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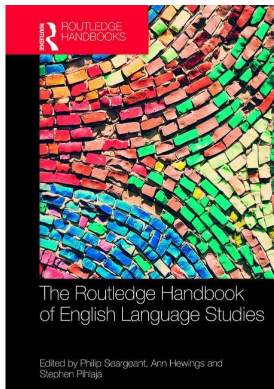

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Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

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Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

Diane Pecorari

Introduction

English is used by large numbers of people around the world. Arriving at an accurate estimate of just how many people speak English is a highly problematic enterprise, but a British Council report put the number of people who speak it at ‘a useful level’ at 1.75 billion (British Council 2013: 5), a figure which matches Crystal’s estimate of ‘in the direction of 2 billion’ (Crystal 2008: 5). The number of people who speak English as a first language (L1) is estimated by Ethnologue (Lewis et al. 2016) at 339 million, so approximately 1.66 billion people in the world use it as a second (L2) or foreign language. TESOL, or Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages, is the area of English studies which serves the needs of such learners. This area is also sometimes known as English Language Teaching (ELT), Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) or Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

The scope of TESOL

With a focus on the learning and teaching of English, TESOL has traditionally had an affinity for areas of applied linguistics and has been less influenced by literary studies, or by work which is primarily descriptive. However, within that focus, a broad range of activities are included under the TESOL umbrella. An indication of this breadth can be seen in the special interest groups within the professional organisation also called TESOL (TESOL International Association n.d.). Members of the organisation have formed 21 such groups to address topics as diverse as intensive English programmes, second language writing, teacher education, materials writing, intercultural communication and social responsibility.

TESOL involves both pedagogical practice and research. As with any other language, teaching English as a second or foreign language involves teaching the forms of the language, (i.e., vocabulary, grammatical structures, pronunciation, etc.), the skills required to use the language (reading, writing, speaking and listening) and various types of metalinguistic knowledge and skills, such as the pragmatic competence involved in selecting the most appropriate way to make a request from a number of possibilities. Courses in general English typically survey those areas broadly, selecting target vocabulary, structures, etc., which are

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appropriate to the learners' level. In addition, more focused teaching addresses areas of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) such as business English, English for academic purposes (EAP) or specific learner needs such as exam preparation.

Teaching English (like any other language) involves the pedagogical skills to plan, deliver and assess learning, so TESOL involves activities such as curriculum design, assessment and materials writing. The last two of these are particularly prominent. Several large international publishers, along with many smaller ones, produce a voluminous selection of textbooks, workbooks, reference books and other materials for learners of English. Many commercial tests of English proficiency are available as well, including the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), both of which are used by universities around the world to assess the suitability of students for study through the medium of English, and the Cambridge Preliminary, First and Advanced exams, which test general English proficiency at various stages of study.

As an area within applied linguistics, research in TESOL is intended to inform and benefit the way the language is taught or learned. Research topics include the forms of instruction which best promote learning; the frequency with which particular linguistic forms occur, as a basis for understanding what needs to be taught; and effective ways of assessing what has been learned. The training of English teachers has also been in focus, including the experiences of teachers in training and the provisions at institutions for their continuing professional development. Another strand of research in TESOL has a focus on the needs and characteristics of the learners, so for instance the particular needs of young learners or adults have been the subject of research. Similarly, a body of work looks at the concerns of learners in a vulnerable position, such as immigrants and refugees. The various types of motivation which learners possess has been the object of a large body of research.

This description of the areas of research and teaching interest which come under the heading of TESOL is far from complete, but it serves to illustrate the breadth, richness and variety of the field. (For a deeper perspective on the kinds of activities which come under the heading of TESOL, useful resources are the tables of contents of two journals published by TESOL, a membership organisation representing the profession. *TESOL Quarterly* has a focus on research issues, while *TESOL Journal* is oriented toward the interests of teachers.)

