

Teaching English as Lingua Franca or as Mainstream Standard English? Voices from Malaysia Generation Y

国際共通語として、または標準英語としての英語教育：
マレーシアのジェネレーション Y からの声

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the stance of Malaysia Generation Y towards the ideology of Teaching English as Standard English and Teaching English as Lingua Franca and the justifications of such stance. A total of 30 respondents (15 males; 15 females), age ranges from 25 to 40 years old (mean age: 34.2) took part in this study. Simplified layperson definition of Standard English (SE) and English as Lingua Franca (ELF) were given to respondents in both verbal and written form to ensure clarity and sufficient basic level of understanding of these two key terms. Then, respondents were given a link to access to an online survey form to solicit their responses to two questions: (1) Between SE and ELF, which do you think is more prestigious? Why? (2) If you have school-going children of your own, would you prefer that they learn to communicate in SE only, or ELF only? Why? Results showed inclination towards mainstream SE owing to the deeply rooted concept to regard SE as accurate and proper variety of English. (*keywords: Standard English, English as Lingua Franca*)

Introduction

English is being used in various communicative purposes in different contexts. It is a global lingua franca which is used by speakers of different mother tongue and cultural background. Globalization and the rapid development of internet and technology making English inevitable in our daily life. Since 1957, the year Malaysia attained its independence from the British government, English education has gone through vast changes. Although Malay is the national and official language of Malaysia, English is still playing an important role as a second language. Besides, English has also become an integral part of the daily lives in many Malaysians. There are several English national daily newspapers namely The Star, The Sun, New Straits Times, and Malay Mail. There are also English language national commercial

broadcasting radio stations such as Hitz, Mix, and Fly FM. Although Malaysia does not have English only television station, currently, considerably high number of English programmes are being aired by television stations such as TV1, TV2, TV3, TV9 and Astro Awani.

Crystal (2008) mentioned that as of 2003, the total number of non-native English speakers has already outnumbered the native English speakers by a ratio of three to one. In view of such situation, it is the non-native speakers of English who will be in control of how English is being used, maintained and changed in the future (Seidlhofer, 2003). The increasing importance of regional and local varieties of English has given various implications for English teaching and learning. First and foremost, it raises a number of questions with regard to how English should be taught and learned. Is it still relevant to teach only the Standard English (SE) to students, since there are more non-native speakers than native speakers of English?

Standard English (SE)

Jenkins (2015) synthesized numerous definitions of Standard English (SE) from various scholars and concluded that all these definitions were referred to the native variety of Englishes or the Inner Circle Englishes. SE was defined by Jenkins as the variety of English language that is promoted through formal education, related to educated upper middle class and it is “standard” in terms of grammar and vocabulary, but not accent, although McArthur (2002) associated accent to Received Pronunciation (RP) as in Queen's English, King's English, Oxford English and BBC English. Ishikawa (2016) commented on the SE ideology as the global use of Standard ENL (English as Native Language). According to Seidlhofer (2011), the SE Ideology suggested that the national standard language (which means the Standard English of the inner circle) should be considered as the privileged variety of English and thus should be accepted worldwide. (as cited in Ishikawa, 2016). Jenkins (2007) suggested that SE of the Inner Circle is often used as benchmark for accuracy in education and for gatekeeping purposes (as cited in Ishikawa, 2016). To sum up, SE can be defined as a variety of English dialect which has received the most prestigious status in the geographic region where it is spoken through education in a formal setting. It has standard grammar and vocabulary, but it is not limited to only one accent and can be spoken in formal, neutral or informal styles.

English as Lingua Franca (ELF)

Jenkins (2015) defined English as Lingua Franca (EFL) as “*English as it is used as a contact language among speakers from different first language*” (pp. 44). Mauranen (2003) called it a “*vehicular language*” which is spoken by people who do not have a shared native language. It is part of the World

Englishes (WE) paradigm, a version of English with the most extensive usage worldwide at present, the “*fluid and flexible kinds of English use that transcend geographical boundaries*” (Seidlhofer, 2001 as cited in Jenkins, 2015, pp.42). It is often the sole option of medium of communication being used by speakers of different mother tongues (Seidlhofer, 2011 as cited in Jenkins, 2015). According to Ishikawa (2016), ELF refers to the dynamic and diverse expression of language resources in an international environment, which may involve native English speakers. In other words, ELF can be defined as the flexible use of English as a common means of communication among speakers of different first language.

