

**In the Name of God, the Compassionate,
the Merciful**



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Subject :

**A Comparative Study of Iranian EFL Teachers and
Learners' Perspectives on World Englishes**

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Dedication

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Abstract

The purpose of this comparative mixed methods research study is twofold. First, explore Iranian EFL teachers and learners' perspectives on World Englishes (WEs), i.e. varieties of English in different regions of the world. Second, detect EFL teachers and learners' reasons for their perspectives. In the past studies done on WEs, researchers have failed to comparatively study teachers and learners' perspectives on WEs. The study, thus, aims to shed more light on the two groups' perspectives on varieties of WEs. Quantitatively, the study tries to investigate the participants' preference for native or nonnative varieties and their tendency towards a localized variety of English in the context of Iran. Qualitatively, the study seeks to detect the participants' reasons for their perspectives. For collecting data, the study draws on quantitative survey questionnaire and then qualitative interview. To this end, the researcher selects 200 EFL teachers and learners, using convenience sampling, to fill the world Englishes survey. Qualitative data are gathered through focus group interviews of 10 participants in order to help explain and also triangulate the initial quantitative results. The analysis of the data is done through *t*-test and also Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is used for checking the normality of the data. On the basis of the analyses of the survey questionnaire data, the study reveals that neither Iranian EFL teachers nor learners hold a positive perspective on World Englishes in general and Iranian English in particular, that is, they still believe in native English. Regarding teachers and learners' reasons for their perspectives, two main reasons emerge from content analysis of the interview dialogues. One reason is the importance of originality and prestige that participants attach to native varieties of English, especially American and British English. Another reason is the importance of Iranian identity, i.e. although Iranian EFL teachers and learners like to speak English like native speakers, they want to be identified as Iranian.

Keywords: Perspectives, World Englishes, Teachers' Perspectives, Learners' Perspectives

CHAPTER I

Background and Purpose

1.1 Introduction

World Englishes (henceforth WEs) are regionally distinct varieties of English that began to emerge in countries, often colonies, where there has been “a long history of English being widely used in education, commerce, and government” (Celce-Murcia, 2014, p. 63). English language is no longer limited to English speaking countries, so Crystal (2003) calls it the world’s leading ‘global language’ whose importance and linguistic domination in world affairs is felt in the four corners of the world. Today, there are several varieties of English spoken around the world and this signals the fact that British English is no longer considered the only variety of the language to be taught and learned.

The global diffusion of English created two main varieties of English, namely: native and non-native. These native and nonnative varieties have undergone changes in different ways. Kachru (1992) argues that changes in English are ‘contact-induced’ or ‘internally induced’ ; for example, nonnative varieties experience changes by contact with indigenous languages while native ones experience changes internally. As a result of the emergence of these large number of different varieties, each with its salient linguistic features such as phonology, lexis, syntax, and discourse pragmatics, scholars preferred to use the

plural form ‘Englishes’ instead of the singular form ‘English’. Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008) state that the plural form ‘Englishes’ is to emphasize both the obvious diversity in the English language and the centrifugal tendency among different varieties of the language.

In effect, ELT has gone, and still is going, beyond the previously-held dichotomy of ESL and EFL framework (Celce-Murcia, 2014). Kachru (1985), an outstanding figure in World Englishes studies, was among the first who went beyond such a dichotomy and thus classified varieties of English into a new framework known as ‘three circles of English’. This model includes the inner circle for countries where English is spoken as a native language, the outer circle for countries where English is spoken as a second language, and the expanding circle for countries where English is spoken as a foreign language. Kachru’s three circles model has become the standard framework of World Englishes studies and represents the types of spread and the functional allocation of English language in diverse sociocultural contexts (Jenkins, 2009).

Recently, scholars (e.g., Celce-Murcia, 2014; Kang, 2015) have proposed that the concept of WEs should be integrated into English language teaching practices because speakers from all three circles are exposed to a collage of native and nonnative varieties of English. Kachru (2005, as cited in Celce-Murcia, 2014, p. 67) states that English learners in all three circles should equip and educate themselves about taking advantage of their English for

communication and mutual intelligibility. English teachers, as the agents of change, can play a great role in making their learners aware of the numerous varieties that exist in English internationally. According to McKay (2002), English language teachers should have a glocal approach when teaching English in the context of WEs, that is, they should think globally but act locally.

