

## **Teachers' Storied Accounts on 'World Englishes'**

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***Rivika C. Alda***

Cebu Normal University, Osmeña Boulevard, Cebu City, Philippines 6000

Email: aldar@cnu.edu.ph

***Remedios C. Bacus***

Cebu Normal University, Osmeña Boulevard, Cebu City, Philippines 6000

Email: bacusr@cnu.edu.ph

### **Abstract**

As English continues to be the world language, the development of more contextualized and culture-based 'Englishes' has been observed. In the context of education, language teachers need to understand the current changes in teaching English based on their students' different contexts. This study explored the junior high school teachers' regard toward 'World Englishes' (WE). It employed a qualitative design with a narrative inquiry approach. Teachers in the junior high school in region 7 in the Philippines were purposively chosen to compose the respondents of the study. These storied accounts on their self-assessed awareness and regard of the nature and importance of understanding WE were determined by using interview questions. The teachers' narratives provided the nuances of their experiences in language teaching and the subjective meaning attached to these experiences. The following themes were generated from the teachers' narratives: *Knowledge of WE is essential; Teachers are desirous to learn more about WE, and Language teachers need to be WE-oriented*. Most of these teachers acknowledged that they have limited knowledge of WE. Their narratives reflect their desires to learn what WE is and how the concept can be

incorporated in the classroom to enrich and maximize students' learning. It is concluded that as countries engrave their own identity into the English language, a WE-informed curriculum that develops the students' language competencies in a culture-sensitive context is possible only with WE-oriented teachers.

**Keywords:** World Englishes, English language teaching, Glocalized English, Contextualization, Culture-based Englishes

## **Introduction**

In today's boundaryless world, people have acknowledged English as a common tongue. Through the years, the users of the language have uniquely engraved their own identity toward the English language. More and more 'Englishes' have emerged highlighting the culture-embedded identity in each variety. This leads to the significant shift of English as a world language to 'World Englishes' (WE). WE refers to the different varieties of English. The Three-Circle Model of Kachru (1992) and McArthur's (2001) Circle of World Englishes identified the countries of the outer circle and expanding circle as standardizing Englishes. Those in the inner circle in their framework are the countries that are native speakers of the language. The varieties of English are so broad that McArthur (2001) emphasized that it is "possible to be multilingual within World English."

WE in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) promotes the diversity of English and confirms the legitimacy of each variety. With English being a highly diverse language, there is a need to revisit how the English language is taught, represented, and valued in countries in the outer and expanding circles.

Filipinos in Kachru's model belong to the outer circle wherein English is used as a second language and termed by McArthur as a "standardizing English" country. English is both used as a medium of instruction and a subject offered in all grade levels. Students in the

country are taught using General American English as an “idealized model of the native speaker” (Baker, 2017). In most cases, teachers also encourage students to speak like native speakers of the language. Since English teachers aspire for a native speaker proficiency among their students, there is an emphasis on certain issues concerning the “attainability and desirability” of native-speaker norms. Furthermore, Filipinos are often well-praised since they can speak with American-accented English. Language learners usually consider native-like pronunciation as good pronunciation (Ozaki, 2011). However, teachers have observed this as one of the reasons why students sometimes feel inhibited and intimidated to use the language in classroom discourses and in their daily interactions. They become accustomed to the belief that they will be laughed at and corrected if they cannot speak the language with an American “twang”. This results in students not participating in class or not using the language anymore.

Additionally, attaining native fluency can be frustrating to second-language learners (like Filipino students) and practically even to teachers. If teachers only expose students to Received Pronunciation (British English) and General American (American English) standards and regard these as “universal norms and desirable targets” in language instruction, they are “neglecting the realities of EIL (English as an International Language) uses and users” (Dewi, 2012). This practice may devalue other English varieties (including Philippine English) and thus promotes discrimination. The use of localized English should be highly respected as a preference especially if teachers’ primary goal is effective communication.

English varies from one country to another because of the diverse cultures, principles, and native language embedded in it, which makes all the varieties of English flexible and culturally and socially relevant. Thus, English teachers should be at the forefront in promoting in-depth consideration of the varieties of English in education so that students will be more intentional and confident when they speak the language. Considering the teaching

context and learner's current English usage, teachers should primarily prepare students for intercultural communication for them to be ready in the global world.