Methodology

This study aiming to answer the following two research questions: (1) What is the stance of the general public towards the ideology of Teaching English as Standard English and Teaching English as Lingua Franca? (2) What are the justifications of such stance?

A total of 30 respondents (15 males; 15 females), age ranges from 25 to 40 years old (mean age:34.2) were recruited online on a voluntary basis using various SNS applications (Facebook, Instagram, WeChat and WhatsApp). Detailed information of the respondents is shown in Figure 1.

The following simplified layperson definition of SE and ELF were explained to respondents via text messages, voice messages or phone calls, at the convenience of respondents:

1. “Standard English (SE) is the type of English that we learn in school or hear on BBC news that we normally relate it to the English that the educated native speakers use.”
2. “English as Lingua Franca (ELF) is the type of English that we use when we talk to someone who do not speak our mother tongue because we don't have other option of language that we can use to communicate. It is a flexible version of English that does not emphasize so much on standard grammar or vocabulary.”

Then, respondents were given a link to access to an online survey form made using Google Forms, created to solicit laypersons' answers from the respondents to the following questions:

1. Between SE and ELF, which do you think is more prestigious? Why?
2. If you have school-going children of your own, would you prefer that they learn to communicate in SE only, or ELF only? Why?

Respondent	Age	Gender	Occupation
R1	25	M	Pharmacist
R2	27	M	Pharmacist
R3	27	M	Custom Officer
R4	30	M	Teacher
R5	32	M	Lecturer
R6	32	M	Customer Service Officer
R7	36	M	Lecturer
R8	36	M	Engineer
R9	37	M	Tour Guide
R10	37	M	Business Owner
R11	38	M	Photographer
R12	39	M	Driver
R13	39	M	Lecturer
R14	40	M	Teacher
R15	40	M	Teacher
R16	25	F	Student
R17	26	F	Beauty Consultant
R18	29	F	Teacher
R19	32	F	Content Writer
R20	33	F	Hair Stylist
R21	34	F	Teacher
R22	35	F	Lecturer
R23	35	F	Engineer
R24	35	F	Sales Executive
R25	36	F	Teacher
R26	37	F	Housewife
R27	38	F	Teacher
R28	39	F	Lecturer
R29	39	F	Admin Manager
R30	40	F	Hotel Manager

Figure 1

Data were collected over a period of 2 months, from 21 July 2020 to 21 September 2020. There was no limit to the number of words for the responses. Respondents were told to be as expressive as possible. To help respondents to provide accurate responses to the questions, they were told that they can ask question whenever necessary.

Results and Discussions

Part 1 Stance regarding the prestige of SE or ELF and its justifications

Overall, there are 30% of the respondents thought that ELF is more prestigious and 70% of them selected SE. When the data were analyzed based on the respondents' gender, 66.7% of male respondents (n=15) thought that SE is more prestigious as compared to their 73.3% of female counterpart (n=15). There is no very obvious disparity. Although respondents are from various occupational ground, but being influenced by the researchers' own occupational background, 12 out of 30 respondents (40%) are working

as educators (either working as lecturer or teacher). Out of 12 of them, 75% thought that SE is more prestigious. It proved that Malaysian educator hold strong belief that the native variety of English is prestigious. Figure 2 summarizes the justifications given by the respondents who thought that SE is more prestigious.

No	Justifications	Frequency
1	It is accurate / correct	8
2	It is widely used	5
3	It is uniformed / systematic	3
4	It is clear	2
5	It is original / primitive	2
6	It is formal	1

Figure 2

As being showed, accuracy and extensiveness of SE being the two main reasons for the general public of Generation Y in Malaysia to think that SE is a more prestigious variety of English. This is believed to be influenced by emphasis on accuracy in the formal English language education setting.

