

World Englishes, Monolingual Bias, and Standardized Tests in a Multilingual World: Ideologies, Practices, and the Missing Link

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Abstract

As English continues to spread as an international lingua franca, there is a growing diversity in its use around the world. As a result, there are calls for embracing the diversity in the teaching, learning and assessment of the language. At the same time, there is a growing criticism against the widely taken language tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) for being guided by the pervasive ideology of monolingual native speakerism and devaluing the multilingual speakers and the multiple varieties of Englishes. Against this backdrop, this conceptual paper focuses on the influence of the World Englishes movement on these so-called standardized tests and critically examines how the existing assessment practices fail to represent the multilingual repertoires and actual language practices of the diverse range of test-takers around the world. Based on the critical analysis of relevant literature on World Englishes, the paper highlights the progress, challenges and possibilities for incorporation of more diverse models of language tests in a translingual world that we live in today.

Keywords: *multilingualism; linguistic diversity; World Englishes; standardized language tests; language ideologies, language bias*

Introduction

The use of the English language has grown multifold in all spheres of life around the world in recent times. Scholars (e.g., Horner et al., 2011; McKay, 2002) argue that most of the users of the English language are people who speak more than just one language. With the rise of British colonies, the English language flourished in different parts of the world mainly in Africa and Asia since the seventeenth century. English expanded further due to the use in business and administration in the colonial countries as it promised economic benefits to the local population ultimately developing as a language of power and prestige (B. Kachru, 1986). Evidently, even after the fall of the colonial power, English has continued to enjoy its spread and dominance. In fact, it is growing

faster now than it did in the past because of globalization and technological innovations (Sadeghpour & Sharifian, 2019), and has now become the dominant language in countries outside of its core areas with historical eminence resulting in more non-native speakers than the native speakers (Crystal, 2003; Davies, 2004)

With the widespread use of English in education, mass media, business, and technology (Phyak, 2011), English is gradually used in everyday life in many countries outside the historically English-speaking countries which B. Kachru (1986) terms the Outer and Expanding Circles. In the so-called Outer Circle countries, English enjoys the status of one of the official languages in many countries such as India, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, South Africa, and Pakistan. In these countries, English is extensively used in all spheres of life, primarily as a contact language between speakers of different languages but it is also used as the first language by many (Alsagoff, 2010; Haidar & Fang, 2019; Kirkpatrick, 2020, Krishnaswamy & Krishnaswamy, 2006; Taiwo, 2009). English was introduced—or rather imposed—in these countries through colonialism but the language has penetrated in everyday lives with several local varieties evolving in this process. India can be taken as a good example, in this regard, where, according to Mukherjee and Bernaisch (2020), a semi-autonomous variety of English has evolved as English came in contact with local languages and cultures. Similarly, many countries that B. Kachru (1986) initially classified as Expanding Circle countries have also witnessed an exponential growth in the spread of English mainly through internet-based mass media and inclusion of English as a subject and medium of instruction in education. For example, the growing use of English has made it “anything but foreign language” (Giri, 2015, p. 95) in Nepal, a country with no colonial history and direct connection with the English language. Similar to many other developing countries, English is spreading in everyday lives in Nepal mainly due to the influence of neoliberal education policy giving rise to the English medium instruction in school education (Phyak & Ojha, 2019). Various studies (E.g., Ojha, 2018; Phyak, 2016; Poudel & Choi, 2021; Sah & Li, 2019) have documented how the local educational policies have contributed to the growth of English in the country as children are introduced to English through teaching of English as a subject and medium of instruction.

Although finding the exact number of English language users is not possible, various scholars (e.g., Crystal, 2008; Schneider, 2011) estimate that nearly two billion people now use English around the world. Most of these speakers use English as an additional language and now outnumber the native speakers in the historically English-speaking countries known as the Inner Circle countries. As English has expanded in countries outside of its historical territories, it has also gone through significant adaptations and modifications (Mukherjee & Bernaisch, 2020). In these situations, English needs to serve a diverse range of functions for the people coming from various contexts and this has given birth to multiple forms of this language. Various factors related to history, politics, economy and culture and technology can be attributed to the unprecedented spread of English resulting in the emergence of various new varieties of English (Sharma, 2008).

