



Writing Assessment and the Challenges of the Norms: Insights from Standard English, World Englishes and English as an International Language

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This reflective essay examines writing assessment as perceived within the three paradigms of Standard English (SE), World Englishes (WEs) and English as an International Language (EIL). In each of the perspectives, the way construct of writing is theorized and then informs the assessment practice are critically investigated. Upon reviewing the three stances on writing assessment, the author argues that in the today's post-colonial and post-modern globalized world with drastically new communicative needs, the Standard English perspective which promotes the educated native speaker as the only accepted norm does not fit the realities of the writing assessment. Also, WEs perspective assessment proposal which advocate the inclusion of a variety of local norms in the theory and practice of writing assessment seems impossible in practice. Finally, drawing on EIL view it is discussed that to meet the new demands of written communication in the present globalized world with no border between the native and non-native speakers, rating scales should be modified to address new communicative needs by including the pragmatic skills of negotiation strategies, sociolinguistic awareness, accommodation strategies, etc. However, it is argued that at present due to the absence of practical tests that realize these claims, the existing International proficiency tests continue to work.

Keywords: Writing assessment, rating scale, standard English, world Englishes, English as an international language

Introduction

Writing is perhaps one of the most complicated constructs to define. Additionally, for writing assessment to be a valid indicator of the writing ability there needs a robust theoretical basis. Theoretical definition of the language constructs or the way proficiency in the English language is defined along with ownership of the assessment norms have been two major controversial issues among a good number of scholars (Brown, 2014; Canagarajah, 2006a; Davies, 2002; Lowenberg, 2002). The current literature shows three major stances in respond to this question: Standard English view (Davies, 2002), WEs view (Lowenberg, 2002) and the emerging English as an international language view (Canagarajah, 2006a).

Standard English proponents state that the appropriate norms for the assessment of English proficiency are those of the educated native speakers of English. In fact, one of the dominant American or British English varieties should form the desired norms for the international English language proficiency tests. In this view, ownership of the language norms belongs to the native speaker who is defined as the monolingual speaker belonging to the homogeneous speech community. This has been a powerful assumption and has dominated the English language pedagogy and the mainstream applied linguistic research and more importantly the whole of assessment practice for many decades (Jenkins, 2011).

On the other hand, WEs advocates call for a pluricentric rather than a monocentric approach to English language teaching and assessment (Jenkins, 2006). They believe that local, nativized and indigenized varieties of English in different world multilingual communities should contribute to determining the assessment objectives and it is no longer belongs only to the countries where English has traditionally belonged to (Richards, Schmidt, Kendricks, & Kim, 2002). Accordingly, proficiency in English is defined as the ability to hold a meaningful social and institutional communication based on the local norms.

However, there have been heated debates in the literature on how to accommodate varietal differences of English into the language tests. And these attempts have been always strongly challenged by major testing organizations which have dominantly controlled the fertile language testing industry around the globe in the native speaker countries. They criticize the localized varieties on two grounds of legitimacy and feasibility. Many inner circle language scholars still consider the local varieties of English as the fossilized ill-formed structures that have developed and remained due to failure in learning the language correctly. In addition, in their idea, these indigenized varieties of English which have emerged around the globe have not been codified enough and hence they cannot be considered as the correct language models in the assessment. Additionally, the existence of a large number of English varieties would create difficulties in the development and administration of the language tests in particular high stakes International proficiency tests (Brown, 2014).

While the scholars in the above two camps have enthusiastically struggled for their concerns, the international world community has been experiencing new changes which demand quite new communicative needs. The move toward a post-modernist globalized world (Canagarajah, 2006a) which gives agency to the individuals as having control and choice in their lives indicates to a new geopolitical context with quite different communicative demands which would change the direction of discussions held by the scholars in the previous two camps. In fact, the new EIL paradigm asks to reconsider the norms of proficiency testing including those of the writing assessment.

Hence, the present study critically analyses writing assessment within each of the above two traditions. Next, upon a careful analysis of the present state of English as an international language, the author calls for a substantial change in the criteria long considered in the writing assessment rating scales.

