

An exploration of teachers' beliefs about the global spread of English in a Chilean ELT programme

Abstract

The current status of English as an international language is opening up the debate about what we understand as “subject matter English”. Traditional constructs in the English Language Teaching (ELT) profession such as the native speaker, standard English, and the culture of English are currently being questioned due to the growing number of users of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) who use English for intercultural communication mainly among non-native speakers. Research on Global Englishes has highlighted the need to abandon the current English as a Foreign Language (EFL) paradigm, which considers standard English and the native speaker as the norm, and adopt a global perspective of English that embraces the linguistic and cultural diversity of English instead.

This article explores how teacher trainers in one ELT programme in Chile rationalise the English that they speak, the English that they teach, and the English that is promoted in their programmes. The beliefs that these teachers hold in relation to the spread of English will reveal how curriculum developers for ELT programmes understand and respond to this phenomenon, especially in contexts where English has no official status or colonial history. Here, I present part of a multiple case study that comprises qualitative data gathered at three Chilean universities, using a variety of data collection methods.

Owing to space limitations, this article presents findings obtained only through interviews carried out in one of the three institutions. The findings reveal that teachers in this programme respond to the global dimension of English by rejecting traditional normative

approaches to English, such as RP pronunciation, and also by promoting the acquisition of 'Chilean English' among their students. Further analysis of the results obtained through the other data collection methods will eventually help to reveal how widespread the notion of "Chilean English" is, as a form of English in its own right, among and within ELT programmes.

Introduction

The growing number of users of English as an additional language and the variety of contexts in which English is used as a lingua franca around the world, have significant implications for the teaching of English. The cultural and linguistic diversity of English has brought into question the validity of the traditional model of the native speaker (NS) as the only legitimate linguistic target in English Language Teaching (ELT), especially in contexts where English does not have a colonial history or official status. ELT publishers and researchers have, to some extent, started to acknowledge the need for a paradigm shift that challenges the current normative approach to ELT in the classroom. However, there is little evidence of change in the beliefs and practices of ELT practitioners or implementation of alternative approaches to English as subject matter in ELT programmes¹. Considering this reality, this article explores the beliefs that teacher trainers at an ELT programme in Chile hold in relation to the English that is promoted in the training of future teachers, as well as their self-image as users of the language.

¹ Martin Dewey, 'Time to Wake up Some Dogs! Shifting the Culture of Language in ELT', in *Current Perspectives on the Pedagogy of English as a Lingua Franca*, ed. by Yasemin Bayyurt and Sumru Akcan (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014), pp. 121-34.

ELT and the global spread of English

Traditionally, the teaching of English in what Kachru² calls 'Expanding Circle' contexts – territories where English does not have an official status or colonial history – has followed an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) model. That is, English is learnt primarily for communication with its native speakers, and therefore, the teaching of English in these contexts has largely focused on the mastery of standard forms, placing special emphasis on correctness and accuracy in the acquisition of British or American English. However, as Dewey points out, this traditional view of language is “in conflict with the sociolinguistic realities of most English language learning, teaching, and using contexts”³ as it ignores the current global dimension of English by reinforcing a monolithic and fixed form of the language which differs from the reality of language use in intercultural communication. In response to this view of ELT, research on Global Englishes, and especially on English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), has stressed the importance of adopting an alternative perspective to ELT that embraces the cultural and linguistic diversity of the language and the need to challenge long-standing beliefs about the nature of language as a set of rules rather than as a dynamic means of communication.

Even though it is possible to see a few examples of attempts to incorporate a Global Englishes perspective in mainstream ELT literature and teacher training courses, “arguments being put forward from an ELF perspective have tended in ELT to be greeted with scepticism, if not open hostility”⁴. For example, Jenkins's⁵ study on attitudes towards ELF revealed a range of conflicting views among teachers in the Expanding Circle. In line

² Braj B Kachru, 'Teaching World Englishes', in *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*, ed. by Braj B Kachru (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

³ Dewey. (p. 121).

⁴ Alessia Cogo and Martin Dewey, *Analysing English as a Lingua Franca: A Corpus-Driven Investigation*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2012).(p. 171).