Nevertheless, research has shown that ESL or EFL teachers and learners still tend to favor native models of inner circle Englishes, such as American English or British English (e.g., Friedrich, 2000; Timmis, 2002; Li, 2009). Moreover, in a study of Iranian EFL learners, Pishghadam and Sabouri (2011) found that the majority of learners still believe in a world English than World Englishes. Teachers may have difficulty in teaching different varieties of English and learners also “may experience difficulty by having different varieties of English available to them” (Kang, 2015, p. 60). Thus, empirical understanding of how teachers and learners perceive teaching models and native and nonnative varieties in the context of WEs is needed. The present study investigates the perspectives of Iranian EFL teachers and learners towards WEs and their preferences for a particular variety and makes suggestions for stakeholders to incorporate the concept of WEs in the process of English language teaching.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Incorporating the concept of WEs in classroom teachings is drawing increased attention among ELT scholars and researchers. Now that there exists an increasingly large number of different varieties of English and the widely accepted fact that English is no longer the sole property of inner circle countries (Kirkpatrick, 2008), studies addressing teachers and learners' perspectives regarding WEs are warranted. The intent of this study, therefore, is to comparatively investigate Iranian EFL teachers and learners' perspectives towards regionally distinct varieties of English. Although some studies have surveyed EFL learners' attitudes toward different varieties of English (e.g., Friedrich, 2000; Timmis, 2002; Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2000), there have been very few research studies on EFL teachers' perspectives toward WEs. English teachers can have a significant role in motivating and making their learners aware of the many varieties of English being used in the world. Thus, there is a research need for more information on teachers' perspectives to plug the gap in the literature.

In addition, the number of research studies on WEs in Iran, as an expanding circle country, can be counted on the fingers of one hand (e.g., Pishghadam & Sabouri, 2011). Sometimes it is necessary to extend past research by simply conducting further research at a deeper level to enrich the existing knowledge about the topic (Creswell, 2012). Hence, the present study

sheds light on what Iranian EFL teachers and learners think of WEs. Further, all the studies conducted on teachers and learners' perspectives have been either qualitative or quantitative and there has been no comparative research study on learners' perspectives towards WEs versus teachers'. In the interest of examining the topic more thoroughly from the viewpoint of the two groups and answering the research questions, the researcher, therefore, conducts a comparative mixed methods design.

The audiences that will benefit from the study of these problems are educational practitioners, syllabus designers, English teachers and learners. Educational practitioners can sensitize teachers and learners to the variation of English language. Syllabus designers can include elements of other varieties of English so that learners get more familiarized with these varieties of English. Teachers can help their learners to hold a positive perspective towards different varieties of English.

1.3 Significance of the Study

According to Friedrich (2000), attitude studies provide a better understanding of sociolinguistic phenomenon since “they raise awareness to the fact that when someone learns a language, they are dealing with more than a set of formal features; they are dealing with feelings, stereotypes, expectations and prejudices” (p. 222). The present study; therefore, tries to investigate the perspectives of Iranian EFL teachers and learners on World Englishes in order

to raise such awareness. Lewis (1981) asserts that teachers and administrators need to be aware of the attitudes towards English varieties in order to improve curriculum design and take actions to address any problem they might have. This study is significant in several ways. First of all, this study will not only contribute to a better understanding of World Englishes from Iranian EFL teachers and learners' points of view but also provide a broader view of varieties of WEs. Secondly, the information provided by this research can be significant to teachers and stakeholders in order to choose a particular variety as a teaching model and implement curriculum and syllabus design successfully. Thirdly, the proposed study will identify areas where future research is needed and provide a basis for the further study of varieties of WEs.

1.4 Research Questions

This research study aims at answering the following questions:

- 1- What are EFL teachers' perspectives on World Englishes?
- 2- What are EFL learners' perspectives on World Englishes?
- 3- What are the similarities and differences between EFL teachers and learners' perspectives on World Englishes?
- 4- What are the EFL teachers and learners' reasons for their perspectives?

1.5 Hypothesis

No early hypothesis is formulated. The main format of this study is a mixed methods one; therefore, the researcher would be open to any probable

result and should not take a hypothesis in mind as it is done in quantitative formats of study. In other words, the investigator do not make predictions about the findings beforehand.

1.6 Definition of the Key Terms

Perspective:

Perspective as defined by George and Douglas (2004), is a set of assumptions about reality that underlies the questions we ask and the kinds of answers we arrive at as a result. Perspectives are important because the underlying assumptions direct our attention and provide frameworks for interpreting what we observe.