Standard English

Standard English perspective or the legitimacy of the native speaker norms in testing and examination boards state that language proficiency should be defined and measured in terms of the educated native speaker narrowly defined as the monolingual speaker from the homogeneous native speech communities. Despite controversies over the concept of native speaker, Davies (2002) strongly advocates the reality of the native speaker and believes that it is the idealization of the standard language which can be a possible target for the second language learners as well.

Needless to say, the prevailing assumption in English language testing has long been that the appropriate norms for judging the language proficiency of the learners are those accepted and followed by the educated native speaker (Lowenberg, 2002). Findings of SLA research mainly provided input for language testing professionals to judge the proficiency of the non-native speakers. Hence, the norms developed by the native experts have determined the development of rating rubrics for a long time. In fact, native speaker has been the only yardstick to define the concept of expert and non-expert speakers of English in the structure of rating scales.

Similarly, the criteria for writing assessment have been defined accordingly. In fact, for a long time, writing construct has been defined in a monolithic way to adhere to the norms of either dominant British or American varieties. In other words, at both international and local levels, mastery in writing has been operationalized through components of rating scales which consider the native speaker as the target and accordingly the writing performance of the writers are judged. The literature on writing assessment is full of native and non-native attempts to develop and validate rating scales which all unanimously consider

the native speaker as the ideal correct form and any deviation from it will be penalized as the lack of related knowledge.

However, it should be confirmed that, the SE view has maintained its dominance in the ELT pedagogy. In fact, majority of English teachers, SLA researchers, examination boards and publishing houses still consider native speakerism as their ideal (Jenkins, 2006). This is because the norms of SE are clear and well-described (Davies, Hamp-Lyons, & Kemp, 2003). In addition, SE as the unmarked variety has served the needs of English language pedagogy extensively for decades. In other words, the models, tests, pedagogical plans, SLA research programs, etc. have all used SE since these have been the best possible proposed at the time. Therefore, the extensive spread of SE should not be interpreted as a hegemony to the field, rather in the absence of other robust pedagogical alternatives SE has greatly served the global technical and practical requirements of the ELT pedagogy to the extent that many people consider the standard native speaker as the only valid ideal (Jenkins, 2006).

The same argument applies to the dominance of SE in writing. According to Quirk (1985, p. 123), 'standard English is particularly associated with the English that is intended to have the widest reach, and in consequence it is traditionally associated most of all with English in not just a written form but a printed form.' As a result, the well-described and clear codes of SE found its place in providing norms for language assessment including the writing assessment.

World Englishes

In a much-quoted article, Kachru (1986) divided English language into inner-circle Englishes (e.g., American, British, Australian Englishes); outer-circle Englishes (e.g., Indian, Singaporean, Nigerian, etc. Englishes) and expanding-circle Englishes (e.g., English in China, Korea, Egypt) (Figure 1). This categorization provided the ground for the emergence of WEs paradigm which is generally characterized by the following three major features (Kachru, as cited in Brown, 1993, p. 59):

- a belief that there is a repertoire of models for English
- a belief that the localized innovations (in English) have pragmatic bases
- a belief that the English language now belongs to all those who use it

WEs proponents questioned the relevance of exogenous SE norms in both outer-circle and expanding circle communities. In fact, many studies (e.g., Bamgbose, 2003; Brown, 2014; Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Hill & Parry, 1994; Jenkins, 2000; Lowenberg, 2000, 2002) have demonstrated that outer-circle countries with a post-colonial legacy have institutionalized English varieties of their own and use these for a wide range of intranational and international purposes. In these countries, nativized English forms have developed with strong implications for English proficiency testing. Lowenberg (2002, p. 431) believes that, 'in many of these expanding circle settings, the norms for Standard English usage, teaching and testing may not always be those of the Inner Circle.'

