

Title	Assessment of EIL/ELF in the classroom
Sub Title	EIL/ELFの教室内評価
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Publisher	慶應義塾大学日吉紀要刊行委員会
Publication year	2017
Jtitle	慶應義塾大学日吉紀要. 言語・文化・コミュニケーション (Language, culture and communication). No.49 (2017.) ,p.133- 143
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	
Genre	Departmental Bulletin Paper
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN10032394-20171231-0133

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Assessment of EIL/ELF in the Classroom

Yuji Nakamura

1. Introduction

English is a global language and at the same time is embedded in a great variety of social contexts as well as classroom contexts. There have been significant changes in the users and uses of English as an international language (EIL). The changes of English language learners and users have posed many challenges to the assessment of English proficiency. English proficiency tests, such as TOEFL or IELTS, have an impact on English language learners and users, and traditionally two standard varieties of native-speaker English (American and British) have been the norm in the construct of English proficiency for these tests. However, these established assessment practices should be examined because of the changes brought by EIL. When it comes to the assessment of proficiency in EIL or as an international lingua franca (ELF) in a classroom context, we need to add a very important aspect to testing English proficiency, which is the measurement of students' readiness to engage in interactions across the many varieties of English. In other words, we should include in our assessment instruments not only students' linguistic comprehension and production skills, but also their abilities to adjust attitudinally to the inevitable communication breakdowns that they will encounter.

2. Purpose of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to answer the question: "In an EIL/ELF classroom context, what kind of assessment instruments will be effective for classroom teachers?" The paper discusses ELF related issues by taking into account three aspects: a) the World Englishes approach, b) the English as a lingua franca (ELF) approach, and c) a locally defined English as an international language (EIL)

approach. A case study of an EIL/ELF class will also be presented.

3. Three approaches to EIL(ELF)

According to Brown (2012), there are at least three ways to use EIL to delimit curriculum:

One way to delimit EIL involves *World Englishes (WE)*. Brown (p. 152) says that the belief that different legitimate Englishes other than the native dialects exist and need to be understood by ESL/EFL learners has led to the possibility that variant dialects of native and non-native Englishes can and should be used as models in English language teaching. Thus, WE is one form of EIL that can help inform and delimit course specifications.

Another form to delimit EIL is the *English as a lingua franca (ELF) approach*. Jenkin's (2009) definition is "English being used as a lingua franca, the common language of choice, among speakers who come from different linguacultural backgrounds. ELF is thus a question, not of orientation to the norms of a particular group of English speakers, but of mutual negotiation involving efforts and adjustments from all parties" (pp. 200–201).

The third one is the *Locally defined EIL approach* in which the choices of unit analysis, objectives, content, teaching strategies, resources, models, etc. are all based on carefully considered local needs for English including its international uses. Such local needs will typically be based on a thorough needs analysis of the EIL language and context involved in a particular local English learning situation" (Brown, 2012, p. 153).

In summary, there is one thing in common among these three approaches. That is, none tend to take the Inner Circle native speakers' English as an absolute benchmark model. This is probably because the number of non-native English speakers is bigger than that of native English speakers and that a variety of Englishes have emerged in the world.

4. Locally Defined EIL Curriculum

Brown (2012, p. 156) listed criteria for locally defined EIL curriculum development. This might equally be applicable to testing locally defined EIL. The criteria are as follows:

1. Include successful bilinguals as English language and pedagogic models
2. Foster English language and cultural behaviors that will help students

- communicate effectively with others and achieve friendly relations with English speakers from any culture
3. Help students achieve intelligibility when they are among other English speakers
 4. Enhance students' access to and capacity to contribute to the international body of information
 5. Support learning English efficiently and help students feel better about their English learning
 6. Provide students with awareness of linguistic and cultural differences in the various contexts in which English is learned and used, and furnish them with strategies for handling such differences
 7. Use "global appropriacy and local appropriation" to help learners be "both global and local speakers of English" who can function both at home in their national culture as well as internationally
 8. Respect the local culture of learning and promote a sense of ownership and confidence in the local varieties of English
 9. Include materials and activities based on local and international situations that are recognizable and applicable to the students' everyday lives, pertaining to both native speaker–non-native speaker (NS–NNS) and non-native speaker–non-native speaker interactions
 10. Include models of Outer-Circle and Expanding-Circle users of English so students realize that English does not belong exclusively to the Inner Circle