The development of TESOL

The development of TESOL could in a sense be dated back to the point at which people with another language first had a need to learn English, and this was, according to Howatt (1984), the result of a process in several steps. The first development, starting from the end of the 14th century, was when English began to replace French as the language used in official and business contexts. The result of this trend was that fewer people in England could speak French, and French speakers who wanted to sell to the English found it advantageous to learn English. The 16th century saw the arrival in England of French-speaking refugees. To serve the demands of these groups which now had an incentive to learn English, materials and teachers became available. The end of the 15th century saw the publication of 'double manuals' with content in both French and English, acting as a sort of phrasebook and useful to English people wanting to communicate in French as much as to French speakers wanting to communicate in English. In the mid-to-late 16th century, three language teachers (two with French as a first language and one with Italian) are documented as working in London, teaching English to the refugee community, and the first textbooks for English as a foreign language were published (Howatt 1984: 3–22).

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However, in the sense in which the acronym is usually used 'the emergence of TESOL . . . is firmly located in the mid-twentieth century' (Gray 2016: 82). It was in the period following World War II that the position of English as a global lingua franca was firmly established, leading to the rapid rise, documented above, in the need for people worldwide to learn English. The earliest citation in the Oxford English Dictionary (2017) for TESOL dates back to 1969, and for TEFL and TESL it is 1963 and 1967, respectively.

During this early period the field which came to be called TESOL was being invented, as evidenced by the proceedings of an early conference on University Training and Research in the Teaching of English as a Second/Foreign Language held in 1960 (Wayment 1961). Some of the themes raised at that conference are ones which, as will be seen below, have had perennial relevance for the field. For example, Firth (1961) pointed out the need to investigate the relationship between the rise of English in developing countries and the status and use of the countries' indigenous languages. A representative of the British Council pointed out that while the elite had previously had best access to English, widening access to English could in turn create opportunities which would confer some of the privileges of the elite more widely, so that using English was

> no longer a question of the sons of Maharajahs, but of the sons of the cultivators. People want English because English is the badge of the middle class, the language of good jobs.
> (King 1961: 24)

One presenter invoked a commercial metaphor in which students were the consumers, teachers the retailers and teacher trainers the wholesalers (Catford 1961: 37).

A common theme in a number of papers at this early conference was the role which linguistics departments could play in developing the field of ELT by providing an empirical and scholarly foundation for teaching practice. The novelty of the idea at the time is demonstrated not only by the fact that several linguists felt the need to argue for it, but also by the exceedingly modest estimate of the growth potential:

> If many more than four or five universities turn out to be interested in one way or another in the problem of English language teaching, a plan should be worked out in which these various universities assume responsibility for different tasks.
> (McIntosh 1961: 29)

Current critical issues and topics

Language is so inextricably bound up with what makes us human that it is impossible entirely to separate it from social structures and relationships. The English language in particular is closely associated with a history of colonialism, and as a result 'English language teaching cannot be isolated from the cultural and political contexts in which it is embedded' (Pennycook 1994: 692). Among many members of the TESOL community there is a strong awareness of these issues, and of the need to engage with them and consider their implications for English teaching practice.

Critical approaches to TESOL

A trend dating approximately to the 1990s is important to TESOL; that is, an awareness of issues with social relevance. A critical approach to TESOL is characterised by two key

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features: ‘a focus on the inequitable contexts in which language education takes place’ and ‘a pedagogical focus on changing those conditions’ (Pennycook 1999: 335). Topics meriting a critical approach are any which have the potential to create or inform inequalities, including race, gender, sexuality and sexual orientation, and migration status. The following short descriptions of two studies taking a critical approach to TESOL can illustrate the nature of work in this area.

