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# Different Englishes, Different Resources of Contextualization: From the Perspective of the Ecology of Communication

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## 1. Introduction

English is unquestionably a dominant international language in today's world. The expansion of English speaking communities and the varieties of the language produce several intriguing phenomena from linguistic and sociolinguistic points of view. Quite a few researches and observations have been conducted on *World Englishes*; hence, the plural form of *English* is accepted to be common and is now well-established in society- and variety-oriented fields of language study. *World Englishes*, as an academic paradigm, aims to describe non-native English throughout the world as discrete varieties rather than as "non-standard" English. What varies, however, is not only the formal aspects of the language, such as pronunciation and vocabulary, but also communicative conventions, which are utilized as resources of contextualization (Gumperz 1982; Inoue 2003, 2004, 2005). Using several examples of World Englishes, this paper aims to demonstrate some of the contextualizing processes wherein variety-specific resources are utilized for communicating messages and signaling ethnocultural symbolic values from an *ecological* perspective on sociolinguistic phenomena, which I would call

the *ecology of communication*.

Kachru (1985, 1992) proposed a three circle model that describes the situation of today's World Englishes. One is the *Inner Circle*, which refers to those countries wherein virtually all public and private verbal interaction is carried out in English among majority of the population, such as Australia, Canada, the UK, the United States, etc. Another is the *Outer Circle*, which indicates the countries wherein private interaction normally does not take place in English among majority of the population, but the people publicly interact in English for legal, political, educational, and other official matters; these countries include Ghana, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Singapore, etc. Yet another circle in this model is the *Expanding Circle*, which is characterized by the countries wherein English is a "foreign" language and is taught as a subject at school; countries in this circle include China, Japan, Korea, Saudi Arabia, Zimbabwe, etc. This model is considered to be the basis for the study of World Englishes, and quite successfully deals with the types of the spread, acquisition, and function of English in various socio-cultural contexts.

Many of the investigations in this field so far have focused on macro-analysis of English varieties in terms of regional differences (Trudgill and Hannah 1982, Bailey and Gollach 1982, McArthur 2002, etc.) or socio-political perspectives (Fishman, Cooper, and Conrad 1977, Platt, Weber and Ho 1984, Cheshire 1991, Crystal 1997, etc.). They have elucidated the situations in which the Englishes in the world function and the backgrounds against which they have been developed. However, there has been no discussion on the communicative and contextualizing functions of variety-specific resources of World Englishes. In what follows, we will examine some of the examples of contextualizing resources in World Englishes, based on the theories of interactional sociolinguistics and the ecology of communication. It will be demon-

strated that variety-specific features are utilized as communicative conventions to evoke interpretive and/or socio-culturally symbolic frames in interaction.

## 2. Theoretical Background<sup>(1)</sup>

The *ecology of communication*, on which we will base the discussion in this paper, may be seen as an elaborated version of interactional sociolinguistics and also the integration of Brown and Levinson's politeness model (Brown and Levinson 1987), the Gumperzian interpretive approach (Gumperz 1982), the ethnography of communication (Hymes 1974), ethnomethodology (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), and Silverstein and Ochs's studies on indexicality (Silverstein 1976, Ochs 1992). All of these have offered crucial inspiration and influence to this study. Sociolinguistics is commonly regarded as a discipline that investigates the relation between language and society or between language varieties and their users and the surrounding social factors. The ecology of communication, however, attempts to elucidate how the user of a language or language variety (e.g. a variety of English) employs language- or variety-specific resources of contextualization, and reversely what sort of resources of contextualization are available to the user of a language or language variety. This study aims to develop an integrated framework derived from the above disciplines.

Among these disciplines, interactional sociolinguistics is particularly relevant to the discussion in this paper. Sociolinguistic approaches to World Englishes or other linguistic varieties have been posing non-linguistic criteria such as region, class, or ethnicity to generalize sociolinguistic phenomena. However, Gumperz (1982) analyzes the interactive processes in which participants negotiate interpretations without relying on *a priori* identification of social categories and

extralinguistic forces, which determine how and under what conditions linguistic variants are used. A simple correlation between the incidents of linguistic variants and independently determined social and contextual categories cannot explain the interpretive consequences of human interactions. The concept of *contextualization cues* makes possible a close analysis on the signaling and interpretive processes of interaction.

