

## ***Language Planning for English Testing in EFL Contexts: China and Korea***

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The term 'world Englishes' might be unfamiliar to many people and people may assume that English speakers around the world are using standard American or British English. However, if we look at the media such as newspapers and TV or radio broadcasts in English, we quickly find that people around the world do not speak in the same way. In addition, the population of English speakers is increasing not only in the native-English speaking countries but also in countries where it is a second and foreign language. According to Crystal (2003), the estimated number of native English speakers is 320 to 380 million, while the number of second language speakers is 200 to 500 million and the number of foreign language speakers is 500 to 1000 million. The non-native are already a numerical majority. Therefore, English change is an unavoidable phenomenon and we cannot reject varieties of English, which are nativized or localized. Therefore, we have to reexamine language planning for English in EFL contexts. In this paper we focus on language testing planning in China and Korea.

## **ENGLISH IN CHINA**

The very first contact between English speakers and the Chinese occurred in 1637, when an expedition of four ships under the command of Captain John Weddell arrived in Macau and Canton (Bolton, 2002). The next three centuries after that visit saw the development and subsequent decline of ‘Chinese pidgin English’ (1740s-1830s) and ‘republican English’ (1840s-1940s). In the last decade, English has become the first foreign language in China. English is extremely important at all educational levels now. At the secondary level, all junior high and senior high students are required to learn English as a subject and it is a heavily weighted subject in the college entrance exams. At university level, all students need to take at least two years of English class for at least four hours a week. At the post-graduate level, unless students are good enough to be exempted, English is still a required course for them. Now English education has even been extended to elementary schools. In 2002, the National Education Ministry officially required all elementary schools nationwide to teach English from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

## **ENGLISH IN KOREA**

English is taught as one of the main required subjects at secondary schools and many people are eager to learn English for world communication. English is now the most preferred language and the Koreans have both the incentive and the opportunities to acquire English language proficiency. Baik (1992) says that after international athletic events – the Asian Games in 1986 and the Olympic Games in 1988 - Koreans at large began to feel an urgent need for English communication. We also believe that another athletic event in 2002, the World Cup, has increased the awareness of World Englishes in Korea. Through the 120 years of English education, American English in education has changed in many aspects: lexico-semantic, morpho-syntactic

and pragmatic (Shim, 1999). Shim (1999) claims that there are approximately 160,000 students taking college entrance exams and 200,000 people taking the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) every year. Korean adult students might be frustrated with the discrepancy between what they have learned before college and what they have been learning, using and being tested on in college or even after. Therefore, Korean English researchers should look more closely at the *use* of language.

### **WHY A WORLD ENGLISHES PERSPECTIVE IS NEEDED**

Firstly, critical approaches have recently been developed and applied linguistics has begun to examine the impact of social, economic and political forces upon the theories and practices of language policies. The main argument of critical approaches is to disclose the relationship between language policies and sociopolitical powers, and call for language policies that empower previously disadvantaged groups (McNamara, 1998; Pennycook, 1995; Rahman, 2001; Shohamy, 1997; Tollefson, 1995).

Secondly, the foreign trade situation in both China and Korea urged language planners and English educators to consider a World Englishes perspective. During the 1990s, foreign trade to China and Korea expanded dramatically. For example, in 2001 China's merchandise exports were \$266 million, 3.7 times that of 1991, and ranks 5<sup>th</sup> in the world. Undoubtedly, booming international business demands far more extensive and higher English communicative proficiency on the part of labor force. The same situation is happening in Korea. That is, a large part of international business in China and Korea is with non-native speakers.

Thirdly, a World Englishes perspective is likely to lead to many pedagogical benefits that impact positively upon English learning and teaching. It will alleviate feelings of exclusion or inferiority. In addition, recognizing the legitimacy of World Englishes implies that people may use English in their own ways to describe their own cultures and thoughts. Thus,

English can be viewed as an additional language of communication rather than as a foreign language controlled by the “others” and having nothing to do with “ourselves” (Warschauer, 2000).

Fourthly, the growth of international education exchanges calls for a World Englishes perspective in China and Korea. International education exchange opportunities are open today and a large number of students study abroad every year in countries such as New Zealand, Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia and Hong Kong. English is a major medium of instruction in these countries, but their Englishes are distinct from American or British English, so it is natural to expect that when these students come back to China and Korea, they will bring back different varieties of English. Consequently, the influence of World Englishes is destined to grow stronger as more people seek overseas education.

## **LANGUAGE TESTING AND ACCOUNTING SYSTEMS**

There are several international English proficiency tests concerning the use of English in international contexts such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Since the Chinese and Korean test-takers’ needs are mostly international communication with not only native-speakers but also non-native speakers, a World Englishes perspective should be infused into those English proficiency tests. Especially the TOEIC, which measure English for international communication, should have international standards for measuring English language proficiency.