As Jenkins (2015) states, Kachru's Three Circle Model has remained influential over the years to understand the "sociolinguistic realities of the spread of English" (p. 15). The growth of use of English in the Outer and Expanding Circle has brought the new varieties of Englishes to the center of discussion and research. As the demand of English in these countries grows, textbook writers, teachers and test constructors are bound to divert their attention to these countries to make them more appropriate to the local needs. The growth of local varieties of English in different parts of the world has brought scholars to an agreement that "English is a heterogeneous language with multiple norms and diverse grammars" (Canagarajah, 2006a, p. 232). Discussing the changes English has witnessed in recent times, Jenkins (2006) argues that "English has been developed as a nativized language in many countries of the Outer Circle...where it performs important local roles in the daily lives of large number of bilingual and multilingual speakers" (p. 42). Besides, English is also used as an international lingua franca for communication among the people from different countries (McKay, 2002; Pennycook & Candlin, 2017). Furthermore, Jenkins (2009, p. 143) argues that English has gained the status of "a contact language used amongst speakers with different first languages. ELF is used in contexts where speakers of different first languages need a common language to communicate with one another". As a widely used language in diverse contexts, English has greatly been affected by the local languages and cultures in different parts of the world, and has gone through many adjustments in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and overall pragmatic features which Lowenberg (2012) calls as process of 'nativization'.

For a long time, these changes were not accepted and adopted in English language teaching, material development and assessment because English used in the traditionally English-speaking countries such as, the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand persisted as the yardstick of the standardized English and 'a prestige variety' (Jenkins, 2015, p.15). However, there is a strong voice from scholars (e.g., Canagarajah, 2006a; Kubota 2012) to embrace the variation in the use of English and celebrate the diversity. This has created a pressure on the testers to rethink and revise the content, approach and tools they use to measure the English language proficiency of the candidates who take these tests. Consequently, scholars now argue that different types of Englishes used by people in various contexts should be taken as innovation and not as a deviation (Saraceni, 2015) because they come up with new ways to communicate the message. The WE movement seeks to challenge the monolingual ideology that prefers the norms of English mainly used by the educated British and Americans, and speakers from other Inner Circle countries. However, the WE movement is also criticized for being too theoretical a notion that has failed to bring much practical changes in the field of classroom teaching, materials development and assessment. Therefore, as Canagarajah (2011b) argues, we need to move away from 'romanticizing' the concept and make some practical changes.

In this conceptual paper, I discuss the developments in the field of WE and its impact on the assessment of English as an international language (EIL). More specifically, I

focus on a critical analysis of the recent discourse to develop a WE-informed approach to standardized language tests such as TOEFL and IELTS. In the section that follows, I present an overview of the impact of the WE movement on assessment of language proficiency through standardized tests. This is followed by a discussion of the connection between such tests with higher education and transnational student mobility. The last two sections before the conclusion part critically examine the status of multilingual approach in standardized tests and challenges of assessing English as an international language.

World Englishes, assessment, and standardized language tests

Assessment is one of the most important factors related to language teaching and learning. It affects the way courses are developed, lessons are planned, materials are designed, and activities are delivered in a language class (McKinley & Thompson, 2018; Shohamy et al., 1996). The English language tests in the past focused only on two-standardized varieties of English, American English and British English (Davies, 2009; McArthur, 1999) and people had to adhere to the norms of these varieties in the standardized proficiency tests to be considered as successful learners. The varieties of English used by people in other parts of the world were taken as an inferior variety and invalid, and the learners were penalized for using these varieties in the standardized tests, mainly due to the “power, economics, and attitudes” (Jenkins, 2015, p.15) associated with the people from the Inner Circle contexts speaking the language. Scholars have also criticized the notion of standardized language tests from different perspectives such as raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015) and linguistic racism (De Costa, 2020; Dovchin, 2020). Although this situation has not changed much till date, there are some positive changes to embrace the diversity of English practiced by people in different contexts in both the teaching and testing of the English language globally.

