

## ***Plenary Paper***

# **Major Trends in the Global ELT Field: A Non-Native English-Speaking Professional's Perspective**

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Twenty-nine years ago, as a young EFL university teacher full of dreams, I left China, going across the ocean to Canada to pursue my goal of getting a graduate degree in TESOL and Applied Linguistics. As the only graduate student from China in that prestigious Canadian graduate school, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) / University of Toronto, I encountered all kinds of challenges in addition to cultural shock during the first few months. The terminologies in the field were all very foreign to me. “Comprehensible input,” “UG,” “SLA” – I had never heard these terms. Even the daily interaction with Canadians was definitely not Small Talk to me. Whenever someone initiated a “small talk” with me, my heart started jumping fast. “Small talk” always felt like “stressful talk” as my English learning in China was based on grammar-translation, literature-translation and memorization. With persistence and good learning strategies, I overcame one barrier after another and became the first Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from mainland China to graduate from OISE. OISE is one of the leading institutions in ELT in the world where many well-known ELT scholars have taught and / or studied, like David H. Stern, Jim Cummins, Merrill Swain, Michael Canale, J. P. B. Allen, Alistair Pennycook, Bonnie Norton, Ryuko Kubota, Brian Morgan, and Angel Lin, to name a few. Today, I am able to teach graduate students, do teacher training, and work with adult English language learners. I also have had the opportunity to serve as President-elect of TESOL International Association and am serving as President in 2014-2015. I have been working with people in the field whose work I read and respect. My story is just one of many stories about the journey of non-native English-speaking ELT professionals. Together, we are making a difference in our professional lives and writing a new page in the ELT field.

This paper, which is based on my opening plenary at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual CamTESOL Conference, addresses nine major trends in the ELT field from my perspective as a non-native English-speaking educator.

### **Trend 1: Changes in Perspectives on English Language Teaching and Learning**

Over the last 50 years, and especially during the last 20 years, the ELT field has seen a dramatic change in educators’ views of the role of English language teaching. English language educators have realized that many new English language learners already know two or more

languages. English is not just their second language anymore. With this awareness, acronyms for the field have also evolved – from ESL (English as a Second Language) to ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), from TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) to TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), Western English to English as an International Language (EIL). The term TENOR (Teaching English for No Obvious Reason because it is in the school curriculum and it is a job) has been replaced by TSR (TESOLers for Social Responsibility) and CLT (Communicative Language Teaching, Contextualized Language Teaching) and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). Nowadays, more and more research and discussions are focused on the issues of “World Englishes” and ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) rather than simply referring to any English spoken outside of the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and Australia as EFL (English as a Foreign Language).

### **Trend 2: Changes in Goals of English Language Teaching and Learning**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the goals of ELT have changed from focusing solely on developing language skills and mimicking native English speakers to fostering a sense of social responsibility in students. Students should be treated as language users.

A series of questions that have been put forward by many educators (Kirby, 1989, as cited in Cates, 1997)

What good is it to teach our students to read if they only read degrading pornography? What good is it to teach students to write if they use their knowledge to write racist graffiti?

Today, more educators are realizing that ELT cannot be considered successful when students do not know about global issues or care about societal problems, or worse yet, in the future use the language skills they have learned for such destructive activities as participating in global crime networks or damaging the environment (Brown, 1994, 2007; Cates, 1997; Sun 2010).

With the awareness of the importance of producing responsible citizens for society, teachers now have well recognized that teaching English is not simply to prepare students to imitate native English speakers as language learners but to produce fully competent language users, critical thinkers, and constructive social change agents as Crystal (1997, 2004), Cook (2002), and Brown (2007) noted.

### **Trend 3: Changes in Teaching Approaches**

The TESOL field has evolved from using traditional grammar translation methods to communicative language teaching approaches where the focus of language teaching is on meaningful language use in a broad context, to where we are now: the 21st century is what Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2006), Brown (1994, 2007), and Richards and Rodgers (2001) referred as the “Post-Method Era” in which the ELT discussions are more focused on eclectic approaches rather than on a single method or approach. Brown (1994) called it *enlightened eclecticism*. Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Mellow (2002) have used the term *principled eclecticism* to describe a coherent and pluralistic approach to language teaching and learning.