The IELTS, which is “designed to assess the language ability of candidates who need to study or work where English is used as the language of communication” (IELTS Handbook, 2000), seems to have some World Englishes perspectives in certain points: (1) listening texts present a “variety of accents,” (2) reading texts reflect a range of English varieties, (3) non-

native speakers can work as examiners if they meet professional requirements and (4) the IELTS is distinctive in its name itself. However, despite the fact that the IELTS adopts some of this perspective, it is still a test developed in the UK, Australia and New Zealand, which are native countries. Nevertheless, the IELTS stands out among the widely used international English proficiency tests in that it discusses the assessment of English as an international language (Chalhoub-Deville, 2003).

Ever since the early 1980s, there have been many studies on the vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology, cohesion and other organizational features of English varieties throughout the world (Bhatt, 1995). However, the systematic codification of the varieties of English is urgent (Bamgbose, 1998; Lowenberg, 1992), otherwise varieties of English can not become a point of reference for usage and acceptance, nor can pedagogical models or language tests be established to promote the development of World Englishes. Therefore, the urgent task is to codify English varieties even if they are very different from Standard English. Then, the codified varieties should be incorporated the future language tests.

There is greater tolerance for pragmatic nativization than for linguistic nativization because pragmatic nativization is often culture-based, and culture remains an integral part of a language (Bamgbose, 1998). At present, the English testing materials used in China and Korea almost exclusively target the cultural information of the “inner circle,” to use Kachru’s term (1986). The dominance of inner circle culture in testing reflects an assumption that still guides many practitioners: “native-speaker varieties still provide the norms which all of the world’s nonnative speakers attempt to follow, even when no native speakers are involved” (Lowenberg, 1992). To clear that assumption from people’s minds, a number of measures can be taken in the case of language testing.

Language testing needs to bring in cultural content as much as possible from a range of English-speaking countries, especially those that China and Korea are most likely to encounter in reality. Language testing should encourage the discussion of the relationship between various cultures;

particularly, it should encourage students to consider their own culture in light of other cultures. This is because a simple introduction of other cultures may appear less relevant and less efficient, but a comprehensive analysis of relationship often exposes students to more varieties and is more relevant to our own culture.

In summary, international target culture materials are effective to infuse a World Englishes perspective into language testing. They could illustrate cross-cultural pragmatics and exemplify the manner in which English is being used effectively by non-inner circle speakers to communicate with others for international exchange, hence demonstrating that English is not a set of static grammar rules controlled by foreigners but live communication tool shared by the world.

One of the purposes of our study is to set up a framework for developing appropriate English proficiency tests in China and Korea. It is not so clear-cut, but we conclude with a suggestion for the new language planning of English testing in China and Korea, using the Cooper's accounting scheme (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997).

## **SUGGESTED LANGUAGE PLANNING FOR ENGLISH TESTING IN CHINA AND KOREA**

<b>What actors?</b>	With regard to the huge impact of testing in China and Korea, language planning should be conducted by the government. On one hand, non-government organizations or individuals rarely have the power to change long lasting practices of or belief about testing. On the other hand, few organizations or individuals have been aware of the issue of World Englishes.
<b>Attempt to influence what behaviors?</b>	<i>Structural properties of planned behaviors:</i> language tests exemplify a wider range of varieties of English in terms of both organizational and pragmatic features.

Particularly, our own varieties that we are most likely to encounter in international exchange must be represented.

*Desired level of adoption:* universal

**Of which people?**

*Type of target:* English learners and teachers at all educational levels, professionals who use English at work, and all sorts of employers

*Opportunities of target to learn the planned behavior:* the government should raise the awareness of World Englishes in the society. Language assessment and evaluation policy need go hand in hand with other language-in-education policies, such as curriculum, personnel and material policy so as to provide the largest opportunity for the target population to learn about World Englishes.

*Incentives of target to learn/use planned behavior:* the growing international exchange and the increasing importance given to communicative ability

*Incentives of target to reject planned behavior:* the deeply rooted superiority attached to native English

**For what ends?**

*Overt:* less concentration on “native-like” English or “correct” English; more attention to English fluency and communication adequacy; more awareness of other functionally-native English varieties.

*Latent:* increasing respect and appreciation for national culture as well as other non-western cultures; reducing the hegemony of western ideology.

**Under what conditions?**

*Situational:* the focus of English teaching/learning is changing from grammar and reading to communication.

*Structural:*

- Political: opening up policy
- Economic: booming international business exchange with major trade partners using different varieties of English.

- Social: people are flooding to the outer circle to receive education.

*Environmental*: the critical approach is gaining important position in language planning

*Informational*: internet provides easy access to the different varieties of English.

**By what means?** It is necessary to combine all sorts of means, including authority, promotion and persuasion.

**Through what decision making process?** Basically it is the government that makes the decision, but the extent of incorporating World Englishes in language testing must be justified by applied linguists who take the responsibility for codifying the varieties of English. Also test developers, materials developers, and English educators are all involved.

**With what effect?** Although Kaplan and Baldauf (1997, p. 57) assert that “the effects of any particular language planning are not always easy to determine because it is hard to know what would have happened if the language planning had not occurred,” this project will definitely promote the awareness of World Englishes in China and Korea since people usually take it for granted that the conflict is only between the inner circle and the outer circle, hence there are very little research in the EFL context from a World Englishes perspective.

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