Context is a set of information that gives interactants a certain frame or schema of interpretation in the real-time process. The notion of context is traditionally and generally considered to be rather static, something that is already given to the speech situations concerned. Gumperz stresses on the interactive and ongoing nature of contextualization. A contextualization cue is any linguistic and non-linguistic feature that contributes to the signaling of contextual presupposition; there is always interplay of verbal and nonverbal signs in the signaling context, which constrains interpretive preferences. Interpretive schemata are evoked through both sentence content and matters of form, such as choice of pronunciation, prosodic features, and dialect or speech style, among which variety-specific linguistic items are focused on later in the discussion. (Gumperz 1982)

As the case presented here will demonstrate, the underlying function of formal or physical aspects of the language varies from one language variety to another. Hence, we argue that the linguistic devices should be examined as parts of the repertoire of communicative conventions afforded and constrained by the communicative environment of the languages in which they occur. In some situations, a certain type of fulfillment of the contextualizing resource is shown to *not* be afforded in some Englishes. We argue that this phenomenon demonstrates that some linguistic items can be understood to be resources of communication, while others cannot.

### 3. Resources of Contextualization in the Inner Circle

The “Inner Circle” refers to predominantly English speaking countries; however, there are many varieties inside the circle. Probably the best recognized language varieties are based on national or geographical differences, such as American English, Australian English, Scottish English, Cockney, etc. Each of these varieties has its own indigenous characteristics concerning every aspect of language, such as vocabulary and pronunciation. And, more significantly for this paper, each variety has its own contextualizing conventions. It may be assumed that the communicative conventions in the Inner Circle are unequivocal and straightforward; however, there are some idiosyncratic patterns of communication in every speech community. Furthermore, it is important to note the fact that many areas of the English speaking countries are multicultural and multilingual societies where, although most of the population speaks English, they have different contextualizing conventions and resources that derive from their native language. Therefore, even in the Inner Circle, there can be mixtures of communicative conventions, which may result in miscommunications caused by different contextualizing conventions.

The utterance (1) is one such example of miscommunication in a multicultural society, such as London in the UK, which is in the Inner Circle. A driver/conductor in London, who hailed from the West Indies, had a poor reputation with local passengers because of his excessive loudness, high pitch, and falling intonation on “please” as shown in (1). The passengers were reported to be annoyed and angry with this prosodic feature (Gumperz 1982).

(1) Exact change, *PLEASE*.

The analysis revealed that “please” with this prosodic feature signaled the speaker’s stance, which may imply irritation or even overbearingness to the native speakers of English (at least in London). However, further investigation showed that it was not the driver’s intended attitude; on the contrary, the prosody on “please” may imply a more polite stance to people in the West Indies (politeness was emphasized). The prosody contextualized the same utterance in different ways: one implies irritation and the other implies intensified politeness. Contextualizing conventions must be shared in order to evoke the same frame of interpretation, that is, the message must be contextualized appropriately.

The following example shows that a formulaic comment with a certain prosodic feature contextualizes the utterance among the people who share the conventions and that it evokes a sequence of routinized conversation that fits a paradigm often uttered, in this instance, by Americans being escorted around a house. (Gumperz 1982: 144)

(2) When a house painter arrived at the home of a middle class couple in California, he was taken around the house to survey the job he was about to perform. When he entered a spacious living room area with numerous framed original paintings on the walls, he asked in a friendly way, “Who’s the *artist*?” The wife, who was British replied, “The painter’s not too well known. He is a modern London painter named —.” The house painter hesitated and then, looking puzzled, said, “I was wondering if someone in the family was an artist.”

This kind of formulaic expression, like “Who’s the *cook*?” on seeing an array of kitchen utensils on a pegboard, or “Who’s the *gardener*?” on looking out the window and seeing rows of seed packages on stick in the

tiled earth, is often a conventionalized way of fulfilling the expectation that a complimentary comment be made upon seeing someone's house for the first time. It is generally interpreted as an indirect compliment, which, if the contextualizing conventions are shared, initiates a routinized sequence of conversation. For examples, it could be followed by saying, "It's just a hobby," or "I'm just a fan," and then there could be further responses such as "But they're really very good." The British wife in this example, however, was not familiar with this paradigm and its attendant routine, and therefore took the house painter's question literally as an objective question on the paintings. The questioner's puzzled look following her response indicated that his question had not been understood as intended (Gumperz 1982). Routinized sequences of formulaic expressions are part of the repertoires in this speech community that serve to evoke interpretive frames as contextualization cues.