The first is an ethnographic study (Ibrahim 1999) set in a French-language school in an English-speaking part of Canada. The focus of the study were sixteen Francophone immigrants from African countries, all of whom were multilingual, speaking an African language and English to some extent in addition to French. In this setting – with English as the dominant language of the city in which they were living, and French, the language of instruction in school, associated with its colonial legacy – the opportunities for asymmetries among these languages was substantial. A finding of the study was that the participants were enthusiastic adopters of aspects of Black North American culture, despite having limited contact with Black North Americans. They favoured ‘rap, hip hop, and the corresponding dress’ (p. 360) and their speech included features associated with African American Vernacular English. The significance of this finding is that ‘identity. . . governs what ESL learners acquire and how they acquire it’, leading the author to suggest ‘rap and hip-hop (and Black popular culture in general) as curriculum sites where learning takes place and where identities are invested’. Ibrahim goes on to question

> whose language and identity are we as TESOL professionals teaching and assuming in the classroom if we do not engage rap and hip-hop? That is, whose knowledge is being valorized and legitimated and thus assumed to be worthy of study, and whose knowledge and identity are left in the corridors of our schools?
>
> (Ibrahim 1999: 366)

This study is characteristic of the critical turn in that it is concerned with a fundamental aspect of (in)equality, i.e., whose English is worth learning and teaching, and is also concerned with exerting change, in that an argument for introducing Black culture into the curriculum is presented.

Those themes – social asymmetry and a focus on exerting change – are also present in an account of a critical approach to needs analysis: that is, the process by which courses are planned following an analysis of the pedagogical situation and the outcomes needed by the learners. In this account (Benesch 1996), two traditional instances of needs analysis are presented. They involve describing, but not questioning the demands which the setting makes on learners. These are then contrasted with a set of interventions which Benesch designed to address a problematic situation in her own teaching context. ESL learners faced significant challenges in a psychology course which had an ambitious body of content, much of which was delivered through lectures. As in a more traditional needs approach, Benesch developed some interventions designed to help the learners adapt to the needs of the curriculum, such as working with their note-taking during lectures. However, adopting a critical approach required going further, and this involved creating two additional sorts of interventions ‘which challenged the requirements, and . . . worked outside the requirements to create possibilities for social awareness and action’ (1996: 733). These included counterbalancing the monologic nature of a lecture by creating spaces in which the students could address the teacher, and engaging students in the political processes which had brought about budget cuts, thus leading to more large-group lectures and fewer small-group discussion sessions.

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Because the English language has global reach, so does TESOL, and inevitably in many of the settings in which it is taught, issues of social inequality are present. Language is rarely a neutral choice, and so the questions of whether and how to teach English are related to other questions of societal importance. Advocates of a critical perspective on TESOL seek to foreground those relationships to create positive change.

English as lingua franca

A closely related issue is the impact of the status of English as a lingua franca (ELF), that is, the language used when people needing to communicate do not share a common first language. The rise of ELF has brought with it a number of problems. It is the status of ELF which is the factor underlying the large numbers of people learning English as a second or foreign language, but the movement toward English has entailed a corresponding movement away from other languages. For example, a report by the European Commission (2012) looked at the language skills attained by students in 16 language communities in Europe. In the large majority, English was the primary foreign language in the school system, meaning that more pupils studied English, or studied it for a longer period of time. Not surprisingly, pupils' skills were stronger in the primary foreign language than in the secondary foreign language. In other words, English is studied in European schools in greater numbers, for a longer period of time, and to a higher degree of proficiency than other foreign languages. In this sense, it is fair to speak of other languages competing with English – and usually losing.

Phillipson (1992) distinguishes between different degrees of competition between English and other languages. The movement toward English and away from other foreign languages is an example of what he terms *replacing*. In other settings, English *displaces* other languages in some domains only. For instance, research results are reported in academic journals overwhelmingly in English (and research published in other languages is difficult for other scholars to access, and as a result tends to be used and cited less often). As a consequence of the tendency to use English in academic communication, other languages have either lost, or risk losing, certain features of language, such as a specialised terminology related to an academic area. Domain loss (as this situation is called) is another consequence of ELF.

Other consequences of ELF are felt by individual users. While a common language for communication is of itself beneficial, communicating in a foreign language generally takes more effort, is more time-consuming, and has greater potential to be less effective or satisfying. Even people with strong proficiency in a second language report that they find it difficult to find nuanced forms of expression, or to be spontaneous, or to use and respond to humour in an interaction. As a result, in interactions which involve some people who have English as a first language and others for whom it is a foreign language, the advantage is generally to the former: the native speaker has a better chance of achieving communicative objectives effectively, comfortably and with relatively less effort.