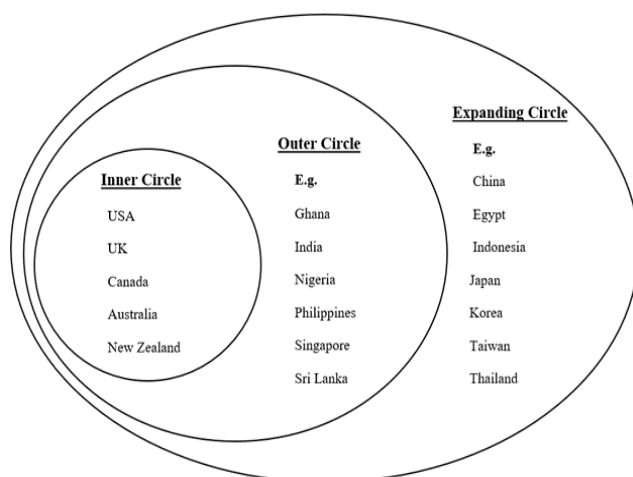


Figure 1. Kachru's concentric circles representation of English-speaking countries of the world (Kachru, 1992).

In the same vein, Jenkins (2006) counts two major grounds which WEs has faced challenges. The first concerns the interlanguage (IL) theory (Selinker, 1972, 1992) and the second is the concept of linguistic imperialism (Canagarajah, 1999; Phillipson, 1992). According to IL theory, any variations between a second language learner's produced form and SE is interpreted as errors which is caused by the L1 and when these erroneous forms become fixed within the learners' language repertoire it turns into the fossilization phenomenon. Based on IL theory, many nativized forms in outer circle settings are actually fossilized forms. However, the main argument against the IL theory claims that inner circle norms do not have sociolinguistic reality for the outer circle English speakers who are operating in a different sociocultural context. The monolingual bias hidden in the IL theory also ignores the developing hybrid English speaker identities in outer circle contexts (Norton, 1997; Lin, Wang, Nobuhiko, & Riazi, 2002).

Linguistic imperialism, as the other ground, also attempts to resist the dominance of the inner circle norms by appropriating English for local purposes (Canagarajah, 1999). Although linguistic imperialism view of the spread of English has faced many criticisms, it has become a household term among many applied linguists.

Although WEs perspective has not led to noticeable changes in English teaching in general and language testing in particular (Jenkins, 2006), there have been many attempts to redress the language testing following the local norms. In this regard, language testing professionals have provided a number of proposals at the interface of WEs and language testing. The most salient of these proposals takes advantage of the repertoire of WEs in the development of the language tests which are not necessarily standardized International Tests. Rather, there are a wide range of tests developed for local low-stakes purposes (e.g., diagnostic, progress achievement tests) (Brown, 2012).

In the same vein, the construct of writing and the practice of writing assessment have also undergone the WEs paradigm shift. Many scholars (Kachru, 2009; Hamp-Lyons & Zhang Wenxia, 2001; Hinkel, 1999) have argued for the development of local norms for the assessment of the writers in the outer and expanding circles countries. In fact, use of a universal template for assessing writing is believed to be no more valid. Rather, the writing construct should be defined considering the multiplicity of Englishes in the world and accordingly there should be rethinking of expectation in writing test design, rater training, test standards and score reporting. In the words of Kachru (2009, pp. 125-126), 'the concerns of Inner Circle publishers who are the gatekeepers of most publications in academic fields are understandable. But that should not determine the fate of academic writing and homogenize it to an extent where a creative process is reduced to an automatic slot filling.'

Needless to say, WEs view which appreciates diversity demands all educators from all circles of English to contribute to the pluricentric tradition of research on the theory and practice of academic writing. However, despite the attempts of language testing experts to incorporate the concerns of WEs in

the form of multiplicities of tests each addressing different purposes and targets, the practice has faced serious challenges in both outer circle and expanding circle countries.

Concerning the outer circle countries, the main challenge of WEs is the wide variety of English codes developed to meet both intra- and international purposes in these countries. Such an expansion of the norms turns the assessment into a difficult and at times impossible task. In the words of Davidson and Lowenberg (1996, p. 1):

The general problem can be put thus: how can English tests be best designed to accommodate varietal differences of Englishes around the world? That is, if an English test developed and normed in Variety X is subsequently used in a country which speaks Variety Y, is the X-test therefore inappropriate in the country where Variety Y is spoken?