Despite the push to establish the legitimacy of varieties of Englishes in recent years, the international language tests have been consistently designed to test the language proficiency of the candidates guided by the pervasive ideology that the ultimate goal of English language learning is to achieve the ‘native speaker’ proficiency (Holliday, 2006). They continue to use the approach and tools guided by the monolingual ideology of the English language disrespecting the changes in the way English is used in the multilingual world today. However, they are criticized for this continued indifference and are under pressure to design the tests that can cater the needs of the students with diverse linguistic and cultural diversity. Standardized language tests are also criticized for creating and maintaining language hierarchies historically prevalent in the world. For example, relating the practice of standardized tests with the social hierarchies, Lowenberg (2012, p. 88) argues that “norms for standardized English are the linguistic forms that are actually used (original emphasis) by institutions and individuals that have power and/or influence” in different domains of standardized English use. Davidson (2006) is also critical about the standardized tests and states:

Large, powerful English language tests are fundamentally disconnected from the insights in analysis of English in the world contexts. These exams set forth linguistic norms that do not necessarily represent the rich body of English varieties spoken and used in contact situations all over the world. (p. 709)

One recent question, however, is regarding how valid these tests are in terms of measurement of the actual ability of the candidates in using the English language for the purpose of communication. As more people come in contact with each other globally, they require skills to negotiate meaning with interlocutors with different linguistic and cultural and social backgrounds and speak different varieties of English. In supporting this view, Canagarajah (2006a) asserts that “to be really proficient in English today, one has to be multidialectal... One needs the capacity to negotiate diverse varieties to facilitate communication” (p. 233). He further argues that proficiency to communicate with the traditionally English-speaking communities, mostly living in the Inner Circle Countries, is not enough as most of the communication in English today takes place among the multilingual speakers using English as an international lingua franca. However, scholars such as Canagarajah have refrained from advocating for norms based on Outer and/or Expanding Circle countries as a model that explicitly draws from the new varieties used in non-traditional English-speaking contexts because such norms will also be based on the English used by a limited number of people in certain areas and, thus, cannot be representative of the entire population of English users in the world.

The growth of new and legitimate varieties of English especially in the Outer Circle countries have created pressure to embrace diversity both in teaching English and assessment of English language proficiency. However, this does not mean that the English learners need to master all the varieties used in the world. Rather it is important for them to develop negotiation skills for effective communication between communities (Canagarajah, 2006a). This requires a shift in assessment practices that can cater to the needs of the changing purpose, users, and contexts of use of Englishes. This new landscape of EIL, according to Hu (2012, p. 123) “requires a critical examination of the established practices”.

One of the major changes embraced by language tests in recent years is the use of non-native speakers as the markers of the tests, but this is not enough as they continue to use the test items and evaluation criteria that adhere to the norms followed by the so-called ‘native speakers’ in Inner Circle countries. Unfortunately, these tests, which are meant for the ‘non-native speakers’ are biased against the bi/multilingual users of English and discredit their multilingual ability, diversity and cultural sensitivity (Freimuth, 2022) and also impact test-takers perception and performance (Altakhaineh & Melo-Pfeifer, 2022). Therefore, the existing assessment practices also fail to replicate the real-life use of the English language as the bi/multilingual students draw a lot of linguistic and non-linguistic resources from various codes (Canagarajah, 2006a). The language tests should also find ways to respect the cross-linguistic resources and translanguaging skills that

multilingual speakers use while communicating across cultures. They should recognize the fact that multilingual speakers use codes from different linguistic resources in real life communication (Canagarajah, 2013). Therefore, testing the ability of people to use English in multinational contexts by multilingual speakers is more relevant and timelier than doing it with reference to the homogeneous contexts of monolingual speakers.

Two notable and most widely used language test systems in the world are IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). More than 10,000 institutions in 150 countries accept TOEFL scores, and over 35 million people from all over the world have taken the test since it started its operation in 1964 (Educational Testing Services, n.d.). Similarly, IELTS is offered in 130 countries and recognized by 6,000 organizations. Each year 1.5 million people who want to migrate, study or work in English-speaking countries take these tests (British Council, n.d.)