5. Two approaches to EIL/ELF Assessment.

Hu (2012) maintains that there have been proposals made for assessing EIL, World Englishes (WE), and English as a lingua franca (ELF). One is a "weak" approach to assessing English that allows test accommodations without changing the underlying test construct. Another is a "strong" approach that defines the test construct not in terms of Standard American or British English but in terms of EIL/WE/ELF in its own right and/or competence criteria other than the traditionally dominant one of linguistic accuracy (Hu, 2012; McKay, 2002).

6. Weak Approach

In a weak approach, the target language norms of EIL area assumed to be a standard native-speaker variety or one based on such a variety. To accommodate

candidates speaking non-native varieties of English, some modifications are made (Hu, 2012). These accommodations are expected to make a native-speaker normed test “more accessible and fairer” to candidates from the Outer- and the Expanding-Circle societies without changing the test construct, that is, competence in an Inner-Circle variety of English (Hu, 2012).

For example: 1) Gloss or avoid lexical items or structures which are likely to be unfamiliar to NNS users, 2) Involve ELF users in standard setting exercises (Hu, 2012).

7. Strong Approach

In a strong approach, the Outer- and Expanding- Circle varieties of English are not dependent on the Inner-Circle varieties. They should be part and parcel of the test construct (Hu, 2012).

Examples are: 1) Sample test items directly from domains relevant to EIL/WE/ELF communication, 2) Focus on performance tasks that are evaluated in terms of functional effectiveness or task fulfillment, 3) Give priority to strategic competence over formal accuracy (Hu, 2012).

8. Approaches to Class Situation: Assessment in a classroom context

A major challenge and a limitation for a class in EIL education is the gap between the ideals of EIL and the present realities of ELT, especially with respect to the examination culture of Japan (Hino, 2017).

While there is a situation where a testing instrument is used by aiming at the native speaker standard, we need to consider what kind of assessment instruments should be used in EIL classrooms where students wish to be able to use English in their own local context and successfully engage in intercultural exchanges (McKay & Brown, 2016).

Unlike standardized tests such as TOEFL or IELTS, classroom tests are typically used to assess what students know or can do in the language with reference to what is being taught in a specific classroom or program (McKay & Brown, 2016). As they mention, ability in EIL means the ability to shuttle between different varieties of English and different speech communities. Then, we need the ability to negotiate the varieties in other outer and expanding circle communities as well as inner circle countries (Canagarajah, 2006; McKay & Brown, 2016).

9. A Longitudinal Study of EIL Flipped Class (Nakamura 2013–2016)

In the past several years, international students from countries such as Japan, USA, Canada, Hong Kong, France, Switzerland, Australia, and Singapore have taken an EIL course titled *English and English education in the age of globalization: East Asia Perspectives*.

This course aims to

- 1) expose students to several varieties of Outer and Expanding Circle *Englishes* found in videoconference as well as in class.
- 2) raise the awareness of English varieties (e.g. English usage and functions) among speaker scholars and in-class students
- 3) enhance students' language skills (listening and speaking) through a variety of activities
- 4) discuss and explore the pedagogical implications that may help students consider how and to what extent they can integrate insights from this lesson into their own autonomous learning.

At the end of the semester in each term, a course evaluation was conducted for official college records, and at the same time a questionnaire was conducted to investigate paralinguage for research/academia. Also, for academic evaluation, the term-end paper submission and student-led oral presentation were used to examine linguistic competence. This paper mainly deals with the results of the EIL questionnaire (EAMQ) as well as the course evaluation.