The nature of problems facing WEs in expanding circle countries differs from the outer circle countries where due to the lack of a written, codified variety of English, the SE is the pursued norm in the assessment. In these contexts, writing assessment encounters the problems that can be generally divided in to three main categories:

- I. What to assess? If there is a possibility that a candidate's written text that voices her ideology is adversely assessed owing to factors beyond the textual features themselves, the components of a writing test including task topics, task specifications, prompt instructions to students, categories of rating scales, etc. may need to be redefined. Moreover, there is still no consensus over the very definition of writing construct. For example, in expanding circle countries (e.g., Iran) standard native competence as the privileged norm is sought in academic contexts. In fact, lack of a 'nativized' English code adds to the complexity of writing construct definition.
- II. How to assess? The scoring procedure and the weighting of assessment categories also need to make sense to the writers as well as be acceptable and operational in the rater training in the expanding circle communities. Along with current interest among the scholars to encourage the learners to choose the topic and theme for their writing to avoid potential ethnic and other biases, the question is whether to provide test candidates with a choice to select topic of their writing as is practiced in some high-stakes tests such as FCE (First Certificate in English) writing component.
- III. Who should carry out the assessment? If native speaker raters and raters from the writers' own culture use different sets of linguistic, cultural and ideological values to guide their judgments, whose judgments are "right"? This controversial question is yet far from being resolved.

English as an International Language

During the past decades there have been dramatic changes in the status of the English language. In the words of Graddol (2006, p. 11), 'it is no longer English as we have known it, and have taught it in the past as a foreign language, but a new phenomenon.' English has promoted to the dominant global lingua franca. The new status of English which is variously called as EIL or ELF (English as a lingua franca) is based on two main premises: The first is the discourse on the colonization and postcolonial orientations to English and the second which is not unrelated to the first is concerned with the new definitions of the norms and proficiency in English language testing. In the following, these two will be discussed in more detail.

New Geopolitical Context

In the geopolitical context of colonization, communities are related to each other in a hierarchical and unilateral way (Hall, 1997). Dominant communities exert the superiority of their cultural and social systems, including their language to spread their influence at the cost of the local traditions and even languages. Needless to say, the local is ignored and even stigmatized in the presence of dominant culture and language. Colonization in the words of Hall (1997) developed the modernist globalization. However, the situation did not continue as expected by the colonization scholars. In fact, within the technical modernist communities there emerged some new social and cultural forces (e.g., diaspora groups, the Internet, multinational companies, etc.) which gradually shifted the direction of the relationship between the communities. According to Canagarajah (2006a, p. 231) this new social context differs from the previous one in at least the three following features:

- The interaction between the communities is multilateral-that is, international involvement at diverse levels is needed in today's economic and production enterprises.
- National boundaries have become porous-people, goods, and ideas flow easily between the borders.
- Languages, communities, and cultures have become hybrid, shaped by this fluid flow of social and economic relationships.

The postmodern globalized world has strong implications for the English language. It goes without saying that in the absence of national borders, the English language cannot be treated as a homogeneous code with a uniform grammatical system any more. In the words of Widowson (1994, p. 385), 'the very fact that English is an International language means that no nation can have custody over it. To grant such custody is necessarily to arrest its development and so undermine its international status.'

In fact, the post-modern globalized world pluralized the English language to meet the diverse needs of the interlocutors. Thus, English language turns to a heterogeneous language with multiple norms and different grammars with its different varieties now viewed equally. However, in the new geopolitical context of the world, porous national borders which have created new local and international communications for the people in the inner circle and also those who have their own English varieties in the outer circle question the ownership of the English varieties in their local context. In addition, the increasing currency and usage of English in expanding circle communities both in terms of increasing intranational purposes and also the development and codification of local English norms confirms that hierarchical models such as Kachruvian model (1986) which put the outer and expanding circle contexts in the periphery cannot account for the linguistic realities in the post-modern globalized world. Further evidence in this regard shows that the populations of native speakers of English in the inner circle countries are outnumbered by the non-native speakers of English in the outer-circle countries and also users of English as a foreign language (EFL) in the expanding circle countries (Canagarajah, 2007; Crystal, 2003).