To address the concerns and criticism from various stakeholders, a few notable changes have been made in the standardized tests. According to Taylor (2002), IELTS tests have started including reading and listening texts that are representative of social and regional varieties of English and involve proficient non-native material writers and test raters from counties other than Inner Circle countries. Hu (2012) observes that similar changes have also been made to revise the TOEFL test. Despite these claims, the limited attempts made to accommodate non-native speakers of English (Llurda, 2004) have not been able to create an impact on the overall concept of diversity and WE. The changes in both TOEFL and IELTS do not accommodate the non-native varieties of English except the fact that the 'proficient' nonnative speakers are also included as the examiners for oral and written tests. If the administrators want to develop these tests as tools that measure the candidates' English language ability to communicate in a diverse range of situations, they should incorporate content and test items that are adapted from a range of contexts including the Outer and Expanding Circles. They should embrace the sociocultural and linguistic features of the different varieties of Englishes used around the world.

Higher education, transnational student mobility and assessment of English

With the growing number of students traveling abroad from the Outer and Expanding Circle countries to the Inner Circle countries, the standardized tests need to be more inclusive and address the different contexts they need to communicate using English. According to Migration Policy Institute (2018), 4.6 million students were studying in counties other than their home countries in 2017. The US leads the table with more than a fifth of these enrollments and as more than a million international students are admitted in US higher education institutions annually (Israel & Batalova, 2021). Most of these students in the US are from countries such as China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Taiwan where English is not a historically dominant language.

The UK draws the second highest number of international students and had 19% students studying in its higher education were from other countries in 2017. Among the international students, 6% were from the European Union and 13% from the rest of the world (UK Council for International Student Affairs, 2018). Some Australian universities have international students at the rate of more than a quarter of their total enrolment. While nearly a third of the international students are from China, there is a significant presence of students from India, Nepal, Malaysia and Vietnam as well (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2018). The data on higher education institutions suggest that international students from non-English dominant countries are important populations in the Universities in the Inner Circle Countries with half of the total international students traveling to these Inner Circle countries for higher education (Study International, 2018). The fact that standardized tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, PTE, Cambridge ESOL are mandatory requirements for college admission for multilingual students in these countries (Zhang-Wu & Brisk, 2021) indicates the importance placed by the universities in these tests. Therefore, as argued by Hamid et al. (2018), standardized tests are functioning as gatekeepers of higher education and transnational student mobility.

Since the candidates of these standardized tests are non-native English-speakers coming from different social and cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it is expected that the content and tools adopted in these tests should recognize different varieties of English used around the world. Unfortunately, these tests use the so-called standardized English as the only norm to assess the English language proficiency of the candidates that do not represent different varieties of Englishes used around the world (Davidson, 2006). These tests fail to recognize the reality of the newly established legitimate varieties of English used in many regions, especially in the Outer Circle countries where English is used beyond academic and formal settings and expands to everyday lives of people. At the same time, these tests do not indicate much about the success of the students in contexts such as in the US where they encounter many varieties of English both on and off campuses, which leads them to question their ability to communicate in English (Zhang-Wu & Brisk, 2021). Interestingly, international students' scores in these standardized tests have been proved to be an insignificant predictor of even their academic success in English-dominant countries (Ginther & Yan, 2018; Hill et al., 1999; Krausz et al., 2005). Therefore, these standardized tests have been questioned for their ability to predict the success of the students who want to study in the Inner Circle countries.

As a mandatory requirement for admission in universities in the English-dominant countries, students willing to study in these countries are required to prove themselves in standardized language tests. Since these tests over emphasize the Inner Circle norms for assessing English language users (Davidson, 2006), students are bound to follow the standards set by these tests to get a good score for their chances of admission in their chosen universities. This encourages them to focus on learning the so-called standardized variety used by White middle class educated people in these countries limiting their

success in multilingual contexts (Khan, 2009). This orientation might pose a challenge for both the universities and the students as they are not able to communicate well with their peers coming from different countries and cultures due to lack of awareness of different varieties of English (Zhang-Wu & Brisk, 2021). As the number of non-native English-speaking professors is increasing in the American, British or Australian universities, the ability of the students to use English following the ‘standardized English’ norms might not guarantee their academic success. In this regard, Davidson (2006) discusses the concerns of the WE scholars about the standardized language tests and states:

There is a well-established and legitimate concern that large, powerful English language tests are fundamentally disconnected from the insights in analysis of English in the world context. These exams set linguistic norms that do not necessarily represent the rich body of English varieties spoken and used in contact situations all over the world. (p. 709)