⁵ Jennifer Jenkins, *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

with Jenkins's findings, Young and Walsh⁶ studied how non-native teachers conceptualised the English they learned and taught, and they concluded that the teachers in their study had adopted "a need to believe in a 'standard' form of the language", even when acknowledging that such a standard does not correspond to the actual reality of English. These views about language appear to be widespread in the ELT profession in general, as they seem to be commonly shared by teachers from different contexts. In light of this phenomenon, I draw attention to the formation of ELT practitioners at pre-service level, especially from the perspective of teacher educators in ELT programmes, since their views about language are likely to have a considerable effect on the beliefs about English of future teachers.

EFL teachers' beliefs

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the beliefs that teachers hold in relation to different aspects of their professional formation and practice, because of the role that these beliefs play in what teachers do in the classroom. Although researchers have traditionally approached the complexity of teachers' mental lives from a variety of perspectives – such as studying beliefs, attitudes, values and knowledge as separate constructs – differentiating them in empirical research is problematic because they lack clear-cut theoretical boundaries⁷. Therefore, I understand teachers' beliefs as an umbrella term that brings together all these complex cognitive processes that influence a teacher's views, decision-making and practices.

⁶ Tony Johnstone Young and Steve Walsh, 'Which English? Whose English? An Investigation of 'Non-Native' Teachers' Beliefs About Target Varieties', *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 23 (2010).(p. 135).

⁷ Simon Borg, *Teacher Cognition and Language Education*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

Research on teachers' beliefs has identified core characteristics based on three key agreed assumptions⁸. Firstly, it is argued that beliefs must be inferred, as they may not be directly observed or measured, which results in researchers having to elicit them using a variety of methods. Fives and Buehl⁹ point out that teachers may not be fully aware of their own beliefs because some of them can be unconsciously held. Secondly, as Pajares¹⁰ argues, "the earlier a belief is incorporated into a belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter, for these beliefs subsequently affect perception and strongly influence the processing of new information". As some beliefs are more resistant to change, teachers are likely to justify their positions even in the presence of contradictory evidence or can even go against logical reasoning¹¹. And third, it has been largely documented that teachers' own experiences as learners shape their beliefs as teachers. This is a phenomenon commonly referred to as 'the apprenticeship of observation'¹², which stresses the fact that before teachers join initial teacher education programmes, they spend a large number of hours observing how other teachers behave and perform in the classroom. In the case of ELT, teachers "enter the profession with largely unarticulated, yet deeply ingrained, notions about what language is, how it is learned and how it should be taught"¹³.

⁸ Hongying Zheng, 'A Review of Research on Efl Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs and Practices', *Journal of Cambridge Studies*, 4 (2009).

⁹ Helenrose Fives and Michelle M. Buehl, 'Spring Cleaning for the "Messy" Construct of Teachers' Beliefs: What Are They? Which Have Been Examined? What Can They Tell Us?', in *Apa Educational Psychology Handbook: Vol 2. Individual Differences and Contextual Factors*, ed. by Karen R. Harris, Steve Grahan, and Tim Urdan (Washington, D.C: American Psychological Association, 2012), pp. 471-99.

¹⁰ M. Frank Pajares, 'Teachers' Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning up a Messy Construct', *Review of educational research*, 62 (1992). (p. 317).

¹¹ Balasubramanian Kumaravadivelu, *Language Teacher Education for a Global Society: A Modular Model for Knowing, Analyzing, Recognizing, Doing, and Seeing*, (London: Routledge, 2012).

¹² Dan C. Lortie, *School Teacher: A Sociological Inquiry*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

¹³ Karen E. Johnson and Paula R. Golombek, 'A Sociocultural Theoretical Perspective on Teacher Professional Development', in *Research on Second Language Teacher Education: A Sociocultural Perspective on Professional Development*, ed. by KE Johnson and PR Golombek (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 1-12. (p.1)

Context and Methodology

This study is part of a multiple case study that intends to reveal the language ideologies that operate in Chilean ELT programmes by exploring the beliefs about English that teacher educators in three initial teacher education programmes hold. Using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis, this case study aims to explore how teachers in these ELT programmes respond to the global spread of English in their curricula and practices, and the views that teacher educators at these programmes held in relation to the idea of English that is promoted in Chile. In this article, I present the results obtained in only one of the cases (henceforth Programme A) through two sets of semi-structured interviews.