Furthermore, a native speaker of the language is someone who has acquired the language in early childhood, consistently use it, and, according to Lee (2005) as cited in Wang (2013), "has knowledge and command of the appropriate use of idiomatic expressions, correctness of language form, natural pronunciation, cultural context, and interjections, above-average sized vocabulary, collocations, and other phraseological items, metaphors, frozen syntax, and nonverbal cultural features." He also added that a native speaker would also "possess the ability to manifest and perform spontaneous, fluent discourse, circumlocutions, and clarifications of the message." Based on these characteristics, Lee concludes that "no learner of a language can speak native-like unless he or she is born again." Nonetheless, it is also imperative to expose the students to these two standards- Received Pronunciation (British English) and General American (American English) to provide them with a well-rounded understanding of the origin and development of the English language. Providing students the opportunity to appreciate the native speakers' language, as well as the varieties of their language, helps them speak the language with increasing linguistic complexity and relevance. Students should not be forced to sound like native speakers, rather, they should be able to see that their own English is valued.

Moreover, as the world now embraces English as a shared language and no longer owned only by the native-speaking countries, these WEs should no longer be considered informal, slang, or erroneous. With the "deepening in people's understanding of systematicity, the form function matching, and identity-bearing nature of the new varieties" (Wang, 2013), a glocalized English (the interweaving of global and local English) is deemed necessary and relevant. The concept of glocalization suggests that as the various cultures of the world become outwardly more similar—as seen in such domains as food culture, pop music, and the

widespread use of English as an international language—they simultaneously develop local adaptations of the globalized products (Anderson, 2013).

With WE in language teaching, students are exposed to different glocalized Englishes as well as the native-speaker norms. As such, they are equipped with the skills of being able to understand and be understood in different contexts while bringing their own identity. The WE represents identities of the people, their cultures, and heritages and should therefore be given utmost importance specially in schools. In addition, the purpose of learning English nowadays is no longer to merely understand and to be understood by the native speakers but to be able to communicate with multilingual speakers from different parts of the world for various purposes (social, cultural, economic). This new linguistic landscape calls for the globalization of English in the Philippines. Teachers should teach English taking into account the acknowledgment of the country's accent (not as an inferior accent) and pronunciation, practices, and culture.

Furthermore, it should expose students to the different varieties of English so that when they come across people from different countries, they will be able to appreciate the “culture” that comes with the country's own English. Teachers and students should recognize Philippine English as an equal variety of English that has resulted from the globalization of the language – and thus be taught in the context of WE. Hence, English teachers need to revisit the needs, wants, and expectations of the students in learning English. For what purpose these students are learning English – should be considered when teachers craft the teaching-learning activities in the classroom.

However, this may pose another problem if teachers are not aware of the existence of WE and the different elements that are highlighted, namely: “a repertoire of models for English”; “the localized innovations [in English] have pragmatic bases”; and “the English language now belongs to all those who use it” (Kachru, 1988 as cited in Arrieta, 2017).

English language teaching and learning is influenced by different factors - political, social, cultural, to the perceptions and practices of teachers and learners. To move to the inclusive WE model, teachers and students need a consensus view and an overt effort toward a student-centered approach "that promotes critical thinking about emerging English varieties in all levels of English Language Learning (ELL) proficiency" (Arrieta, 2017). This may not be possible if the idea of WE has not been fully understood by the teachers and students.

Teachers need to realize that in the WE model, it is not the native speakers who "own" English. Thus, teaching students how to sound like native speakers should not be a goal of English language classes. Rather, it should focus on the glocalized English highlighting the way speakers (students) use the language in their contexts.

On the other hand, learners should also be exposed to as many varieties of English as possible so that they may be able to develop a strategy on how to be understood and how to understand others in different communicative situations without having to feel inferior of their pronunciation and accent. Thus, there is a need to revisit current practices and consider paradigm shift highlighting WE which is responsive to the call of localization and contextualization of learning in schools.

### **Research Objective**

This study is conducted to determine the junior high school English teachers' regard toward World Englishes (WE). It is believed that better outcomes especially on achieving English language proficiency among students will be achieved in a WE-oriented curriculum. Results of this undertaking may direct the researchers and the department of education to raise awareness of the principles of WE. The storied accounts of these teachers may also provide rich input on the ways that WE can be integrated into English language classes especially for pragmatic reasons highlighting the country's glocalized English without losing

sight of the other varieties of English which include General American or Received Pronunciation.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This study employed a qualitative design using a narrative inquiry approach. Considering the context of the study, qualitative approach enables the researchers to come up with a deeper understanding of the experiences from the narratives of the teachers. It allows for broader inquiry on these experiences which cannot be translated into numbers. It captures the data that cannot be quantitatively analyzed as these are in the form of beliefs, feelings, values, motivations, aspirations embedded in these narratives. Bamberg (2010) described narratives as the stories told by the respondents that explain or normalize what has occurred. As each teacher-respondent confers the subjective meaning of his/her experiences as an English teacher, narrative inquiry is used as an approach that deals with how meaning is conferred onto experiences.