Here are the main characteristics of principled eclecticism:

- Maximize learning opportunities
- Facilitate negotiated interaction
- Encourage learner autonomy
- Increase language awareness (tolerant of learner errors)
- Activate self-discovery (utilize learning and communication strategies)
- Contextualize language input
- Integrate language skills
- Ensure social relevance (a means for self-empowerment and expression)
- Raise cultural consciousness (goal, purpose of teaching / learning)

(Kumaravadivelu, 1994)

Today, the use of L1, as well as the use of a variety of accents in listening activities and assessments, is encouraged in teaching and learning.

#### **Trend 4: Changes in Teaching Content, Curriculum Design, and Assessment**

Today's ELT classroom is now interdisciplinary. The hot topics nowadays are CBLI (Content-Based Language Instruction), CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), or SIOP (Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocols), in addition to ESP (English for Special Purposes). With such changes, now more and more programs require English teachers to use cross-curricular, cross-disciplinary content in teaching so the students learn both the content and English. English is not viewed as an end in itself but as a means to learn subject area knowledge such as history, mathematics, and science.

In terms of teaching content, textbooks and learning materials have more inclusion of multicultural content both from local and global resources to help students gain multiple perspectives and multicultural understandings. Students read from multicultural writers. They take a "field trip" to Angkor Wat or the Great Wall of China, but never leave the school. They work on collaborative projects to address critical issues locally and globally.

Curriculum designs are more content-based and theme-based with emphases on both language and content knowledge. The learning outcomes or learning standards are much broader and includes not only language skills, but critical thinking, learning strategies and related content knowledge and skills in the real world. They emphasize both the learning process and the product. These learning standards / outcomes are guiding the curriculum design and classroom instruction.

Today, standards, accountability, and assessment have become a major focus of the educational reforms in many countries in the world, including Cambodia.

#### **Trend 5: Expanding the Dimension of Communicative Competence**

Much recent research and many publications have focused on the discussions of expanding the framework of communicative competence. Some scholars introduced a new way of looking at SLA as "multi-competence" (Cook, 2002 and others, such as Byram (1997) and Kohn (2013), focused on the importance of intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

According to Cook (2012, para 1-2),

Multi-competence...presents a view of second language acquisition (SLA) based on the second language (L2) user as a whole person rather than on the monolingual native speaker... It changes the angle from which second language acquisition is viewed. It constitutes a bilingual 'wholistic' interpretation of bilingualism as opposed to a monolingual 'fractional' interpretation of bilingualism, in Grosjean's (2009)'s terms).

Another dimension of the expansion of the communicative competence framework is the discussions on intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997, 2009; Kohn, 2013). Those with intercultural communicative competence are able to effectively communicate with interlocutors from other cultures in appropriate ways. The implication here is that when teaching intercultural communicative competence, teachers need to teach both local and international cultures. Nowadays, there is less focus on the culture of native speakers of English unless there is a specific purpose. The goal is to produce effective language users who can use English as lingua franca, not just learners who mimic the "inner-circle" countries' language and cultures. Only in this way, TESOL educators can, for example, introduce the world to students in Cambodia and introduce Cambodia to the world.

Several researchers in the ELT field have raised a series of conceptual issues (Honna, 2005; Wen, 2013) in terms how cultures should be expressed in English:

As a speaker, should you stick to your own way of thinking? Or should you adapt to the listener's way of thinking when you communicate with the listener?  
As a listener, should you impose your own way of thinking on the speaker? Or should you be sensitive to and tolerant of the speaker's different way of thinking?

Honna (2005) shared a study that he and his colleagues had conducted back in 2000 using the following story. The story, *My Mother Isn't Well, Sir*, was told by an Australian to Honna, a Japanese professor. The following conversation between a Hong Kong police superintendent who was British and a Chinese constable took place in the superintendent's office.

There was a quiet knock at the door and in came a young Chinese police constable. He was, of course wearing his uniform. He saluted the superintendent and stood smartly to attention in front of the large wooden desk.

"Yes?" enquired the superintendent.

"My mother is not very well, sir", started the constable.

"Yes?" repeated the superintendent, a frown appearing on his brow.

"She has to go into hospital, sir", continued the constable.

"So?"

"On Thursday, sir".

The superintendent's frown was replaced by a look of exasperation.

"What is it that you want?" he asked sternly.

At this direct question, the constable's face fell and he simply mumbled,

"Nothing, sir. It's all right", and turned and left the room.

As soon as the door had closed the superintendent turned to me and said:

"You see. A classic case. They can't get to the point."

"So, what would you want him to say?" I asked.

"Well, instead of beating around the bush, he should come straight to the point. He obviously wants some leave so he can look after his mother. He should ask for leave and not waste my time going on about his poor mother."