In order to become a teacher of English in Chile, students enrol in university programmes that range from 4 to 5 years in length. Applicants are not required to demonstrate a specific proficiency in English, as they learn the language alongside other subjects. At the end of their initial teacher education course, students are expected to achieve a C1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages CEFR¹⁴, although as yet this is not a compulsory requirement to become a qualified teacher. Courses on phonetics and grammar dominate the curriculum of most of ELT programmes in Chile since, as Barahona¹⁵ observes, “there is an understanding that to be a teacher of English it is necessary to master English at a native-like proficiency level, and that RP English is the best accent for a non-native teacher of English”.

¹⁴ Ministerio de Educación, 'Estándares Orientadores Para Carreras De Pedagogía En Inglés', ed. by Ministerio de Educación (Santiago: Gobierno de Chile, 2014).

¹⁵ Malba Barahona, *English Language Teacher Education in Chile: A Cultural Historical Activity Theory Perspective*, (London: Routledge, 2016). (p. 49)

The selection of programmes for this case study followed a purposive sampling selection, which is a non-probability sample technique that “lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth”¹⁶. Programme A was considered of particular interest because of its participation in setting up the Chilean Ministry of Education’s standards for ELT published in 2014. In addition, this programme implemented a curriculum innovation that aimed at integrating subjects that are traditionally treated as separate modules in Chilean ELT programmes. That is, courses on English phonetics and grammar are incorporated in the language skills modules instead of running in isolation. It is important to mention here that students in this programme are expected to pass the British Council’s APTIS test by the end of their course as proof of C1 proficiency. Eight teachers from the ELT staff at this higher education institution agreed to participate in the study.

Findings

The interviews were transcribed using the transcription conventions included in Appendix 1. Later, they were analysed using thematic analysis ¹⁷ by coding the data and creating categories through establishing relationships among emerging codes. Due to space limitations, this article focuses primarily on findings related to how these teacher educators conceptualise the English that is promoted by the programme in the training of future teachers of English.

¹⁶ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd edn (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002). (p. 230, emphasis in original).

¹⁷ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2006).

Most of the teachers in Programme A showed a strong resentment against the emphasis on accuracy that they experienced during their own training. In addition, they expressed the need to differentiate their practices from those that are perceived as common in what they call 'traditional programmes', which are Chilean ELT university programmes that normally incorporate up to six courses on phonetics and grammar. In Extract 1 below, Javier, a teacher educator at Programme A refers to how his own experience as a trainee under an intense normative approach differs from his current view of English. In addition, he points out that his students experience 'shock' when they are told that they are not expected to sound like a native speaker.

Extract 1:

Javier: as teachers we were all trained under the RP NORM so: **there was no choice**, I mean, those who had little interest in American English, FORGET IT, I mean, **this is RP and that's it** [...] but apparently after the shock [my students] seem very RELIEVED, they're like 'you know what? I don't need to worry about an accent, I mean, because I already have one (1) **what I need to do is communicate and be intelligible**'

Not only does Javier distance himself from the traditional view of training pre-service teachers of English, but also shows resistance to the imposition of a native-speaker based form of English by stating that his students 'already have an accent' as Chilean speakers of English. Variations from a standard norm, in his view, are considered to be acceptable and even encouraged for effective communication. This perspective is shared and promoted by other teachers from the programme. For example, in Extract 2 below Cristina reflects on how features of British English are noticeable in her speech because of her training, but also evidences an appropriation of English as her own

language by incorporating features of Chilean Spanish in her use of English to suit her own communication style:

Extract 2:

Cristina: Once someone said 'but you have a British accent' – NO (.) I don't have it (.) no, not at all (.) but MAYBE there are some things that you can perceive, maybe because of the training but I think that **if I had to define my English I would say that it's Chilean English** because (.) as the time has passed by I have incorporated some Chilean expressions, so actually in my classes I say **MOVE PO**

When talking about her own English in the extract above, Cristina describes it as 'Chilean English' because of the inclusion of expressions of Chilean Spanish such as "po", which is a non-standard intensifier commonly used at the end of a sentence. As there is not a direct translation for *po* in English, users like Cristina find it useful to employ it in front of an audience that understands its meaning (e.g. her students, her colleagues, a Chilean researcher). The data collected at Programme A appears to suggest that the teachers in this programme share the belief that the promotion of 'Chilean English' – as a form of reinforcement of the trainees' own identity as Chilean teachers – may act as a response to the traditional native-speaker model that most of them followed during their own training. Further support for this claim lies in the views of Silvia, an experienced teacher from this programme, who also validates the idea of acquisition of 'Chilean English' among Chilean teachers of English, as Extract 3 below shows.

