.

Malaysian (8): English is a tool for communication. As a person, I feel very strongly that I‟m Malaysian though I‟m fluent in English.

Indian (16): As far as smooth communication takes place I wouldn‟t mind how I am sounding but I can have both pronunciation.

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In case of Iranian and Turkish learners, the orientation is toward speaking with a native accent. Majority of expanding circle participants (above 77%) found it important to sound like native speakers of English when speak English. These are some comments by expanding-circle participants:

Iranian (4): I know it is difficult to speak like a native speaker but I want to sound like native speakers of English in order to communicate well.

Turkish (32): I want to have a real native accent and I try to have it with trying more and more.

Iranian (44): It is more prestigious to speak English with native accent and I can attract more the attention of others when I interact with them.

Majority of native participants also put emphasis on keeping your own identity in communication with other English speakers.

American (22): Learning English is not important because it is English, learning English is important because it is the world's lingua franca-for better, or for worse. Now, in the glocal world, it‟s necessary to keep their own identity.

British (30): If possible, learners should do their best to demonstrate their own identity.

Learners of outer-circle and expanding-circle were also asked about the ownership of English. In case of expanding circle learners, about 70% selected native speaker; and 8.3 % selected those nations who use English as an international language. 5% chose bilinguals ("those whose mother tongue is another language, but have grown up using English as well"). Only 6.7 % said

Table 5

Participants' preferred identity when speaking English

Q.4	My preferred identity when speaking English	Indian Learners	Malaysian Learners	Iranian Learners	Turkish Learners
1	I want to keep my own country‟s accent –not a native speaker of Englishso long as others can understand me.	32 (72.7%)	30 (68.2%)	6 (15.5%)	8 (20.00%)

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2	I want to sound like a native speaker of English	10 (22.7%)	10 (22.7%)	32 (80.00%)	30 (75.00%)
3	Other (please specify)	2 (4.5%)	4 (9.1%)	2 (5.00%)	2 (5.00%)
Total		44(100%)	44 (100%)	40 (100%)	40 (100%)

"anyone fluent enough to speak the language without major problems" was a rightful owner. Very few took an EIL perspective: Only 10% chose as owners "speakers of the language (independently of problems)." Considering outer circle learners, about 65% said native speakers; 12% selected bilinguals ("those whose mother tongue is another language, but have grown up using English as well and 23% chose "speakers of the language (independently of problems) as real owners of English language." In case of native learners, about 55% said native speakers;

20 selected bilinguals ("those whose mother tongue is another language, but have grown up using English as well and 25% chose "speakers of the language (independently of problems) as real owners of English language."

Choosing native speakers as the rightful owner of English shows a strong orientation towards nativisim among all learners in three circles of world Englishes. An interesting point is that outer and inner circle learners take an EIL perspective in comparison with expanding circle learners. This tendency towards nativism is in conflict with EIL norms and shows more trying on behalf of teachers for raising awareness of learners of different varieties of English and promoting their confidence in the global world.

Discussion

Findings of this study reveal significant differences among learners in three circles regarding pronunciation issues and verities of English. The results of the study show that expanding circle

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learners‟ desire is still deeply rooted in Inner-circle models. It is a need to raise awareness of English learners towards global spread of English and the realities of English today which can be really helpful to be more realistic and not just blind followers of a particular model. The findings of the study suggest that learners of EIL need to be aware of issues like acceptance of varieties of English, comprehensibility, cultural appropriateness of pedagogical materials, language and identity and ownership of English in the globalization and glocalization of English.

The results of the current study showed that expanding circle learners‟ attachments to inner-circle norms was stronger in comparison with outer circle learners. Expanding circle participants‟ responses indicated that most of them like to have native-like pronunciation and because of that they are not satisfied with their English accents. Those who were also fairly satisfied with their accents mentioned that they should do their best to have native-like accent. In contrast, outer circle participants were more satisfied with their English accent and this satisfaction can be because of their more attention to communication than pronunciation and also their willingness to have their own English accent in the world. Upon closer scrutiny of those participants whose preferred English accent was a NS-based one, it can be understood that it seems more beautiful for most expanding circle learners to have American accent while most outer circle learners like to have British accent.

In case of participants‟ preferred identity when speaking English, Indian and Malaysian participants‟ remarks are indicative of a concern for both nativelike English proficiency and their own identity as symbolized by a native-like accent while majority of Iranian and Turkish participants (over 85%) found it important to sound like native speakers of English when speak English.

Conclusions

Based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data using a semistructured questionnaire, supplemented by an interview, administered to 84 learners from expanding circle, 84 from outer circle and 76 from inner circle. This study surveyed the emerging picture of EIL pronunciation and evaluation of different varieties of English from the perspective of learners from three circles of world Englishes. Findings revealed some differences among learners with regard to various models of English and accent pronunciations.

Considering pedagogical implications of this study, English teaching should be no longer considered as simply teaching the NS norms to learners. Jenkins (2006 a: 174) considers that rather than sticking to NS-based norms, teachers should try to raise learners‟ awareness of different varieties of English

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and help them to improve their confidence. Following Jenkins, McKay (2012) puts emphasis on language awareness among all users of English, including both L1 and L2 speakers. He believes that EIL users should be aware of notions such as language innovation, varying linguistic and pragmatic norms, negotiation strategies, and social sensitivity in language use. In addition, teachers also need to view lingua franca English (LFE) pronunciation not as deficient, but as an acceptable variation of English (Jenkins, 2005). Until teachers change their perspective of viewing LFE speech as "learner speech," this paradigm shift of global intelligibility in pronunciation instruction may not take place. If the goal of pronunciation instruction is to change what is being taught as the norm, then attention needs to be paid to both native and nonnative speaker attitudes toward LFE.

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