10. Results and Discussion (about the 2016 results)

10.1. The course evaluation results

As mentioned above, the course evaluation was conducted at the end of the spring term for official college record. The twenty registered students responded to the items on the form on a 5-point Likert scale.

Free comments: Good points (strengths of the class)

- 1). Opportunities to share views from different cultural perspectives.
- 2). Invigorating discussions through exchanges of opinions based on readings.
- 3). A lot of student involvement was good.
- 4). Content and teacher's teaching ability was good.
- 5). Lots of discussions, raising awareness of the class material.

Table 1

	Strong agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
There was enough interaction between the instructor and students.	13	5	2		
The instructor's way of talking was easy to follow.	12	5	3		
English speed spoken in class was appropriate.	15	4	1		
The contents of the class were interesting.	13	3	2	2	
Materials were useful.	8	10		2	
The instructor presented topics effectively.	9	6	3	2	
I would like to recommend this class to other students.	10	4	5	1	
The university should offer this class next academic year as well.	10	6	3		1

6). Lots of discussion provided different points of view to share.

7). The teacher made the class feel comfortable.

For improvements (areas of the class you felt needed improvement)

1). Need more dynamics and a change of the class's way of teaching sometimes.

2). More in depth and less broad.

3). When Professor lectured, it was enjoyable and insightful. I wish he lectured more often.

4). Having students summarize the articles was not effective.

As Table 1 shows, students had mostly favorable opinions on this class, such as the contents, the materials, in-class activities, and the way of teaching. Although there were some negative responses, the number was small. Thus, the information from this course evaluation provides us with the overall impression of the course, and even the free comments give useful feedback to teachers, while we need to know the details of the students' reactions or attitudes, or interests toward this class in terms of EIL theory or EIL concept.

In order to obtain information on this aspect of EIL class, the EAMQ, a theory-based EIL questionnaire, was used. The EIL Awareness Measurement Questionnaire (cf. Lee, Dressman, Nakamura et al, 2016, 2017) was created to explore the theoretical part of EIL classes.

10.2. The questionnaire results (EAMQ)

EIL Awareness Measurement Questionnaire (EAMQ) (Lee, Dressman, Nakamura

et. al 2016, 2017)

1:totally disagree, 2:disagree, 3:neutral, 4:agree, 5:totally agree

The EAMQ was administered twice (before the class in April and after the class in July) to investigate how the class has influenced the students' awareness towards the EIL or varieties of English and their attitudes towards the current status of English, also towards their English abilities. Since the EAMQ was completed on a voluntary basis, the number is not equal between the pre- and the post-class survey, also the number in the post-class survey was even smaller.

Factor 1 *Understanding of Current Status of English (3 Items)*

1. English is used today as an international language to communicate effectively with people from around the world.
2. Many non-native English-speaking countries use English as their official or working language today.
3. English is the language of business, culture, and education around the world today.

	2016 April (N=21)	2016 July (N=12)
1	4.5	4.4
2	3.5	3.4
3	3.9	3.9

This table (the pre- and the post-class survey on the first factor) indicates that students had already known or understood the current status of English. This class did not influence students' perceptions toward EIL. The averages of items 1 and 3 is closer to 4, which indicates that students already knew the current status of English.

Factor 2 *Attitude toward Varieties of English (4 Items)*

1. Different varieties of English, such as Hong Kong English, Indian English, and Singaporean English, are acceptable today.
2. Teachers can use English listening materials that are recorded by people who have different kinds of English accents.
3. Different varieties of English, such as Indonesian English, Taiwanese English, and Japanese English, are acceptable today.
4. Teachers can include the interaction between non-native and non-native English speakers (e.g., Indonesian-Japanese speakers) in English listening materials.