Those students who opt to go to the US for higher education need to be aware of the different varieties, such as Black English Vernacular and Spanish English to be able to adjust in the communities in US cities as they do not merely interact with the White middle-class people speaking the so-called standardized English in their lives both within the academic institutions and beyond (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002). If they have not been exposed to the features of English except the standardized English, they will likely face a difficult situation as they need to spend a significant amount of time traveling, shopping, and engaging in different activities outside the academic contexts. This might further make their stay abroad even more difficult. Therefore, they need to have language awareness and cultural sensitivity (Canagarajah, 2006a) towards the diverse groups of people they meet. Since students’ standardized language test score might not be the true representation of their ability to communicate well in American universities and multilingual societies, there is a need for these tests to reflect on their current policies and practices and revise them in light of the ongoing shift in the linguistic landscapes.

Despite his critical observations on the standardized tests, Canagarajah (2006a) agrees on the legitimacy of language tests for people moving to the Inner Circle countries for education and employment purposes. However, he finds such tests problematic and/or invalid when used for recruitment and promotion in an Expanding Circle context, such as a company in Japan. However, the designers of these international language tests need to understand that American society and universities constitute a large number of multilingual speakers. And these students are expected to be able to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds to live in the US successfully. It is, therefore, important to recognize that students’ language proficiencies and their diverse skills are not isolated, and English is a part of their sociolinguistic tapestry they have. Hu (2012, p. 129) emphasizes the need to respond to the “changing sociolinguistic realities” of English as an international language.

Standardized language tests and (lack of) assessment of multilingual abilities

Despite the growing awareness of the WE movement, standardized tests such as TOEFL and IELTS are disconnected from the core ideas that WE scholars have proposed. According to Davidson (2006), these tests continue to promote the ideologies and beliefs that do not necessarily represent the diverse Englishes used in different contexts around the world. Therefore, the tests are problematic for many students because they might not represent the actual ability to negotiate meaning in a multilingual communication using the English language. Moreover, they devalue the bi/multilingual abilities of these students and focus on testing only the monolingual ability. Therefore, there is an urgent need to diversify the approach they use to make these tests more scientific and representative of the linguistic repertoire that the multilingual candidates have. For this, the standardized tests should try to be valid to measure the communicative competence of the candidates for international communication in English that involves people from multilingual contexts.

Jenkins (2006) criticizes the standardized language test on the ground that they focus overtly on the formal lexical and grammatical features that are not used even by the so-called native speakers in their everyday conversations. She discusses some examples of how the standardized tests penalize the candidates even though they are widely intelligible. Jenkins further states that “There is nothing ‘international’ about deferring to the language varieties of a mere two of the world’s Englishes, whose members account for a tiny minority of English speakers” (p. 44). Y. Kachru (2011) supports this argument and argues that the international language tests should aim to test multiple varieties of Englishes (both native and non-native alike) to ensure that the candidates are sensitive to the diversity of Englishes around the world.

To make the discourse of EIL assessment more productive, Hu (2012) has suggested five broad principles that are based on the realities of the different group of people that use English in different contexts. The principles include: (a) Determine linguistic norms for a test according to its intended use, (b) Choose a standardized variety of English if more than one variety is adequate for the intended test use in a society, (c) Provide candidates with exposure to multiple native and non-native varieties of English, (d) Broaden the construct of EIL tests to incorporate intercultural strategic competence, and (e) Make allowances for individual aspirations to Inner-Circle norms. Similarly, Brown (2014) discusses the problems that have emerged due to the ongoing debate on inclusion of WE in language testing and suggests how various Englishes can be included in the language tests. He has made the following recommendations for more productive intersection of WE and language testing: (a) Better describe WE in all three circles, as well as ELF and EIL, (b) Broaden and narrow our views of what English assessment can be, (c) Recognize that test items come in many forms, (d) Base tests on context, needs, and decision purposes, (d) Clearly explain the purpose and target English(es) of every test, (e) Discourage misuse of test results, and (g) Do much more research on WE,

ELF, EIL, as they relate to language testing. Comparing these lists reveals that both Hu (2012) and Brown (2012) have focused on engaging a diverse range of items and people engaged in different stages of test preparation, administration, and implementation.