"You want him to say something like, 'Can I have some leave please, sir?'"

"Yes, exactly", replied the superintendent.

(Honna, Kirkpatrick, & Gilbert, 2000, pp. 16-17, as cited in Honna, 2005, p. 80)

The study surveyed 138 students and asked them to respond who they thought was responsible for the communication breakdown for the case *My Mother Isn't Well, Sir*. As indicated in Figure 1, sixty-nine percent of the respondents believed the British superintendent was responsible. While the British superintendent had understood the words and meaning of the constable's request, he refused to accept the style of the request since it reflected norms different from his own.

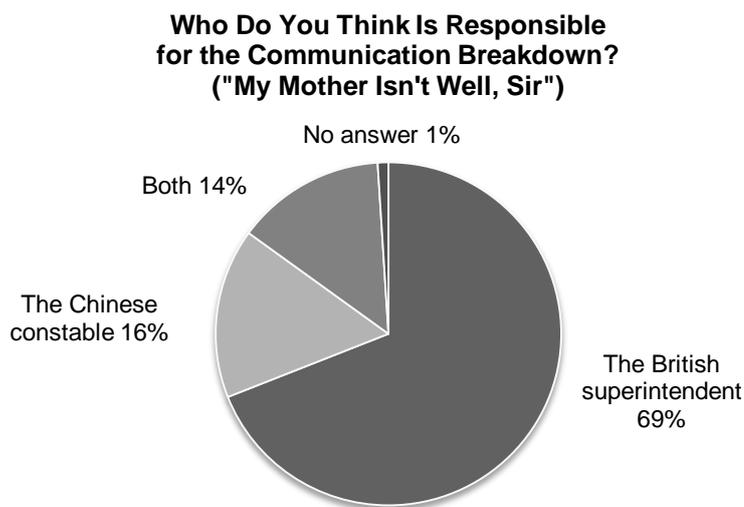


Figure 1. Student responses ( $N = 138$ ) (Honna, 2005)

If this exchange had happened between a Chinese speaker and a Cambodian speaker, the outcome would have been very different:

Chinese: My mother is not very well, sir.

Cambodian: Oh, you must be worried. Would you want to take a leave and take care of your mother?

(adapted from Honna, 2005, p. 81)

In Asia, non-native speakers of English frequently begin to relate to and understand each other more when not following native speaker communication norms (Honna, Kirkpatrick, & Gilbert, 2000, as cited in Honna, 2005; Wen, 2013). Being able and willing to listen and try to understand what others are saying without expecting them to conform to one's cultural values and communication norms is essential in intercultural communication. As Honna (2005) stated, "with some degree of intercultural awareness, one is capable of understanding the other even if the two persons' communication styles are different."

It is clear that communicating effectively and appropriately involves both the speaker and the listener. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) requires:

- Openness and respect: the ability and readiness to regard other people's values, customs and practices as worthwhile in their own right and not merely as different from the norm and willingness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own,
- Empathy and tolerance: the ability and willingness to understand, acknowledge and accept different behaviors and ways of thinking, the existence of opinions or behavior that one does not necessarily agree with,
- Sensitivity and flexibility: the ability and willingness to adapt and to deal appropriately with the feelings and ways of thinking of other persons, and the awareness and responsiveness to other people's behaviors and ways of thinking, and
- Knowledge and application of critical cultural awareness: knowledge and critical awareness of social groups, values and cultural practices in one's own and in one's target culture, and the ability to apply and act effectively using that knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.

(Byram, 1997, 2009; Kohn, 2013; UNESCO, 2013, Wen, 2013)

These traits and abilities are more important for successful intercultural communication than the native English speakers' (NES) norms of communication.

### **Trend 6: Changes in Views of an Effective English Educator**

With the changing views of communicative competence and the awareness of intercultural communicative competence, the perception of what is an effective English teacher is also changing. Recent studies on World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca as well as the roles of NNESTs (non-native English speaking teachers) in the TESOL field have made more people recognize that the effectiveness of an English teacher should be determined by his / her linguistic, instructional, and intercultural competence rather than simply being a native speaker of English. In fact, English is used by more people whose mother tongue is not English (Canagarajah, 1999a, 2007; Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997; Kirkpatrick, 2007; McKay, 2002; Seidlhofer, 2011).