	2016 April (N=21)	2016 July (N=12)
1	4.0	4.2
2	3.7	4.2
3	3.2	3.9
4	3.6	4.3

This factor from the questionnaire analysis reveals several interesting insights, many of which show how this class influenced students' perceptions on *Attitude toward Varieties of English*. All items in the questionnaire demonstrates a significant change in students' perception on *Attitude toward Varieties of English*. All of the participants' responses, according to the questionnaire, indicate a positive influence on their perceptions toward varieties of English. They realized the importance of their exposure to a variety of Englishes especially for their listening aspects, which is also related to the linguistic aspects students mentioned in the questionnaires as shown below:

- “I couldn't link that too much because I am not good at English and I couldn't listen to everything”
- “Actually, it's hard for me to listen to their English, so it's much harder for me to understand what they talked about...I can find my language skill (speaking and listening) stupid”

This suggests that teachers need to help students identify their language skills and improve their linguistic skills. Teachers should provide specific additional instruction.

Factor 3 *Strategy for Multilingual/Multicultural Communication (4 Items)*

1. I can adjust my conversational style according to my interactions with people of other cultural backgrounds.
2. I can explain my own culture and customs clearly in English to people from other cultures.
3. I am open-minded in accepting speaking/pronunciation patterns that are different from those of my home country.
4. I can behave appropriately according to English users I speak with.

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	2016 April (N=21)	2016 July (N=12)
1	3.6	4.0
2	4.0	4.0
3	4.5	4.6
4	4.2	4.2

The EIL /ELF classroom helped overcome some disadvantages of typical in-class EFL instruction (e.g., teacher-based teaching, only 21 hours of course instruction per semester) and, more importantly, helped students better understand EIL-related issues. Such benefits of the EIL classroom were mostly reflected in the classroom evaluations as follows:

“Opportunities to share views form different cultural perspectives.”

“Invigorating discussions through exchanges of opinions based on readings.”

“A lot of student involvement was good.”

“Lots of discussions, raising awareness of the class material.”

“Lots of discussion provided for different points of view to share.”

Factor 4 *Perception of English Speaker’s Identity (3 Items)*

1. English teachers should not push me to speak like a “native” English speaker.
2. I don’t mind if people laugh at my English accent when I speak because it is my own English.
3. It is unnecessary to speak like American or British English speakers as long as my English is intelligible (or understandable) to others.

	2016 April (N=21)	2016 July (N=12)
1	3.2	4.0
2	3.0	3.3
3	4.0	4.4

The EIL class influenced students’ perceptions toward Perception of English Speaker’s Identity. This also suggests that statements such as “Focus on performance tasks that are evaluated in terms of functional effectiveness or task fulfillment” and “Give priority to strategic competence over formal accuracy” should be taken into consideration in our EIL/ELF test construct (Hu, 2012).

11. Conclusions and Implications

We can draw some conclusions from this data: 1) We need to consider the theory of EIL from a classroom context, in other words, from a locally defined classroom context along with the language assessment perspective, and 2) The key issue is there are various aspects in the linguistic part as well as in the non-language part to assess, and that there are several approaches to take when dealing with EIL-related issues.

Hu (2012) suggests that instead of the over-simplistic dichotomies of the norms of English, i.e. native vs non-native, or inner circle vs outer-expanding circle varieties, it is necessary to take a more sensitive socio-linguistic approach to the redefinition of the test construct for a fair, relevant, and valid assessment of EIL proficiency by considering the sound understanding of the current situations of EIL. Galloway and Rose (2015) summarize issues as follows:

- 1) there should be a move away from tests of formal grammatical competence to tests that 'focus on one's strategies of negotiation, situated performance, communicative repertoire and language awareness'
- 2) we need to consider prioritizing accommodation skills
- 3) there is a need to define communicative competence, by taking into account that the focus should be on how people know the language, not how much they know
- 4) there is a need to determine how achievement is defined, by considering the relevance of construct based on native English-speaker norms

There should be an emphasis on strategic competence, ability to use ELF in international situations, and ability to demonstrate accommodation skills (Galloway & Rose, 2015)

Assessing a student's strategic competence is important and difficult to do. However, in the ELF/EIL classroom context, more focus should be placed on awareness assessment, as well as linguistics and strategic competence, since assessment has a washback effect on the objectives of many language classes.

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