The L1 user of English benefits from an additional advantage as well. The native speaker has traditionally been identified as the standard for what constitutes good use of English (or indeed any other language). In that sense, the ultimate objective of language teaching is often assumed to be to raise the learner's proficiency in the target language as close as possible to that of a native speaker of the language (even though for most learners this is an unrealistic objective; only a small proportion of language learners ever achieve native-like proficiency in the target language). The native-speaker norm has come under sustained criticism from several directions, including from scholars working from a World Englishes perspective (see Bolton, this volume) who point out that the numerous varieties of English spoken in the world

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make it difficult to assign a normative role to a single variety, or a small handful of them. Yet an adherence to the native-speaker norm persists; for example, a recent study showed that students in Hong Kong assigned higher status to native-speaker pronunciation (favouring UK, US and Australian pronunciation, in descending order), while perceiving Hong Kong speakers of English as having higher status than those from the Philippines or mainland China (Chan 2016). In other words, even when the communicative competence of a non-native user of English is unproblematic, the relative judgements about subjective aspects of an interaction tend to be made in favour of the native speaker.

What are the implications of this situation for TESOL? One view is that these inequalities are the inevitable consequence of the use of any lingua franca – some people will always be more skilled in the language than others – but that they are outweighed by the benefits of having a lingua franca. In any event, the status of English as a world language is not a situation created by the field of TESOL; in fact the opposite is closer to the truth. From this pragmatic perspective it has also been suggested that whether the advantages outweigh the costs or not, the status of English is firmly entrenched, and therefore is a reality which cannot be altered and must be accepted.

An alternative position is that because the potential for these inequities is always present, the TESOL community has a responsibility to consider whether to teach English, how to teach it, and which English(es) to teach. Awareness of these critical issues can promote beneficial change. Informed and thoughtful choices can be made about which materials and methods to use in order to bring a diversity of voices into the classroom. Recognising the diversity of Englishes used in the world and bringing them into the TESOL classroom has the potential not only to remove the unrealistic model of the native speaker as the sole target of instruction, but also to tap into the resources which English language learners have as multilinguals. In other words, TESOL can deliver

> a message of hope for students. . . . do not see yourselves as failures always trying to be like native speakers; see yourselves as successes, achieving things as L2 users that are out of the reach of monolinguals.
>
> (Cook 2016: 187–188)

Debates in TESOL

In its relatively short history over the post-World War II period, two issues have been perennial sources of debate: the question of who teaches TESOL, and the related matter of TESOL as a commercial enterprise.

The teachers of TESOL

As noted above, the native-speaker norm has been criticised from several perspectives but it has also proven to have considerable sticking power. Native-speaker status frequently plays an important, indeed sometimes decisive, role in the recruitment of English teachers. Like teachers of all languages, English teachers require a range of skills and knowledge, and one which is essential is the ability to use the target language well. To the extent that using English 'well' has frequently been construed to mean using it like a native speaker, there has been a tendency to view native speakers of English as better equipped to teach the language than non-native speakers. Indeed, a belief in the native-speaker norm is so deeply entrenched that the preference for first-language users of English has frequently gone beyond the qualification

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'all other things being equal;' it is not unusual for a native English speaker with few qualifications in language teaching (or none at all) to be selected for a teaching position in preference to another candidate with superior teaching credentials but who is a second-language user of English.

Many TESOL professionals have taken an activist stance, challenging this state of affairs and working for more equitable hiring practices. A body of scholarly literature supports efforts to challenge the prioritising of native speakers. Nonetheless, it remains common, as this vignette illustrates:

> One of my students from a Southeast Asian nation came to my office on the day of her graduation. On a day when she should be full of joy and laughter, she was crying. Instead of rejoicing at the completion of her studies, she was regretting it because she realized that the time had come for her to go home and face the ground reality there. She was one of my best students, full of potential, but still was afraid to return home because English language teaching in her country is the proud privilege of expatriates from the UK and the US. According to her, it is difficult for even well-qualified citizens with foreign degrees to compete with expatriates, and if they do manage to get a job at an institution of their liking, their salary and service conditions are not on par with those of the expatriates, nor do they enjoy the same respect and recognition accorded to native speakers. They are treated as second-class citizens in their native land. I fully understood what my student was saying about her country because, just a few months before her graduation, I was in her country to give a keynote address at a conference. On the first day, just before my talk, there was a function to inaugurate the conference. Sharing the stage with me and other invited speakers were nearly half a dozen office bearers of the association that organized the conference. I looked around—all expatriates, not a single local professional on the stage. The non-natives were, of course, sitting in the audience. It was apparent that they were not running the show in their own country.
>
> (Kumaravadivelu 2016: 68–69)

If native speaker status is not a necessary part of the skill set of an English teacher, what is? Good knowledge of the language is essential, but it must be complemented by metalinguistic knowledge. So, for example, an English teacher needs a good vocabulary, but also an awareness of which vocabulary items are very common, and therefore suitable to introduce to elementary learners, and which are less common and may need to be explained if elementary learners encounter them. Similarly, the fact that 'hook,' meaning a kind of blow in boxing, is related by metonymic association to the physical object called a hook is not something which necessarily needs to be presented to a group of learners in explaining the term, but a teacher who can access that and other semantic relationships has more tools available for understanding what learners need to know about the word and for finding effective ways of presenting it to them. A good foundation in English linguistics is therefore indispensable for an English language teacher. Valuable tools for a teacher include the descriptive tools of syntax, semantics and phonetics and phonology, and approaches to examining language such as discourse analysis and corpus linguistics.

Teachers also need a grounding in how languages are learned. Although a deep understanding of the processes of second-language acquisition is not necessary to be effective in the classroom, such an understanding can often be a valuable resource in making principled pedagogical decisions about what content to introduce, when to introduce it, and how to follow up effectively to consolidate learning.

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A related skill set is the ability to manage learning effectively in the classroom and beyond. To keep learners engaged and motivated, teachers need to have a wide range of teaching and learning activities in their tool boxes. Pedagogical skills are also needed outside of the classroom, in planning curriculum, course content and learning objectives, for example, and in designing assessment activities which accurately measure students' attainment of the learning objectives.

In other words, as a discipline within applied linguistics, TESOL is situated at the point at which English studies intersects with applied linguistics, and teachers need skills and knowledge from both domains. This suggests that institutions which provide instruction in TESOL should be highly attuned to recruiting staff with strong backgrounds in both these areas, and promoting their continuing professional development. This, however, is not always the case (e.g., Crookes 1997), and one reason for that is that the salaries which well qualified teachers command are not compatible with the budgetary constraints – or the profit imperative – which is associated with much TESOL instruction.

TESOL as an industry

ELT is big business, and the speed with which TESOL has become such a large enterprise is particularly remarkable. As noted above, as recently as 1961 there was speculation about whether as many as four or five universities in the UK would be interested in training English teachers (McIntosh 1961). Within a very short time, that cautious speculation was shown to be a wild underestimate. As of 2016, the British Council's website listed approximately 40 universities in the UK alone offering degrees in teaching English as a second or foreign language. This large body of institutions preparing teachers is explained by a commensurately large number of courses needing to be staffed: the same website listed 352 universities, language schools or other institutions in the UK offering general English courses. While large, this figure also underestimates the amount of ELT as it does not account for teaching happening on specialised courses, at institutions which are not listed by the British Council, one-on-one lessons provided by individuals not affiliated with an educational institution, etc.

It would be difficult if not impossible to produce similar, accurate figures for the rest of the world, but the situation in the UK is indicative of the fact that TESOL is a large industry, and that is hardly surprising; the estimate of 1.66 billion people who use English as a second or foreign language given at the beginning of this chapter is also an estimate of the number of people who receive, or have received, tuition in English.