Hu (2012) critically reviews the established principles and practices for assessing English proficiency when it has grown as a language of global communication and suggests developing “a set of macrostrategies grounded in a sound understanding of the postmodern conditions of EIL that can guide an informed redefinition of the test construct for a fair, relevant, and valid assessment of EIL proficiency” (p.139). The test developers have to acknowledge that the use of English by the people from the Outer and Expanding Circle might differ from the ‘standardized’ norms of these tests “not necessarily because they are deficient in English, but because they inhabit communities where English is acquired non-natively and particular nonnative features have assumed the status of stable varietal differences” (Elder & Davies, 2006, p. 288). It might be worth quoting Canagarajah (2006a) in this context who argues that in most cases involving multilingual individuals:

proficiency means, then, the ability to shuttle between different varieties of English and different speech communities. In this sense, the argument becomes irrelevant whether local standards or inner-circle standards matter. We need both and more – that is, the ability to negotiate the varieties in other outer- and expanding-circle communities as well.
(p. 233)

Scholars in recent years have discussed how multilingual individuals engage in translanguaging practices drawing on the multiple linguistic and nonlinguistic resources (Canagarajah, 2013; García & Li, 2014; Lin, 2019; Li, 2018). According to Lin (2019), translanguaging perspectives takes a “fluid, dynamic view of language” (p. 5) especially in multilingual individuals. Lin (2015, p. 23) uses the term “trans-semiotising” to describe this phenomenon, whereas Canagarajah (2011a) refers to this process as “shuttle between languages” (p. 401) and argues that people use translanguaging as a strategy for communication in multilingual communications as the need to communicate with diverse communities grows (Canagarajah, 2013). Translanguaging has been proposed as an approach with transformation in the teaching, learning and assessment of multilingual individuals by scholars and can be adopted by the standardized language tests to make them more appropriate to test the translingual competencies of the candidates (Baker & Hope, 2019; Garcia & Lin, 2017; Van Viegen & Jang, 2021). Despite these arguments, however, there are practical challenges related to development and administration of standardized language tests that can truly assess the language proficiency of the multilingual people. I discuss this issue in detail in the next section where I elaborate on the ideological, practical and financial constraints in achieving the desired changes in the field of standardized language tests.

Challenges of assessing English as an international language

Along with the growth of English as a global language in diverse contexts several challenges have emerged in both teaching and assessment of English language proficiency of the language learners (Canagarajah, 2006b). As a result, the international language tests are under pressure to test the pragmatic ability of the candidates to use English in diverse international contexts that includes users from a range of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. However, as Hu (2012, pp. 137-138) argues, one of the major challenges for the EIL test developers is selection of the “appropriate language tasks to elicit...those pragmatic strategies that facilitate effective communication”.

To stand by their names as true international tests, the standardized tests need to reflect the way English is used around the world and make necessary changes in various dimensions such as the selection of contents and test items, testers, and overall belief on what counts as English language proficiency in an extremely globalized world. The inhabitants of the Inner Circle countries are not required to take any of these so-called standardized tests to prove their ability to communicate with an international audience in English. However, the tests are designed in such a way that favors the candidates who are familiar with the norms followed in these traditionally English dominant countries. This practice raises critical questions on the validity of these tests as they test the skill to use a limited type of English which is not used in most of the communicative contexts that involve the use of English around the world.

If the standardized tests want to claim themselves as international tests in true sense, they must “develop instruments with imagination and creativity to assess proficiency in the communicative needs of English as a lingua Franca” (Canagarajah, 2006a, p. 240). However, the ongoing discussion on the notion of WE has not been able to provide clear ideas on how these tests can actually cater the needs of the diverse population they aim to serve. It might not be practical to design multiple sets of test items to test candidates from different backgrounds as the tests need to be consistent and fair. Therefore, the biggest challenge for these tests could be figuring out how to embrace the variation in the use of English without compromising their ability to provide a consistent and reliable framework for assessment of the English language ability of the extremely diverse candidates.

A survey of the existing literature shows that the testing agencies are facing a tough time to maintain consistency and embrace diversity in their approach. Jenkins (2006), for example, states that “some of the examination boards...are already confronting the issues of how to make English language testing more relevant to the international needs of many test-takers” (p. 48). To overcome this problem, as Canagarajah (2006a) notes, the testing agencies need to develop tools that test the intelligibility rather than grammatical correctness. Kubota (2012) concurs with these arguments and asserts that these tests should be designed to assess ability to use English as a lingua franca and tool for border-crossing communication.