### ***Research Instruments***

The storied accounts of the teachers on self-assessed regard of the nature and importance of understanding WE as well as their experiences on it were determined using an interview guide. It is composed of open-ended questions that will help the teachers reveal their behaviors on the topic under study. The questions are also designed to be flexible to allow further probing and to allow the teachers to elicit their storied accounts explicitly. The researchers also use appropriate prompts to explore areas where information was difficult to elicit. To ensure validity, the interview guide has been subjected for review by language experts. The researchers are considered as the main instrument of the study since the analysis of the descriptions of the data is dependent on them.

### ***Research Locale and Respondents***

The number of respondents selected in the study was determined using the inclusion criteria and through data saturation. In this study, the data have saturated on the 13<sup>th</sup> respondent, thus, the researchers have to interview 2 more respondents to ensure that there are no new information discovered.

A total of 15 English teachers from the selected junior high schools in region 7 in the country were purposively chosen to compose the respondents of the study. Inclusion criteria were used to identify the teachers. These teachers must have: taught the English subject for more than two years; with at least three years of teaching experience; encountered concerns on students' acquisition of English language; and are willing to be part of the study.

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

For the source of the data, long and in-depth interviews were done along with observing ethical standards and protocols to safeguard the respondents. Before the conduct of the interviews, the researchers first sought the consent of the identified teacher-respondents. The researchers made sure that they were properly informed of the objective and method of the study and the nature of their participation. After consent was granted, the researchers scheduled separate schedules for all of them.

The interview for each respondent lasted from one hour and 30 minutes to two hours on a mutually agreed time and place. The interview of all 15 respondents was completed in two months and all the sessions were recorded, transcribed and analyzed for data analysis. In the data analysis and presentation of results, the respondents' anonymity was observed by using codes-that is R1 means Respondent 1.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data Analysis was completed for another three months. The researchers were engaged in a detailed account of describing and classifying the information gathered for possible



emergent themes, and then providing an interpretation of the findings in light of literature and theoretical underpinnings. The narrative data were analyzed to develop an understanding of the meanings attached to these experiences. Using Braun and Clarke's steps in analyzing the responses, significant themes emerged after clustering of the formulated meanings derived from the teachers' vignettes.

Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest that the following 6 steps should be undertaken by researchers doing thematic analysis. The following are the phases for thematic analysis: (1) familiarization with the data –through reading the transcripts from the interview of the teachers before coding to identify possible patterns and be familiar with all aspects of the data; (2) generating initial codes – involves the production of codes from the data, while continuously revisiting, reflecting and interacting with the data; (3) generating the themes – allows for the sorting and collating all the potentially relevant coded data extracts into themes; (4) reviewing potential themes – includes reviewing and analyzing coded data extracts whether they appear to form a coherent pattern; (5) defining and naming themes – calls for the researchers to conduct and write a detailed analysis, identifying the story that each theme tells; and lastly, (6) producing the report – directs the researchers to write a concise and interesting account of the data and supporting it with vignettes from the respondents to compose the final report (King, 2004).

However, Bamberg noted that “even if narratives are elevated into a central method of sense-making, it needs to be open to interpretations and reinterpretations, as there are various perspectives from which the storied accounts can be analyzed.” In-text citation missing here

## **Results**

To arrive at the teachers' storied accounts on their awareness and regard of the nature and importance of understanding WE, 20 teachers handling English subjects in the junior

high school were interviewed. Less than half of the teachers had completed advanced degree programs in graduate studies and a majority of them have just joined the teaching workforce. As to language background, all of them speak three languages: Cebuano-Visayan, Filipino, and English, and claim to use the General American English variety in their language classes.

With the emerging landscape of English language teaching brought about by the globalization of English, classroom activities still generally focus on the 'native ideology,' particularly in the many expanding circle settings, like the Philippines. To obtain a basis on this ideology, teacher-informants' narratives were clustered. Employing Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework, three themes emerged: Knowledge of WEs is essential, I am eager to learn more about Wes, and Language teachers need to be We-Oriented.