Figure 3 presented the justifications given by respondents who hold the belief that ELF is more prestigious. As can be seen clearly, there is no obvious similarity in the justifications provided by the respondents. Respondents even showed misunderstanding towards the ideology (such as item 6) and contradicting opinions (see item 1 and 2). Data also reviewed that although most of the respondents think that SE is more widely used but some have opposite opinion towards it (compare item 2 in Figure 2 and item 4 in Figure 3). Respondents who think that SE is more prestigious seem to be able to provide clearer justification toward their choice. This could be due to the familiarity towards SE as SE is being emphasized in the English education in Malaysia. However, although it is being mentioned in the definition of SE that it is often being related to the variety of English that the educated native speakers use, some respondents still regarded the non-native variety of standard English (such as Standard Malaysian English or Standard Singapore English) as the same as to the meaning of “standard” in the SE ideology.

No	Justifications	Frequency
1	It is more complicated	2
2	It is easier to understand	2
3	It has precedence over other languages	1
4	It is more widely used in daily life	1
5	There is no one universal SE in the world	1
6	People are forced to use it as they are living in English speaking environment	1
7	We need it to communicate with the world	1

Figure 3

Part 2 Stance regarding the personal preference towards the learning to communicate in SE only or ELF only for own school-going children.

Overall, there are 80% of the respondents thought that if they have school-going children of their own, they would prefer that they learn to communicate in SE only, despite the fact that only 70% of them thought that SE is more prestigious. Data were analyzed by comparing the respondents' stance regarding the prestigious variety of English (SE or ELF) against their personal preference towards learning to communicate in only a variety of English (SE or ELF) for their own school-going children. Data is presented in Figure 4.

There were 4 patterns being observed when the data were analyzed. They are the ELF-ELF pattern, the ELF-SE pattern, the SE-SE pattern and the SE-ELF pattern. The pattern should be interpreted as follow:

No.	Pattern	Frequency
1	ELF-ELF	5
2	ELF-SE	7
3	SE-SE	17
4	SE-ELF	1

Figure 4

if a respondent thought that ELF is more prestigious and he/she also prefer that his/her own school-going children to learn to communicate only in ELF, the respondent belongs to the ELF-ELF group. It can be seen clearly that the SE-SE pattern dominated as the general pattern or in other words, general trend of the way of thinking of Generation Y in Malaysia, with as high as 56.7%. It follows by the ELF-SE group, which made up of 23.3%. 9 of the 17 respondents fall into the SE-SE category are males and 8 out of 17 are females. It can be concluded that 60% of the male respondents and 53.3% of the female respondents fall under the SE-SE category. There is no significant disparity in this, thus indicated that both male and female Generation Y from Malaysia show inclination towards Standard English or in other words, towards the native variety of English.

Figure 5 summarizes the justifications given by the respondents in the SE-SE category. Data indicated that 64.7% of the respondents in SE-SE category prefer the school-going children to learn to communicate on in SE owing to the deeply rooted concept to regard SE as accurate and proper variety of English.

No	Justifications	Frequency
1	To help in mastering accurate and proper English	11
2	Useful for examination	2
3	To learn the widely recognized variety	2
4	More work opportunity	2

Figure 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

The favorable attitude towards the native variety of English still persists. However, it is important to note that English has spread beyond its original boundaries, and it no longer belongs to only one nation. It has become a language spoken by more non-native speakers than native speakers. The globalization of English has changed the needs of students and the goals of ELT worldwide. It raises question on the relevance of teaching Standard English (SE) to students, since there are more non-native speakers than native speakers of English.

No doubt teaching learners Standard English prepares learners to interact with the native speakers, to understand their pronunciation and to understand how the use of English being affected by the native culture. These learning objectives are valid if our learners are learning a foreign language, for instance Japanese, because learners are most likely only going to interact with the native speakers of Japanese. However, it is not the case with English. As being mentioned earlier, the number of non-native speakers of English outnumbered the native speakers by a ratio of three to one since 2003 and the number could be more shocking by now. As such, our students are more likely to use English mainly to interact with other non-native speakers. Teaching ELF prepares them to do so and help them to succeed. The learning objective to raise students' awareness about the diversity of Englishes and to raise students' confidence as speakers of their own localized variety of English need to be emphasized in the English educational policy.

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