Variety-specific resources of contextualization become apparent through the contrast with other languages. Resources of contextualization in so-called Standard English (i. e. Englishes in the Inner Circle) tend to be invisible — unnoticeable and taken for granted — to both native speakers and learners of the language. The address term in the Inner Circle Englishes, and probably many other European languages, is one such example, if it is compared with Japanese.<sup>(2)</sup> It is an optional linguistic item and therefore never an obligatory syntactic element in the sentence in both languages. However, by examining the relationship between the use of the address term and the context in which it is embedded, it will be elucidated that the address term is employed as part of a rather different repertoire for communication in the two languages. In English, the address term can be the resource to negotiate the interpersonal communication, that is, speakers can utilize it in order to specify the addressee, allocate other participants and themselves in the interac-



tion and construct the whole participant structure, mitigate FTAs (Face Threatening Acts (Brown and Levinson 1987)) and signal the change of the level or aspect of FTAs (FTA shift). On the contrary, in Japanese, the address term can be the resource to specify the addressee and, by doing it, avoid using the second personal pronoun <sup>(3)</sup> (Inoue 2003, 2004, 2005). The manner in which the address term is used in English (and other European languages) may sound very unique to Japanese native speakers.

For example, in Inner Circle English, when address terms are not used for specifying the addressee, they are placed at the point of the shift of politeness level or face risk intensity and features of FTAs, where threatening possibility becomes high.<sup>(4)</sup>

(3) In the film *Working Girl*, Tess is an ambitious woman who has not witnessed satisfying results in her career. One day, she is called by Bob, a man occupying a managerial position in another department, who indicates an opportunity for promotion to improve her career. However, it turns out that he has other intentions to meet her, that is, he wants to seduce and sexually harass her. In the limousine, a drunken Bob strikes a conversation on rather irrelevant business-related topics, sometimes using dirty cheap words. Tess tries to protest it and rebuke him by saying “I’m hungry, *Bob*, but I am not that hungry!”

A possible interpretation of Tess’s utterance is that the two expressions of “hungry” imply different concepts or at least different aspects of the word or connotation: the first denotes her ambition to be promoted and the second implies a sexual connotation. The phrase “not that hungry” probably implies “not hungry to the extent that she will tolerate sexual

harassment,” or “not hungry in a sexual way”. In either case, the address term *Bob* is located at the place where the same word shifts to different meanings or different phase of the word that will require different interpretations. This address term contributes to contextualizing both terms “hungry” in different connotations.

In other words, this type of address term makes the hearer anticipate the shift of the politeness level or the frame of interpretation. The first part “I am hungry” refers to a more public, career-related aspect of the self, that is, she wants to be promoted in the company. Topics such as business and career entail a more objective stance or frame of talk, which foregrounds negative face interaction. On the other hand, the second part after the address term refers to a more personal and private aspect, which has implications of sex or a close relationship. Personal and private topics entail a more subjective stance or feeling and imply the existence of a more intimate relationship, although the strategy may clash against the other’s negative face wants, as in this example. The address term signals the shift in the FTA and stands at the pivotal point of politeness strategies in discourse. It can be said that Tess tries to contextualize the second half of her utterance by using the address term *Bob* so that she can lead Bob to the intended interpretation of “hungry.” This process contributes to both mitigate the FTA to the self and other, and to contextualize and frame the utterance.

We have emphasized the claim that the resources for contextualization and the constraints necessary for their exploitation are not equally endowed to every language variety and communicative practice. Linguistic items and communicative devices should be examined as part of the repertoire, which is afforded and constrained by the communicative environment of the particular language varieties and their communicative conventions. It is important that we focus on how a situated use of

address term in a particular situation constructs a social relationship between interlocutors, how participants arrange and allocate themselves, and what sort of contextualizing resources are utilized in the abovementioned processes. The two languages or language varieties are constituted differently to make different aspects of address terms available for their users to exploit; further, speakers have different repertoires of resources or *affordances* in communicative circumstances.<sup>(5)</sup>

#### 4. Different Resources of Contextualization in the Outer Circle

Many of the Englishes in the Outer Circle often incorporate the contextualizing resources of their native language into the variety of English languages; these resources range from morpho-syntactic features to particles. English speakers in the Outer Circle seem to find it difficult to express or index their own socio-cultural values and attitudes by means of Standard English. As a corollary to this “socio-cultural deficiency,” they often develop their own resources of contextualization, resorting to their native languages. On the other hand, some linguistic items of the Outer Circle Englishes develop themselves, autogenously as it were, as a certain resource of contextualization.