***Theme 1. Knowledge of WE is Essential.***

The overarching goal of English language instruction is to equip the students with reasonable competence in the use of English in differing situations. Teachers are fully aware that as non-native speakers of English, they can only approximate the native-like pronunciation, and for many years, language education is built upon understanding and communicating using "standard English." As to their grasp of WE, the majority of the teachers acknowledged that they have limited knowledge of it. Their accounts reflect their views on the importance of WE.

*It is my first time hearing about World Englishes. I am happy to know there are varieties of English. People will not be embarrassed to express their thoughts; even with grammatical errors for as long as there is intelligibility in any communicative situation. (R2)*

*The concept of World Englishes is still new to most of us in school.*

(R4)

*In my teaching, I have focused on the American accent for it is standard English, and my students must become fluent speakers of English.*

(R9)

*...teaching pronunciation is following the standard American English. (R10)*

*Accent plays a central role when speaking in English because it can help the students when they visit foreign countries. (R11)*

*I should say that my teaching experience is not enough for me to understand what World Englishes is. For now, I want my students to learn and use standard American English. (R12)*

*Every time I teach to develop my students' oral communication skills, I use American English. However, I introduce British English and discuss the difference between them. (R15)*

## ***Themes 2. Teachers are desirous to learn more about WE.***

With the current knowledge on WE, it is difficult for the teachers to expound what it is in relation to teaching. True to the tenet of learning as a lifelong process, the teacher-participants are desirous to learn the 'Whats and Hows' of WE. They believe that to be

effective teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they need to become teachers-as students while being teachers- as guides. The accounts that follow expound on the teachers' desires to learn what 'World Englishes' is and how the concept can be incorporated in the teaching-learning process. Interview responses revealed their innermost desire to learn more about WE.

*I am willing to learn for in learning I will never stop growing and succeeding. WE broaden the students' understanding of English. (R2)*

*The English language should be taught to build a bridge and not a barrier. Hence, teachers should be knowledgeable about it. I feel I need to learn it too. (R5)*

*We have not gone to training and seminars regarding the issues of World Englishes. The awareness and importance of incorporating WE in the classroom are fundamental. I feel there should be more exposure to it. There should be a new methodology and new ways of introducing the lesson to better prepare the students for the future. (R6)*

*The culture-friendly concept of WE addressed the changes in how to teach English. As a teacher, I need to be appreciative, refrain from discriminating against my students for not following the standard English; after all, accent, pronunciation, and grammar vary from place to place, culture to culture. (R8)*

*I feel students have an incorrect impression of English and other Englishes. I am now challenged to lead them to success by giving equal attention to other Englishes, thereby preparing them for real-world tasks. (R13)*

*English has its variations that need to be understood fully to be able to understand each other. (R14)*

*English must be taught with an emphasis on appreciation of one's culture. (R15)*

***Themes 3. Language teachers need to be WE-oriented.***

World Englishes is not a new concept, but to use this paradigm in an English class, and to make everyone in an institution believe its potential to enrich and maximize student learning has not been fully achieved. The stories of the teachers support their contentions.

*Acknowledging WE plays a vital role in teaching. In a country where BPOs flourish, it is a must for teachers to prepare their students for the rigors of the work as they encounter learners and clients from any part of the globalized world. Henceforth, other Englishes must be understood. (R1)*

*I have been teaching for almost 3 years now and I feel that if given the trainings or the input on what is World Englishes and its use to a teacher, I will be greatly happy. I can improve my current*

*practice. Eventually, I can help my students appreciate English, as a subject and a language. (R3)*

*WE promote intercultural communication. It provides new perspectives and strengthens students' confidence in speaking. They need not be native-like to be understood. It is in accepting each other's differences that truly makes one conversant using English. (R7)*

*I understand that there should be a balance in teaching. It is imperative to be sensitive to the culture of others and be mindful of the diversity of learners. (R11)*