New Definitions of Proficiency and Norms

It goes without saying that in a multi-dialectal context, defining the proficiency becomes complex. In fact, proficiency in English changes into the capacity to negotiate different varieties of English. This multidialectal competence requires English language testers to move from an 'either-or' orientation to a 'both and more' perspective (Canagarajah, 2006a). In other words, in a post-modern context of communication, local standards or endogenous, inner-circle standards do not matter. What is needed is the ability to negotiate the varieties in different outer- and expanding circle communities. As an example, results of many studies focusing on lingua franca (Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2004) have shown that when people from outer- and expanding-circle countries speak to each other, they rarely refer to inner-circle

norms; rather they can effectively manage their communication following their own language repertoire. In the same line, Jenkins (2011, p. 928) comparing ELF with EFL (English as a foreign language) characterizes ELF to belong to the global Englishes paradigm 'in which all Englishes are seen as sui generis rather than as attempts to approximate a native speaker version, hence it draws on pragmatic strategies of code-mixing and code-switching to establish solidarity with their interlocutors and also transmit their cultural identities.' It can be inferred that speakers in the globalized multilingual world need more than proficiency in all varieties of English which is impossible in practice. Rather, they should have negotiation skills to smoothly shuttle between different speech communities. This implies a major shift in assessment objectives from emphasizing grammar to incorporating pragmatics, and language as a structural system to language as a social system'. In other words, proficiency in EIL is different from the narrow view of correctness based on the native inner-circle criteria, rather participants use their linguistic repertoire to communicate in a fluid and flexible manner to ensure the comprehensibility. Therefore, EIL adopts a difference perspective which does not consider divergence from the native norms as the gap or deficient language knowledge.

Concerning the norms, the language speaker in a postmodern globalized world faces with relative, heterogeneous norms. As a matter of fact, in the multilingual context of postmodern world the emphasis should be on intelligibility rather than the correctness of the code. In a language context with different norms developed by its different speakers, the capacity to negotiate this variability should be pursued by the language testers. Therefore, the new EIL paradigm bears important implications for the language assessment:

First of all, assessment has to be contextualized. Proficiency is in fact the ability to use the English language effectively for specific purposes, functions and discourses in specific communities. In fact, seeking for a universal template for language testing does not make sense any more. Second, testing agencies should make clear that International tests just assess English in inner-circle contexts. Local preference for inner-circle norms should not be treated as an argument against developing tests in local English and third when the objective is the need to assess one's ability to use English as a second language in the local community, development of tests in English according to local norms should be pursued.

In order to achieve the above goals, it is needed that a further level of assessment be added to the language tests (both International English tests and tests on local Englishes). This should include language awareness, sociolinguistic sensitivity and negotiation strategies (Canagarajah, 2006a). These features are further discussed below.

Language awareness requires the language speakers to move from teaching English to teaching language (ibid). To fulfill this aim, the language learner should inductively process the underlying system in the varieties one encounters in social interactions. In addition, he/she should draw on intuitive skills to develop relative communicative competence in new varieties according to one's needs. Tests should also examine a candidate's ability to discern the structure, pattern, and rules from the available data of a given language.

Sociolinguistic sensitivity as another feature requires the sensitivity to dialectal differences, identity considerations, contextual constraints and cultural sensitivity. Furthermore, the language learner should recognize different pragmatic norms for different contexts of communication. Finally, negotiation strategies require that code-meshing, accommodation and interpersonal strategies be considered as parts of the tests in the postmodern globalized world (Canagarajah, 2006c).

Taking the above into account, a realistic assessment of one's ability to communicate in English in a single community today involves a range of proficiencies. In the case of a 'general' proficiency test at all, we should move toward a multi-task, multi-rater, and multi-candidate one (Canagarajah, 2006a).

