

Reforming the Assessment Criteria of Speaking Skill in TEFL: The Implications of World English(es)

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Abstract

Soon after Kachru (1985) promoted the notion of the World of English(es) through his 'inner-outer-expanding circle' principle, the public has widely recognized that the number of English non-native speakers has noticeably surpassed its native speakers. Such a phenomenon has led English learners of culturally and linguistically diverse societies to acquire sufficient oral proficiencies yet deemed as deviations of 'standard' English, supposing that their accents are phonologically inaccurate (this is to say, strange, foreign, and non-standard). Universal recognition upon the trend of Global English (Graddol, 2006) is, paradoxically, not followed by the practitioners' pedagogical breakthrough to de-value the 'nativeness' criterion in assessing the students' oral proficiency. Many scoring rubrics, such as those proposed by Harris (1990), Ur (1996), and Brown (2004), still consider foreign / mother-tongue accent, which is actually an inevitable implication of World of English(es) trend and thus worth-tolerating, as interfering factors hindering oral accuracy. This paper, therefore, aims to provide a critical insight upon oral proficiency assessment by redefining the conventional concept of 'accuracy' and reviewing some principles to reformulate alternative scoring criteria which assure phonological diversity for successful communication in the World of English(es). It seeks to propose a speaking assessment rubric which emphasizes on "understandability" of utterance instead of holding tightly the traditional view upon single phonological / pronunciation accuracy as maintained by the proponent of standard English.

Background of the Issue

As an international language (Broughton et.al, 1980), English is nowadays used by countless people in the world as their global communication means. Therefore, the rise of English speaking country has been steeply increasing, in which it makes the position of the inner circle (native speakers) is slowly marginalized by the existence of the outer and expanding circle (Kachru, 1985). This situation has the nativized variety of English growing greater and greater (Brown, 2000).

Given this fact, what is meant by nativeness of English is then slowly triggering countless questions and an endless debate, whether it should be impersonating the natives or having their own standard to measure their accuracy, especially the oral accuracy standardized toward the EFL learners. Considering that the non-native speakers must have the sufficient comprehension on L1 (Yule, 2004, Fromkin et.al. 2011) and be rich of countless language features which might be totally different from English, the sole native-likeness norms to standardize their oral proficiency is regarded as a not-fairly-wise-accomplishment.

In point of fact, Brown (2000) has also stated that the existence of Englishes highly needs the openness and acceptance of the prevailing variety of English in use in the country where you are teaching. It, of course, creates an idea that English as a language does not necessarily lie on the countries like UK, US, and New Zealand, in term of its cultural identity. Additionally, the division between native and non-native speakers itself has been criticized for creating inequality by positioning the natives as the authoritative one over non-natives (Loisa, 2014).

However, the dependence "syndrome" of native norms mostly attacks those who are in the expanding circle or the foreign language speakers (Kachru, 1992). They are seemingly still haunted by the "superiority" of native speakers' accents. Non-native English use is seen as incorrect and substandard (Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011). Mostly they think on their non-native accent as the negative thing. Several scoring rubrics, such as those which belong to Harris (1990), Ur (1991), and Brown (2000) are inevitably still viewing the mother tongue accent as the interfering factor hampering oral accuracy.