One of the typical instances of Singapore English is the sentence-final particle *la*, which derives from the Malay (or Chinese) particle.

(4) *Hurry up la.*

It is said to express an emotional, and sometimes socio-culturally loaded, stance or attitude and promote a sort of solidarity and national identity of the people. This resource is available and affordable to them. In colloquial Singapore English, *ever* is used in affirmative responses to Yes/No type questions (as in (5)) as well as in declarative sentences in

discourse (as in (6)). (Ho and Wong 2001)

(5) Q: You *ever* go to Japan?

A: (Yes), *ever*.

(6) You *ever* work in other jobs ah?

The Singapore English use of *ever* shows strong similarities with the use of its equivalents in the local languages in Singapore, for example, Mandarin *guo*, Hokkien *koe*, Cantonese *gwoh*, and Malay *pernah*. In addition, in Singapore English, *never* means “at no time” and by its semantic extension, it seems only logical that its antonym *ever* means “at any time,” which functions in affirmative contexts.<sup>(6)</sup>

Jeffery and Rooy (2004) demonstrated that the adverb *now* functions as a subjunct, specifically as an emphasizer in the colloquial registers of South African English. They claim that the phenomenon conforms to two of the prototypical syntactic patterns. One has a clear parallel in Afrikaans and can be reasonably derived directly from Afrikaans, while the other is not closely paralleled in Afrikaans, and, showing an indigenous development that takes advantage of the potential for emphasis offered by the emphasizer *now*, is nativized in South African English. The adverb has acquired a non-Standard English meaning, reflecting the influence of Afrikaans *nou* on South African English *now*.

Aceto (2002) illustrates multiple personal names in an Anglophone Creole-speaking community of Panama, where nearly every Afro-Panamanian resident of the island of Bastimentos has two given names — one Spanish-derived and the other Creole-derived. He argues that the Creole or “ethnic name” is virtually the exclusive name used locally for reference and address and preferred because they reflexively define who the members of this speech community are, in terms of culture and ances-

try. It can be said that the ethnic name is one of their important resources to contextualize socio-cultural values.

Adegbija and Bello (2001) investigate the contexts in which *okay* is used in Nigerian English. They claimed that, while its basic meanings may be readily accessible to the speakers of English, in some contexts, they could have great difficulty in understanding the senses because *okay* can convey a rebuke, a bye bye, the termination of discourse, an ironical affirmation of authority, etc. Therefore, they showed that these meta-communicative senses are anchored in the Nigerian sociolinguistic and pragmatic contexts.

These abovementioned researches are not conducted under the rubric of contextualizing resources, but oriented to in same direction. In fact, they could be reorganized as part of our discussions; resources of contextualization in World Englishes derive their origin from their native languages, though some of them are self-generated, seemingly without any trace of their origin. There could be some resources quite common to human beings.

## **5. Some Implications to EFL in the Expanding Circle**

In the Expanding Circle, English is often something that must be learned in a classroom or other places. In such environments, the learners tend to rely on conscious and unconscious comparison with their own language. We have emphasized the claim that the resources for contextualization and the constraints necessary for their exploitation are not equally endowed to every language variety in communicative practices. Theoretically, this implies that the basic assumption of the contrastive study of languages must be reconsidered. It is highly doubtful how productive a surface level of comparison between two or more linguistic items could be; no equation of two linguistic items, whether it is lexical,

syntactic, or pragmatic, would be valid without reference to *ecological contexts*, as discussed in this paper. We should ask what repertoires are available as resources for communication in a specific language variety and speech community, including covert resources for contextualization.