## **Discussion**

The majority of the respondents' self-assessed knowledge on WE may be attributed to several factors ranging from limited to non-exposure to the concept while in school to absence of opportunities to learn about it in seminars and training while already in-service in the Department of Education. Another factor is the pre-service curriculum that teachers had during their preparation years in the university. While it is acknowledged that curriculum is evolving, how the state-mandated policies, standards, and guidelines are cascaded to the classroom is an potent area for study. Esseili et al. (2009) pointed out the role of academic institutions to be imaginative in strengthening teachers' acceptance of English varieties. In so doing, the apparent mismatching between classroom practices and language curriculum standards is addressed. The limited knowledge on WE is quite alarming since the concept meaning the differences in the English language was introduced in 1984 when Barj Kachru

proposed the three concentric circles. It must have become part of the curriculum for an English major at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Having taught English to primary and junior high students allows the teachers to confer a description of English language teaching focusing not only on the content but also on the ways by which they believe students learn best. The teachers' vignettes provided the nuances of their experiences in language teaching and the meaning attached to these experiences. Their accounts provide a snapshot of their understanding of WE. Their limited knowledge of WE made them think that deviations and variations from the standards are not acceptable. They have acknowledged that their students' language which has not reached the target language yet (which is English) can be described as interlanguage; different to but not at all erroneous. Such contention closes the notion that non-native Englishes is 'deficit.' There are language varieties, and non-native Englishes are valid as teaching models, and as a medium considering the impact of localization and contextualization in the learning of another language. As observed, teachers and students have shared the experience of learning English, which can be an asset during any teaching event without undermining the native speakers' role in looking into content and teaching materials. On the contrary, Bolton (2012) maintained that the word 'Englishes' emphasized the unarguable plurality of the English language such as the term 'varieties' which came as an offshoot to suggest heteronomy to the core of English.

However, the preceding reality is supported by the study of Sadeghpour & Sharifian (2017) when several teachers in Australia did not recognize the legitimacy of the expanding circle of Englishes while acknowledging that there exist new varieties of English. Further, there is a need to teach basic English and for teachers to help their students where the interference is by acknowledging the linguistic effects of first and second language learning (Gilsdorf, 2002; Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015).

The condition implies that the continuous spread of English, which gives rise to the many varieties of English, made it almost impossible to trace and have conventional norms to follow. Teachers may be only exposed to a specific issue about relevant English language pedagogy and are less aware of the reasons why their second language learners experience problems- the sources of interference.

From the findings, it can be surmised that although training on developing pedagogical and content knowledge had been emphasized, teachers believed that the aspects of language dynamism had not been fully covered. At the onset of their career, the teachers' backgrounds and experiences vary. With the view of growing professionally, they have sought and have attended various seminars, workshops, and training, but they could not single out those that are specific for World Englishes. In this vein, Gupta (2001) avowed that teachers needed time to think of the kind of English their students used in the classroom and to address better the difficulties being exposed to the real world of English.

As English teaching is construed as dynamic, it is noteworthy to point out that Englishes are critical to the oral language base of any classroom. It entails teachers' training on strategies in employing various Englishes in their classes. It requires conscious effort and unwavering dedication to continually expand one's knowledge of how to teach English best. It necessitates a change of mindset towards designing tasks, arranging teaching-learning activities, and assessing students' performance. The foregoing conditions find support in the study Bacus (2021) which accentuated the teacher's continual engagement of personal assessment of one's practice to come up with enlightened choices for meaningful language instruction.

Considerably, since language is tied with culture, it necessitates adopting a balanced approach in teaching, that is, acknowledging that one has to be culturally sensitive to the diversity of milieus in which English is taught and used. As for the



'standard', McArthur as cited in Farrell & Martin (2009) and Bhowmik (2015) reasoned out that there is no world-recognized governing body that prescribes what should and should not comprise in such a 'standard.' and the prevalence of more than one standard variety of English is usual as in the case of any other language. As such, there are only opponents in WE as there are those who are not acquainted with it.

For many years, English teachers in Philippines have been forcing students to master standard American English without discounting the latter's rights to the use of their language. Such practice does not necessarily mean that English is imposed but since it is the medium of instruction in most subject areas in all levels of education, learning it seems prescriptive. Taken as accepted norms in school and the workplace, teachers have invested in making their students proficient in the use of English. Language proficiency pays off as this will open more work opportunities. With understanding and acceptance of 'World Englishes', language teachers adapt teaching-learning practices to incorporate the notion of English varieties aside from what has been held as standard English.

## **Conclusion**

It is concluded that teachers' awareness and regard of the concept OF WE is due to the dearth of WE-related seminars which they have attended. However, they would benefit from professional development that is geared toward enhancing their knowledge and understanding of WE. The study also implies that English teachers need to recalibrate teaching practices and create a balanced approach to English Language Teaching that suits the needs and context of students. As countries engrave their own identity into the English language, a WE-informed curriculum that develops the students' language competencies in a culture-sensitive context is possible only with WE-oriented teachers.

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## **Conflict of Interests**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest, that is, no situations in which financial or other personal considerations were compromised in conducting this research.

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