Implications for the Writing Assessment

Writing is one of the important literacy skills. The skill has been viewed by the above three approaches differently. The standard English view defines writing proficiency as a universal ability demarcated by the American or British norms. Based on this definition, many rating scales have developed which are the outcome of empirical studies in the inner circle contexts. A closer look at the components of the scales shows that writing is viewed as a stable and constitutive activity which promotes a monopoly of NS English rules and conventions.

As an example, International English Language Testing System (IELTS) defines the writing construct in terms of task fulfilment, coherence and cohesion, lexical resources, and grammatical range and accuracy as the important components to be assessed. The rating components views writing as the sum of rules and conventions required to develop a text regardless of diverse rhetorical, cultural and sociolinguistic contexts of the writers. Despite some modifications in the structure of IELTS test (Hu, 2012), many scholars (e.g., Hall, 2010) admit that the test still “serves both to deliver and reinforce discourses which support native-speaker language norms” (p. 326). In this test, the target language norms of EIL tests are assumed to be a standard native-speaker variety or one based on such a variety. Nonetheless, the underlying assumption of recent revisions in IELTS has been to make the test “more accessible and fairer” to candidates from the outer- and expanding-circle societies without changing the test construct, that is, competence in an SE variety of English (Elder & Davies, 2006; Uysal, 2010). In addition, it should be noted that IELTS as “the world’s proven English language test” offered in more than 130 countries, recognized by over 6,000 organizations, and taken by 1,500,000 candidates each year has been among the most successful large-scale testing attempts that have ever met the needs of different stakeholders globally. The large testing houses that have been involved in developing and validating the test along with annual research projects conducted on the technical and linguistic aspects of the exams in different contexts around the world have all benefited the language testing and assessment for many years. So, the above criticism on IELTS does not mean that the test has been imposed on the test-takers, rather it has greatly aided the global ELT programs to provide a sound picture of the candidates’ English language proficiency. The test exists and continues to exist simply because there has not been a powerful alternative for it. Needless to say, the particular SE view behind the test would be strengthened in the light of global technical and practical benefits of the test.

Based on the WEs perspective, the inclusion of diverse writing norms following the various rhetorical conventions of the speakers in different circles was encouraged to form the assessment criteria. Hence, the interaction of culture and conventions of writing which implies that EFL/ESL writers should adopt different rhetorical patterns in different assessment contexts was raised by many scholars (Kachru, 2009; Hamp-Lyons & Zhang Wenxia, 2001). As mentioned above, this position has raised several practical concerns. The most important one being that with the dominance of NS norms and also ratings conducted by the NS raters, the learners have to give up their nativized English norms to prevent the defects in the International assessment contexts. On the other hand, WEs involve an array of local norms which are legitimate ones in the context of their use. Design, administration and ratings of the writing tasks based on these different norms create serious practical considerations. For example, the nativized and culture-specific rhetorical patterns may affect the way raters with different or similar linguistic and cultural background with that of the text evaluate it. Further, to what extent academic written discourse which has been long defined by the English native norms judge the appropriacy of the different non-native rhetorical patterns. More importantly, which variety of English (in particular in the outer circle countries) should be selected in the design of the academic tests is controversial. All in all, the pluricentric WEs approach while giving equal weight to all the English varieties faces problems in practice.

In the context of EIL assessment, scholars have proposed new principles for the language assessment including the writing assessment. As an example, Hu (2012) in response to the changing sociolinguistic realities of local and EIL states that the linguistic norms for a test should be defined according to its intended use in the assessment context. Therefore, there should be a sociolinguistic awareness when

deciding on the appropriate norms of a test. In this regard, Canagarajah (2006a) considers TOEFL as an invalid assessment of English proficiency when used for the recruitment and promotion purposes in a Japanese company whose main clientele and business partners are based in India and Singapore. The same argument holds true for EIL writing proficiency as well. In addition to the sociolinguistic awareness, accommodation and negotiation strategies help the EIL writers to attain their rhetorical objectives by a strategic and creative choice when facing textual differences. In other words, EIL writers 'are not conditioned by discourses to use them passively. They negotiate with them to use the competing literacy conventions on their own terms.' (Canagarajah, 2006b, p. 600). Writing is the rhetorical negotiation for achieving social meanings and functions. In fact, we do not write only to construct a rule-governed text, but to perform important social acts by the text (e.g., to achieve interests, represent our preferred values and identities, fulfil diverse needs). This requires to look at the text/context in a different way. According to Canagarajah (2006b) texts are not simply context-bound, rather they are context-transforming. Writers should think of texts and discourses as changing and changeable, so they can engage critically in the act of changing the rules and conventions to suit their interests, values, and identities.