Extract 3:

Silvia: [as regards Spanish] where are you going to study in Chile or in Spain or Colombia or Mexico? which accent do you like more? it DOESN'T MATTER (.) you can have a mix, you can speak with your own accent and it will not make any difference **as long as you speak accurately, clearly and fluently**, and you use that language as a tool, whatever language you're trying to teach [...] so what difference does it make if you speak South African English or, I don't know, New Zealand English? (.) or **CHILEAN ENGLISH (.) but dignified Chilean English**

Even though Silvia's view seems to be in line with the beliefs of her colleagues presented in Extracts 1 and 2 above in relation to the validation and promotion of a teacher's own form of English, she raises a few issues related to an "accurate" use of the language that are not explicitly discussed by her peers. She suggests that users of English, more specifically teachers, should be allowed to mix between different varieties of English, and use their own L1-influenced pronunciation, provided that they "speak accurately, clearly and fluently". This view is reinforced by her comment referring to a "dignified" version of 'Chilean English' as an acceptable form of English. The findings presented here reveal that teachers at Institution A share the belief that it is not necessary to adopt a specific variety of English in order to become a successful user or a teacher of English. What is more, they openly promote, and in some cases, admit using, a localised form of English. However, tensions still exist when it comes to describing what is and is not acceptable in the use of English.

The analysis of the interview data also evidenced a strong influence of experiences in countries where English is a national language on their beliefs about English. In most

cases, teachers reported a mismatch between the English that they learnt as trainees and the reality of English. Two of these teachers made explicit reference to communication problems that they experienced because their English was 'so bookish' due to their pre-service training, while at the same time reporting how being exposed to a multicultural community helped them develop an awareness of how English is used in intercultural communication. Extract 4 below presents Cristina's view of the influence of her training on her communication in English in an English-speaking country.

Extract 4:

Cristina: **I learnt lots of rules** but as I told you **I realised that I wasn't fluent at all** so I think that it was full of rules so you have to respect this and that (.) but at the moment that I was there and had to communicate **my English was so bookish**

These findings tend to challenge theoretical assumptions about teachers' beliefs. The emphasis on linguistic accuracy that these teachers experienced in their training is generally rejected in their espoused beliefs. However, it is necessary to explore their beliefs in practice in order to understand whether and how these views about English are promoted in the classroom, and the way in which long-standing normative views about language learning and teaching are dealt with. What is more, a further exploration can also reveal how widespread the notion of 'Chilean English' is – and perhaps how widely encouraged it is – in the ELT profession in Chile.

Conclusions

Research on ELT has tended to state that there is little uptake of the implications that the global spread of English has had for the teaching of English in Expanding Circle contexts. Although teacher education programmes in Chile have traditionally followed an approach that places the native-speaker as the norm in terms of linguistic proficiency, this study reveals that the beliefs of teacher educators in Chile have started to change in favour of a more inclusive perspective, which places emphasis on effective communication over accuracy. However, it is important to be cautious in these claims, since contradictions and inconsistencies may occur in practice, such as the implementation of Native-speaker based testing systems, and ideas of what constitutes acceptable communication in English.

The results presented here are not expected to be taken as a generalisation of ELT training in Chile: on the contrary, they are most likely to be regarded as an exception, considering the programme's implementation of curriculum innovation in recent years. What is more, a comparison between the beliefs and practices found in this programme and in other initial teacher education programmes in Chile could contribute to a better understanding of the views about English that are promoted or challenged in the training of English teachers in this context.

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Transcription conventions

(.)	Pause of less than a second
(2)	Approximate pause length in seconds
CAPS	Strong emphasis
[author's commentary]	Author's commentary
<i>/Italics/</i>	Words and phrases in a language other than English
?	Rising intonation (questions)
“	Quotations

[...]

Gap between the sections of the transcription that were
not included