In this study perspective was operationally defined and measured through participants' responses to the items of an attitude questionnaire containing statements about World Englishes on a 5-point Likert scale to indicate a positive or negative selection.

Learners and Teachers' Perspectives:

In the present study learners and teachers' perspectives are tapped by administering a questionnaire about world Englishes. Moreover, interviews will also be used to obtain a more comprehensive view in this regard.

World Englishes:

World Englishes is defined by Celce-Murcia (2014) as “regionally distinct varieties of English that have arisen in areas of Asia, Africa, and Oceania, where there is a long (often colonial) history of English being widely used in education, commerce, and government” (p. 63). World Englishes refers to the different varieties of English used in diverse sociolinguistic contexts such as America, Britain, India, Singapore, West African, China, and Korea.

1.7 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The current study suffered a number of limitations or weaknesses that would need to be addressed so that they may have affected the results. The first limitation was the number of participants ($n = 200$) in the questionnaire survey. The researcher was not able to select as large a sample as possible from the population because of such factors as lack of accessibility, being time-consuming and vast expense. There were also fewer participants in the focused group interviews than expected: the data set was limited to only five participants in each group. Having a larger number of participants in the questionnaire survey and in the focus group interviews would have helped make more reliable generalizations. As the result of the limited number of participants, the generalizability of the findings to the whole target population of Iranian teachers and learners should be done with caution. The next limitation to consider was the fact that the study lacked the observation element which allows the researchers to see the actual behavior of the participants towards different

varieties of English and “to record information as it occurs in a setting” (Creswell, 2012).

Another limitation was concerning the survey questionnaire. In fact, as Dörnyei (2003) points out, questionnaires are not a reliable research instrument and sometimes they may produce unreliable and invalid data. Since people often attempt to portray an ideal picture of themselves when filling in self-completed questionnaires, they do not always provide true answers about their attitudes. Therefore, the researcher of the present study can not tell how truthful the respondents were. Another common problem concerning the questionnaires is related to the *Halo effect*, which refers to the human inclination towards overgeneralization. Dörnyei (2003) states that “ If our overall impression of a person or a topic is positive, we may be disinclined to say anything less than positive about them even if it comes to specific details.” (p.13). Therefore, the researcher of the current study can not guarantee if the respondents have not been affected by the Halo effect.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical and empirical framework for the study by reviewing current literature on World Englishes and on teachers and learners' perspectives towards WEs. In the current literature, some key issues described and discussed in World Englishes (WEs) studies, and of concern to the present study will be presented as follows. First, a brief background of the expression "World Englishes" and various classifications or models of World Englishes proposed by certain Scholars will be discussed. Second, the developmental cycles of new varieties of English which are closely linked to models of World Englishes will be reviewed. Third approaches to World Englishes will be discussed. Finally, native vs. non-native debate will be discussed.

The strategy used for searching the literature comprised of investigating sources on mainstream teachers and learners' perceptions of World Englishes and different varieties of English. Journal articles and books available through online libraries, Cambridge and Routledge materials, as well as current home and university library resources were explored to find information on the topic. In searching the literature on the research topic, terms used were English as an international language, English as a lingua franca, English as a global language,

World Englishes, English as a native language, English as a second language, English as a foreign language, regional Englishes, teachers and learners' perception of World Englishes and of varieties of English.

2.2 World Englishes

The term “World Englishes” gained wide recognition in the mid-1980s following the two conferences held on English as a world language in 1978 at the East-West Center in Hawaii and at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Smith, 1981). Kachru (1992) points out the main topics of the conference as the description of varieties of English, the sociopolitical contexts of English in the world, the use of English in previous Anglophone colonies, and the processes of ‘nativization’ and ‘acculturation’ in such societies. Kachru justifies the adoption of this expression:

The term symbolizes the functional and formal variations, divergent sociolinguistic contexts, ranges and varieties of English in creativity, and various types of acculturation in parts of the Western and non-Western world. This concept emphasizes “WE-ness,” and not the dichotomy between us and them (the native and non-native users). (Kachru, 1992, p. 2)

Bolton (2006) postulates a range of meanings and interpretations for the concept of World Englishes. These includes the following “1) perhaps, it refers to a wide range of differing approaches to the description and analysis of