Chapter 26

Transdisciplinary Approach to Linguistic Diversity: Can We Co-Exist Without “One English”?

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author shows the reality of English. Some light is shed on the features of today’s English. Then, the debate between monolithic standard and pluralist perspective is presented. The linguistic diversity of English is introduced. Based on this diversity, the aim of the study is to summarize the major studies about pedagogy for English as an international language (EIL). In concluding, the transdisciplinary approach is defined, and some ideas are given about how to implement this approach to unify the linguistic diversity of English.

INTRODUCTION

The global reality increases diversity. Diversity thus becomes an essential characteristic of today’s education. Diversity affects the classroom environment and also questions on how to foster inclusive approach for multiplicity. At the linguistic level, thanks to the spread of English, there have emerged different varieties of English. This plural English shows its multilingual reality and asks for multilingual approach to include all its varieties.

There is a pressing need for the transdisciplinarity approach to study global English. “English is not monolith but a catchall category for all its varieties” (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2010, p. 370). Pennycook (2007) argues that “we need to understand how English is involved in global flows of culture and knowledge, how English is used and appropriated by users of English around the world, how English colludes with multiple domains of globalization” (p. 19). This colored English reflects its global cultural diversity. English becomes the outcome of different cultures.

This chapter is an attempt to give an overview of the features of today’s English. It then presents the debate between proponents of pluralism and supporters of Standard English. The next part deals with...
the linguistic diversity of English and the pedagogical ways to implement this diversity. It also aims to explore approaches to cultural diversity in wide varieties of English. Throughout the chapter, the author seeks to answer some questions revolving around the diversity of English. An argument is made for a transdisciplinary approach to the study of the globalization of English and the need for inclusive approach of multiple experiences that does not neglect difference.

FEATURES OF TODAY’S ENGLISH

Today’s English has changed. It becomes a global or an international language. Crystal (2003) declares that English is “a language [that] achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country” (p. 3). This language “belongs to all people who speak it, whether native or non-native, whether ESL or EFL, whether standard or non-standard” (Norton, 1997, p. 427). Similarly, Smith (1976) states that “It [English] is yours (no matter who you are) as much as it is mine (no matter who I am). We may use it for different purposes and for different lengths of time on different occasions, but nonetheless it belongs to all of us” (p. 39). There is a shift from a monocentric view of English as a foreign language (EFL) to a pluricentric view of English as an International Language (EIL).

Halliday, MacIntosh & Strevens (1964) assert that:

*English is no longer the possession of the British, or even the British and the Americans, but an international language which increasing numbers of people adopt for at least some of their purposes. […] In West Africa, in the West Indies, and in Pakistan and India […] it is no longer accepted by the majority that the English of England, with RP as its accent, are the only possible models of English to be set before the young […] this one language, English, exists in an increasingly large number of different varieties. (p. 293)*

Graddol (2006) refers to English as “a new phenomenon” (p. 11). It is multiple English which Kachru names “World Englishes”. WEs is defined as “indigenous, nativised varieties that have developed around the world and that reflect the cultural and pragmatic norms of their speakers” (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 3). According to Mackay (2002), EIL is “a language of wider communication both among individuals from different countries and between individuals from one country” (p. 5). WEs represents “the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition, and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages” (Kachru, 1985, p. 12).

English becomes a semi-official language in more than 60 countries (Crystal, 2003, p. 1). Based on this view, there is a belief that the difference between native and non-native speakers becomes irrelevant. Some sociolinguists hold this view. Ferguson (1992), for instance, states that:

*Some languages … spread widely as lingua franca between speakers of different languages or serve as languages of special functions in communities of non-native speakers; this kind of language use merits the attention of linguists as much as do the more traditional objects of research. In fact, the whole mystique of native speaker and mother tongue should probably be quietly dropped from the linguists’ set of professional myths about language. (p. xiii)*