Nor does the TESOL industry consist solely of the provision of instruction: a wealth of related products and services exist as well. ELT-related publications are a significant source of revenue for several large international publishers and innumerable smaller ones. For example, the Cambridge University Press ELT catalogue for 2016 (n.d.) was 104 pages long. Its offerings included textbooks for learners ranging in age from pre-primary school to adults; graded readers; exam preparation guides; workbooks for practicing grammar, vocabulary, listening skills, pronunciation, etc.; and professional literature for teachers. According to the annual report of another of the big publishers, English course materials generated £185 million in revenue for the company in 2015 (Pearson 2016).

English language testing is another profitable area of TESOL. Learners frequently need or want to produce an assessment of their English language proficiency, either for a specific purpose, such as showing they meet the entry requirements for a university course, or generally in order to add specificity to a skill listed on a curriculum vitae. A number of organisations administer commercial tests designed to provide scores which allow the relative

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abilities of test-takers to be compared and benchmarked against statements about what someone with a stated proficiency level can do. Two tests which are used extensively for university admissions are TOEFL and IELTS. Suites of exams like the Cambridge Preliminary, First and Advanced provide tests suitable for a broad range of learner levels. According to the TOEFL website, over 30 million people have taken the TOEFL, and the fee, which varies from one testing centre to another, is around $200, giving an indication of the scale of the revenues generated by English language testing (ETS n.d.).

Unsurprisingly, the major publishers and testing organisations in ELT are based predominantly in English-speaking countries (especially the UK, the US and Australia), and these are also popular destinations for studying English, and popular sources of English teachers. At one level this is unremarkable; Germany is a likely place to look for German textbooks, and France for French textbooks. However, the sheer scope of TESOL means that English is a particularly valuable commodity which is consumed by the entire world, but controlled primarily by just a few countries.

Future directions

Looking to the future, three issues are likely to play a prominent role in the development of TESOL: the way that the use of educational technology is incorporated into TESOL; the extent to which English continues to maintain a prominent status vis à vis other languages; and implications of ELF.

Technology and TESOL

Technological developments have wrought sweeping changes on the educational landscape. Virtually all subjects have felt the impact of these, and TESOL is no exception. Course platforms enable teachers to provide large amounts of supplementary materials and activities to students, including materials created and hosted by other educational institutions, and to engage and interact with students outside of lessons. In the classroom, apps allow students to participate in activities, polls or assessments via their own mobile devices. The development of massive open online courses (MOOCs) means that the shape of the classroom itself is changing; students can attend lectures from all parts of the world. Online courses, such as Duolingo's (n.d) suite of language courses, provide instruction and practice whenever and wherever the learner wants them. Language learning in particular requires a great deal of exposure and practice, and the internet provides this to an extent which language learners in earlier centuries could not imagine. Films, television programmes, books and music can be streamed online or downloaded, allowing varied forms of exposure to the target language. Social media platforms permit interaction in English; in other words, truly authentic communicative activities.

Some technological innovations have now been part of language learning for a considerable time, and have become thoroughly integrated into teaching practice, at least in those parts of the world fortunate enough to have access to them. However, the speed with which innovations occur mean that this situation is subject to change. In a review of technology in language teaching published in 2006, Kern observed that

> the rapid convergence of functionality across digital devices, and our growing reliance on such devices for communication, means we may soon need to refer broadly to information and communication technologies rather than specifically to computers in our research.
>
> (Kern 2006: 185)

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It took very little time for that tentative prediction to be realised, and tablets and mobile phones are now frequently used for instructional purposes, and indeed are the devices of preference to a younger generation who see computers as archaic. The potential of future technological developments to change TESOL is considerable.

Will English retain its dominance?

The crucial element sustaining the large TESOL industry described above is the status of English as the pre-eminent global lingua franca, and some question how long English will retain that status. It is easy to find predictions of other languages 'overtaking' English on the basis of the number of speakers they have and are projected to have in the future. Based on figures from the Ethnologue website (Lewis et al. 2016), the 339 million first-language users of English are dramatically outnumbered by the 1,302 million who speak Chinese. Spanish, with 427 million speakers, is also ahead of English, and Arabic, with 267 million, is not far behind.