Despite the attempts to support the advancement of WE-informed language tests, much of the scholarship in this area has focused on describing the features of the English language used in different contexts and argued that teaching and testing of English should embrace those features. There is a lack of empirical studies that explore how inclusion of WE features has an impact on predictability of the success of the candidates in communicating with the diverse range of communicative contexts in both Inner and Outer Circle contexts. Besides the material and human resources, as Kubota (2018, p. 97) argues, “The major obstacle in...implementation of world Englishes amounts to language ideology that constitutes and reflects the biases people have toward linguistic varieties and speakers’ race/ethnicity”. Therefore, having an ideological clarity among the key stakeholders is the most important factor in making a progress towards WE-informed assessment practices. It should also be noted that a single model of language test that adheres to particular norms of English language use and usage is bound to have more limitations than the benefits it may offer.

Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed the recent developments in the field of world Englishes and its impact on the assessment of English as an international language through the standardized tests. While doing so I argue that the current practices of assessment of proficiency of English as an international language are biased, inadequate and invalid, and, therefore, need a serious revision both in the content and the process involved.

A critical examination of the recent developments in the field of language teaching and assessment shows that despite scholars fiercely advocating for more inclusive practices both in English language teaching and testing, little changes have been made by the classroom teachers and assessors in line with the emerging trends in the English language in the world. Despite this, a noted shift in the attitude of the test takes from standardized norms to multiple norms is evident in the recent literature. However, more research in this area is required to get a clear picture of the ongoing shift in the use of the English language. This might also require studies that explore the relationship between the nature of tasks, testers and various testing approaches on the predictability and success of the candidates in international communication. The field also needs to shift the research agenda from describing the features of WE and EIL to more practical issues like experimenting with the contents and test items that can be used by the standardized tests to assess the ability of the candidates to communicate effectively in international communication.

We might not be able to see the changes in our teaching approaches unless there is a shift in the way we test the ability of our students as Jenkins (2006) has argued, “it is changes in teaching which keep pace with changes in testing and not vice versa” (p. 49). Although some changes are possible by the classroom teachers, the much-desired changes in the overall testing industry will be possible only when the standardized tests embrace the diversity of Englishes people use in different parts of the world. Therefore,

if we want to bring change in the overall field of English language teaching, we should revise the approach used in testing language.

On a more personal note, as a so called ‘non-native’ user of English and a transnational scholar having an experience of these standardized tests at some point in my life, I strongly feel that standardized tests are not open to inclusiveness and, therefore, have not been able to embrace the diversity of Englishes used around the world. The speakers from the Inner Circles also have a need to diversify their English as they come across multiple communicative contexts that demand them to negotiate diverse varieties of English. While I argue that there is a need for these language tests to shift from their current model and diversity their approach, I am not advocating that these tests should embrace the Outer Circle and Expanding Circle norms leaving their existing norms guided by the historically dominant Inner Circle standards. Otherwise, this will be a shift from one extreme to another one as Canagarajah (2006a) argues:

Posing the options as either “native English norms” or “new Englishes norms” is misleading. A proficient speaker of English in the postmodern world needs an awareness of both. He or she should be able to shuttle between different norms, recognizing the systematic and legitimate status of different varieties of English in this diverse family of languages. (p. 234)

Therefore, one needs to be careful not to fall into the trap of setting ‘the’ standards for these tests and advocate for a more flexible, fluid and practical approach that can capture the everyday realities of multilingual uses of English. Kumaravadivelu (2016, p. 66) aptly covers this as he argues that if we wish to “effectively disrupt the hegemonic power structure, the only option open to it is a decolonial option which demands result-oriented action, not just intellectual elaboration (original emphasis)”. Highlighting the need for a more practice-oriented approach, Jenkins (2006) makes similar comments and argues that “practical outcomes are trailing badly behind theoretical good intentions” (p. 48). Scholars advocating for WE, therefore, should not just get engaged in scholarly discussions on the issue, but also try to help teachers and testers design and administer the tests in a way that can truly assess the ability of the English language learners to use English as a ‘dynamic language’ (Mahboob, 2018) with people from a diverse range of contexts.

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