Such a shift has further raised the awareness of non-native speakers of English teaching in the TESOL community. English teaching is no longer dominated by native speakers. Educators

who are speakers of English as a non-native language are thought to outnumber those who are speakers of English as a native language. Today, more and more non-native speaking educators are working in the ELT profession and playing important roles in TESOL leadership, research, and teacher training. They are in the front line with EL learners. Their significant contributions and impact on learners and the profession are no longer peripheral. TESOL, a leading professional association for English teaching around world, for example, has a Non-Native English Speaking Teachers Interest Section (NNEST-IS), with many well-known TESOL researchers and scholars as members. It is one of the most dynamic Interest Sections within the TESOL organization. The NNESTers work tirelessly together with native English-speaking researchers and educators to raise awareness of non-native English speaking educators.

In fact, there are many advantages that NNESTs possess in ELT. NNESTs are better at:

- Teaching learning strategies and anticipating learning difficulties
- Sharing multilingual and multicultural perspectives
- Empathizing with the needs of language learners
- Serving as models of successful learners and users
- Providing useful information about the language  
(Braine, 2005; Canagarajah, 1999b; Cook, 2005; Llurda, 2005; Mahboob, 2003; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Seidlhofer, 1999)

Educators want to make sure that students are served by well-prepared and well-qualified teachers, regardless their first language background (Braine, 2005; Canagarajah, 1999b; Cook, 2005; Liu, 1999; Llurda, 2005; Mahboob, 2003; Medgyes, 1992; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Seidlhofer, 1999, to name a few).

### **Trend 7: Early Start in Learning English**

In recent years, many countries have started teaching English in earlier grades at school (Baldauf, Kaplan, Kamwangamalu, & Bryant, 2011). For example, in 2011, Japan made English as a required subject in the primary level. In 2012, Dubai introduced English in the kindergarten level instead of Grade 1. In Egypt, English is a required subject starting with the first grade. Since 2011, English learning has been introduced from Grade 4 in Vietnam and Saudi Arabia. Also In 2004, Taiwan's Ministry of Education mandated all public elementary schools should start English courses from Grade 3 but the majority of schools actually begin to teach English in the first grade (C. Chern, personal conversation, 2013). In the People's Republic of China, since the new millennium, English has been a required subject for students from Grade 3 all the way to college and graduate school, and in 2011, the Ministry of Education introduced new national English curriculum standards for compulsory education which further raised the bar for all students in both primary and secondary schools (Y. Gong, personal conversation, 2013). In Thailand, English was first mandated to be taught in primary Year One in 1996, but in 2001, all schools had to be ready to teach English from Year One; in 2013, the Ministry of Education in Thailand announced another education reform aiming to improve students' English proficiency (S. Nimmannit, personal conversation, 2014). English is a compulsory subject in kindergartens in Malaysia, and almost all Malaysian children will learn at least some English in their kindergarten years. This trend can be seen in many countries around the world (Baldauf, Kaplan, Kamwangamalu, & Bryant, 2011).

### **Trend 8: Rapid Development and Integration of Information Technology in ELT**

Today we face an information explosion. The World Wide Web contains seventeen times the information of the U.S. Library of Congress (Johnston, 2012). The recent rapid development of technology and the use of cell phones and different multimedia devices have opened endless

possibilities for teachers to teach English and access information. The Internet, YouTube, Web 2.0, e-books, and various websites have changed the way teachers prepare their lessons and instruct their students. Now, with ready-made materials at the touch of a keyboard button, it is much easier to bring real-life issues to the classroom and have meaningful discussions. Teachers have free access to online resources and are less worried about limited class budgets in preparing lessons and creating teaching activities. Appropriate integration of technology in the classroom encourages students to use language in many different ways and bring world issues into the classroom.

Furthermore, learners from different parts of the world can be connected and exchange ideas via the Internet and other media devices. Thus, the way to gain information and knowledge in terms of accessibility, flexibility, and mobility has changed drastically. Students may know more about how to use technology than their teachers: nowadays, it is said that the 26 letters in the alphabet in English start with A for Apple, B for Bluetooth, C for Chat, D for download, E for e-mail, F for Facebook, G for Google, H for Hewlett-Packard, I for iPhone, and J for Java. Children, starting from a very young age, have been using digital devices in learning, communicating with others, and playing games, yet they need proper guidance from their teachers on how to select, analyze, and utilize the right information to achieve their learning goals.