However, the factors which make it likely that a language will achieve global reach and lingua franca status go beyond the number of people who use it. Commercial importance is another factor, and is part of the reason for Chinese frequently being named as the language most likely to usurp the position of English. The Chinese population is not only large, it has a growing middle class with disposable income; in other words, it has a population of consumers. Much as the French-speaking merchants of the 16th century found it expeditious to be able to communicate with their English customers in English, the desire to tap into the Chinese consumer market may favour those who can communicate in Chinese, thus setting up a situation which could lead to a demand for Chinese speakers, and making Chinese a popular language to learn – possibly more popular than English.

While the logic of this scenario is clear, commercial strength is also clearly not the only driver behind the creation of a world language, as evidenced by the position of Germany as an economic force within Europe in the last part of the 20th century, precisely the time period when the number of pupils studying German in school was decreasing sharply.

If the number of people wishing to learn English were to drop dramatically in favour of another language, that would have an indelible impact on TESOL, but whether this will happen, or what the pace of such a change would be, are at present unanswerable questions.

Will ELF change English?

For the foreseeable future then, English will continue to be widely used around the world. The majority of people who use English in their daily interactions will continue to be those who have a different first language. As the previous section on ELF noted, this sometimes disadvantages L2 users of English. On the other hand, given the number of second-language English speakers, communication in English is frequently between speakers of a variety of languages other than English. In such situations, the ability to make oneself understood and negotiate meaning may advantage the L2 speaker. This has led those who work from an ELF perspective to take the view that it is desirable to distinguish between non-standard features in the English of second-language users which disrupt communication and those which do not. It is those which disrupt communication that become the focus of teaching. This is part of the rationale for denying the native speaker a privileged status: there are many differences between native and non-native speakers of English, but not all of the differences should be regarded as problematic. From this perspective there is a case to be made for cultivating an acceptance of the features of non-native speaker English, such as the omission of the final 's'

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on third-person singular verbs in the present, or treatment of the countability of nouns. If those features are accepted, then it is possible that as part of the natural process of language change, they may come to be regarded as standard. In other words, there is an argument that the use of English by speakers of other languages may lead to changes in the language itself.

Whether this will come to pass is difficult to predict (for a discussion, see MacKenzie 2015). However, the prospect raises important questions for TESOL: should a focus on accuracy (e.g., standard grammatical forms, word choice, pronunciation) be abandoned in favour of an emphasis on communicative competence? Should textbooks represent non-native usage of English, on the basis that it is most common? Is it meaningful to speak of a non-native variety of English? These are questions which closely relate to key issues in sociolinguistics. Regardless of the answers which are ultimately found for them, the fact that they are being asked opens up an opportunity for TESOL to engage with and feed back into the sociolinguistic curriculum and research agenda, thus allowing TESOL to inform its parent discipline.

In just over half a century, TESOL has established itself, claimed a place within applied linguistics and English language studies, and seen rapid expansion and a degree of commercial impact which is atypical of language teaching generally. It has found itself at the heart of pressing questions about colonialism and its aftermath, globalisation and social equality, and is now positioned to observe the next stage in the development of the English language. The next half century of TESOL promises to be as eventful as the first.

Further reading

Jenkins, J. (2007) *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This book provides an in-depth treatment of issues relating to the use of ELF, which, as discussed above, have significant implications for TESOL.

Nunan, D. (2015) *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: An Introduction*. London: Routledge. This volume, which is aimed at future teachers of English, provides an introduction to key topics in TESOL.

Pennycook, A. (ed.) (1999) 'Special Issue on Critical Issues in TESOL', *TESOL Quarterly* 33 (3). This special issue features articles investigating some of the critical issues described above, and contains an introduction which orients the reader to the critical perspective on TESOL.

Phillipson, R. (1992) *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This book sets the teaching and learning of English, in the context of the dominant status of the English language around the world.

Snow, D. B. (2007) *From Language Learner to Language Teacher: An Introduction to Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). This volume provides a resource for English language teachers who have another first language than English.

Related topics

- English and colonialism
- World Englishes: disciplinary debates and future directions
- The relevance of English language studies in higher education
- Literacy in English: literacies in Englishes.

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