In sum, the EIL writer as not only a competent writer but also a critical writer considers the repertoire of the languages at his/her disposal as an opportunity to negotiate his/her identity, values, etc. through appropriate rhetorical strategies.

In the context of academic writing, many scholars have accepted that all texts are mediated by the beliefs, values, and subject positions of the writers. Although academic writing as a high-stakes activity where publication is gate-kept and assessed for professional success, the writers have shown marks of localization in their texts. In this regard, Zamel (1997) in her transculturation model argues that academic writing should not be equated with a closed set of rules and conventions. Many studies (Belcher, 1997; Canagarajah, 2006b; Kramsch & Lam, 1999; Prior, 1998) have also shown how the writers can adopt different strategies to negotiate their challenges in academic text construction. In fact, multilinguality is not a constraint rather as a resource provides the author with a double vision to construct a unique and striking voice in English writing. This practice clearly complicates the accepted rules of academic text construction in the inner circle Anglo-American contexts.

Consequently, EIL writing assessment should focus on measuring the negotiation strategies of the writers, their awareness of the particular rhetorical contexts, and also how the writers accommodate diverse literacy traditions and shuttle between different linguistic norms while composing a text. In this way, writing assessment in the EIL context defines the writing construct as a situated, process-based performative act that is the requirement of present-day multilingual, globalized world. In this regard, development and validation of rating scales which include new pragmatic components of negotiation strategies, sociolinguistic awareness, accommodation skills, etc. should be encouraged in the assessment context. Also, assessment of writing should find imaginative ways to take into account the multiliterate needs of the postmodern citizens. Needless to say, the above proposals for the writing assessment demands different stake-holders involved in the assessment enterprise (e.g., test developers, composition experts, and cross-cultural language scholars) to reconsider different components involved (e.g., rating scales) to fit the realities of the postmodern globalized world.

Conclusion

In the globalized, multilingual world, English is a heterogenous language with multiple norms each coming into play at different levels of social interaction. Hence, proficiency including writing proficiency means the ability to negotiate this variability.

With regard to writing assessment, although some believe that in extremely formal institutional contexts where inner-circle norms are conventional (e.g., academic writing assessment), one has to adopt the established NS norms, studies have shown that all texts (including academic ones) are mediated by the beliefs, values and subject position of the writers (Canagarajah, 2006c). According to Ammon (2000),

when English is the universal medium for academic communication, it is unfair for one community (i.e. NS community) to define the norms.

The global appeal for the EIL requires practical innovative attempts to develop global norms for the academic writing assessment. In fact, the current complex condition of the global community has created a context where socio-cultural and linguistic realities are greatly interwoven. In this context, the native speakers' norms are considered in the global community besides the non-native speakers' norms. The backbone of communication in this heterogeneous global community relies on the intelligibility skills (e.g., negotiation strategies) which underscores the use of a language as a situated, performative and social act. The writing assessment, hence, should provide a sound picture of the multiliterate globalized world through not only emphasizing context-bound rules and conventions but also negotiation and accommodation strategies via awareness of different cultural, rhetorical and contextual settings, etc. However, the existing global English language assessment (including writing assessment) shows that these criticisms have remained at a proposal level and there has not been any alternative global test in practice. In fact, the claim made in this article should be considered as a call for incorporating the current socio-cultural global context into the structure of the International proficiency tests. Up to that time, the present global English language proficiency tests are in place to fulfil this aim.

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(Received May 30, 2020; Revised August 20, 2020; Accepted September 01, 2020)