### **Trend 9: Changing Roles and Increasing Responsibilities of Teachers**

With all the new trends happening, the role of today's teachers is also evolving and their responsibilities have also been increasing. Trilling & Fadel (2009) outlined the seven most important skills that students need to be ready for as 21st century citizens:

#### The 7 Cs

1. Critical thinking and problem solving
2. Creativity & innovation
3. Collaboration, teamwork, and leadership
4. Cross-cultural understanding
5. Communication, information, and media literacy
6. Computing and ICT literacy
7. Career and learning self-reliance

(Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 176)

The needs of the classroom of today differ from those of the past few decades. In the 21st century classroom, teachers have multiple roles and responsibilities, the most important being facilitating learning and making an environment where learners are able to develop skills necessary for success in today's workforce (Learning Services International {LSI}, 2007). In ELT, the goal of teachers should not be just to prepare language learners with knowledge of the language but to produce effective language users who are critical thinkers with strong 7C skills. To achieve this goal, teachers need to understand the students' learning styles, and even more importantly, engage learners with different strategies and ways to learn and use the language. One possible way to do this is to focus on learners having a preliminary experience of work environments. This can be done through a content- and project-based curriculum through which students work collaboratively, building skills in communication and higher order critical thinking as well as acquiring technological knowledge (LSI, 2007). The integration of technology is not an add-on but *a must* in teaching and learning.

Another important change is that teaching is not necessarily a solitary activity now (LSI, 2007). There are opportunities to co-teach, team-teach, and collaborate with teachers from other

disciplines. For example, in 2013, I co-taught an ESP teacher training class with instructors from the Aviation Maintenance Technology (AMT) program to prepare future teachers who will teach students in the AMT program overseas as there is a rapidly growing demand for such teachers overseas. The co-teaching experience has been one of the most rewarding experiences I have had during my more than 28 years of teaching.

Furthermore, teachers are no longer considered to bear the entire responsibility of making learning happen effectively; other parties include parents, school administrators, boards of education, local and larger communities, and the students themselves (LSI, 2007). However, in reality, teachers are still the ones who shoulder the most responsibility to educate students and implement all the mandates. Therefore, teachers need real institutional support on all levels including funding, and release time to attend training and implement new ways of teaching and assessing learning.

### **Final Words: Our Responsibilities**

With the rapid changes in the ELT field, teachers are expected to engage in continuous professional development activities in order to keep current on trends, research, development, and practices as well as to remain effective and competitive.

Educators need to improve professionally by:

- Increasing their knowledge base and skills in ELT through professional development (PD) activities.
- Urging institutions and policy-makers to create supportive environments where PD is highly valued.
- Ensuring that institutions provide funding and release time for PD activities.
- Engaging in and critically reflecting on new ways of teaching, including different strategies and technologies.
- Implementing a “principled eclectic approach” and the 7Cs in an informed and effective way.
- Forming teacher learning communities to build support systems and exchange teaching and learning ideas.
- Sharing teaching and learning strategies and successes with others at conferences and in publications.
- Valuing perspectives, expertise, and resources of non-native speaking teachers of English.
- Being confident and open minded, embracing every opportunity to grow as professionals and as learners.

While teachers can make a difference in students’ lives in the classroom, teachers can also make a difference in their own professional lives and make professional organizations better in serving them, their colleagues, and communities. The awareness of “World Englishes,” “English as an International Language,” the roles of non-native English-speaking teachers in the TESOL field, the mission of English language learning, and the global English teaching / learning community did not occur by happenstance. This progress has been achieved through the concerted effort of all involved individuals who care about the profession, the students, and the equality of all TESOL educators in the education system. The stronger the professional association, the louder the voices can be heard at different policy-making levels and professional organizations. Also, the more publications that are from NNEST educators and on the current research and teaching practice in the ELT field, the better the awareness and opportunities that can be created for teachers and for learners.

In conclusion, today, English language teaching has entered a new era. The role of English in global, social, cultural, and linguistic contexts has changed greatly over the decades. This is also reflected in the way English is taught in the classroom. However, ELT educators still face many challenges and responsibilities to ensure quality education for students and maintain professional integrity. The mission to improve ELT for all learners must continue. There is also a strong commitment to putting principles into practice to fulfill social responsibilities as TESOL educators. Professional development at all levels is necessary to improve our English proficiency and teaching skills and to continue sharing cutting edge research ideas and effective teaching strategies and successful stories, so challenges can be overcome, students can be prepared to achieve to the best of their abilities, and teachers can be reflective practitioners and critical constructive social change agents in this world of globalized Englishes.

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