Our discussion suggests that linguistic usages situated in particular indigenous contexts should be regarded in view of the resources for contextualization, which are *afforded* to interactants (Gibson 1977, 1979); agents engaging in communicative activities can exploit only *afforded* but limited repertoires of particular language varieties and communicative conventions as part of ecological information of the speech community. It could be argued that sociolinguistic research as well as EFL learners' comparison between their native language and a target language must be extended to encompass the investigation of the availability of the resources that make contextualization possible, in addition to the constraints that these resources impose on contextualization. This study and its theoretical and practical implications delineate and support a perspective for thus extending sociolinguistic research, which we have termed the *ecology of communication*, and the strategies for learning foreign languages.

We have emphasized that every language variety and associated set of communicative conventions are endowed with unequal resources for contextualization. As discussed above, the theoretical implication of this claim is that the fundamental assumption of the contrastive study of languages and the comparison by lay persons (learners of foreign languages) must be reconsidered. It would be necessary to treat the repertoires of the whole communicative resources of particular language variety users, without employing *a priori* concepts like "culture" and "society." The specific repertoires of resources for communication that are available in specific language varieties and speech communities,

which vary from one language variety to another, should be investigated with reference to covert resources for contextualization.

## **6. Concluding Remarks**

We have to observe the availabilities and constraints of the contextualizing resources as linguistic repertoire in several varieties of English. Unlike words that can be dealt with out of context, the process of contextualization is not necessarily apparent because it usually functions implicitly. Their signaling process of the words depends on the participants' tacit understanding of the value. When participants understand and notice the relevant contextualization cues, interpretive processes tend to go unnoticed. However, when a hearer does not react to a cue or is unaware of its function, interpretations may differ from the speaker's possible intention, and a misunderstanding may occur. Miscommunication often occurs when participants do not share the contextualization conventions and cannot evoke the same frame of interpretation at a certain cue. The socio-pragmatic approach to World Englishes and the perspective of the ecology of communication, which has been discussed in this paper, will match the analysis of contemporary multi-cultural and/or multilingual situations in urban settings. The intercultural encounter is a norm, rather than an exception, in this culturally and ethnically diverse world. The assumption that speech communities share the norms and conventions and constitute a homogeneous whole becomes subject to serious questioning. Language usage in World Englishes is not just a matter of correctness and appropriateness, but a way of conveying information about values, beliefs, and attitudes in everyday life, though intelligibility is the basis for communication.

A clear advantage in adopting the ecology of communication approach when we deal with cross-linguistic matters is that it incorpo-

rates various levels of features into a single unified program. This approach is a broadly-based framework meant to elucidate how discourse interpretation is achieved and negotiated through a wide range of verbal (and nonverbal) signaling conventions in any variety of language, and how interactants exploit resources for communication as their repertoires of speech communities.

### Notes

- (1) The discussion in this section is partly based upon Inoue (2004).
- (2) Address term has been studied as a fruitful concept in the field of sociolinguistic research. It is a highly sensitive feature of language in reflecting the speakers' assessment of co-participants in a speech event (Brown and Gilman 1960, Brown and Ford 1961). In English, selecting some specific linguistic items according to social situation is a relatively marked phenomenon, and address term is one of the typical items suitable for sociolinguistic investigation. In modern English, even the so-called T/V (*tu-vous* in French or *tu-vos* in Latin) distinction in second-person pronoun has disappeared, and expressing familiarity or distance in a systematically formal way is out of the repertoire in this language. Using *you* for any addressee does not entail social and psychological pressure or constraint for the user. As is clearly demonstrated in Brown and Levinson's politeness model (Brown and Levinson 1987), a large part of interpersonal consideration reflected in language use is recognizable only in terms of socio-psychological aspects of the language users; it is not something that is internalized in syntactic structure as in the case of honorific systems in Japanese.
- (3) More precise is "the linguistic item seemingly equivalent to the second person pronoun in the sense of European languages." The second person pronoun in Japanese is a sort of taboo word (Inoue 2005).
- (4) Inoue (2003, 2004, 2005).
- (5) At the next stage of this study, we will attempt to delimitate the potential and possible availability and constraints to the resources as part of the repertoire of the particular language variety.
- (6) Singapore English is a prolific area for indigenous resources for commu-



tion. Wong (2004) and Wee (2003) are some of the other demonstrations in this area.

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