

2013

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Recommended Citation

Harding, Sarah, Teaching English as a lingua franca in Tyrol, Austria, *Journal of Student Engagement: Education Matters*, 3(1), 2013, 2-12.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/jseem/vol3/iss1/2>

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Abstract

More speakers of other languages are using English to communicate in today's globalising world. It is important for foreign students to learn English to communicate effectively. This paper looks at an overview of the Austrian compulsory education system and then discusses the demand for native English-speaking high school teachers in Austria, and how native and nonnative speakers can work together to teach English as an international language. Effective ways for native speakers to teach within the Austrian academic secondary school context in Tyrol are examined, as these will develop intercultural understanding and respect for other cultures. The article concludes by highlighting the impact that teaching English as an international language may have on interculturalism and international communication throughout the world.

Keywords

Tyrol, Austria, English as a Lingua Franca, native speakerism, cultural continuity, interculturalism, World Englishes



Teaching English as a lingua franca in Tyrol, Austria

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More speakers of other languages are using English to communicate in today's globalising world. It is important for foreign students to learn English to communicate effectively. This paper looks at an overview of the Austrian compulsory education system and then discusses the demand for native English-speaking high school teachers in Austria, and how native and non-native speakers can work together to teach English as an international language. Effective ways for native speakers to teach within the Austrian academic secondary school context in Tyrol are examined, as these will develop intercultural understanding and respect for other cultures. The article concludes by highlighting the impact that teaching English as an international language may have on interculturalism and international communication throughout the world.

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Introduction

More people are using English as an International Language (EIL) in the world today. Only one in four users of English is a native speaker of the language (Crystal, 2003) and the majority of English spoken is carried out outside the English-speaking West (Holliday, 2005). Consequently, Kachru (1985) categorised English speakers into three groups, which will underpin ideas about a native and non-native speakers' pedagogies in this paper. The term 'English as a Lingua Franca' (ELF) has emerged in recent years to refer to speakers with different first languages who use English to communicate with one another (Seidlhofer, 2005). However, "the ideology of native-speakerism is based on the assumption that 'native speakers' of English have a special claim to the language itself" (Holliday, 2005, p.8). This paper aims to raise awareness about EIL and will encourage native-speaking secondary school teachers in Tyrol, Austria, to approach teaching ELF without claiming the English language as their own. It will discuss teaching ELF in the macro-environment – the context of the world, Austria, Tyrol and the Austrian education system – and in the micro-environment – the context of the secondary school classroom. It will consider teachers' and students' preconceptions about each other, the roles of native and non-native speaking teachers, intelligibility and comprehensibility, and teaching resources.



The paper will conclude by highlighting the impact of teaching ELF on international communication, respect and understanding.

Kachru's Three Circles model

Kachru (1985) theorised a Three Circles model of English worldwide, to divide the English-speaking world. This model is based on the historical context of English and why it is used in different countries. The inner circle represents people who come from countries in which English is the mother tongue, such as Australia and the UK. These countries have traditional and historic associations with English and are typically monolingual. The outer circle represents people who come from countries that were former colonies of Britain or the USA, such as the Philippines and Malaysia. Typically, English is part of that nation's institutions and it may be used as an official language. The expanding circle represents countries in which English plays no historical or governmental role, but where people use the language for international communication, such as Japan and Austria.

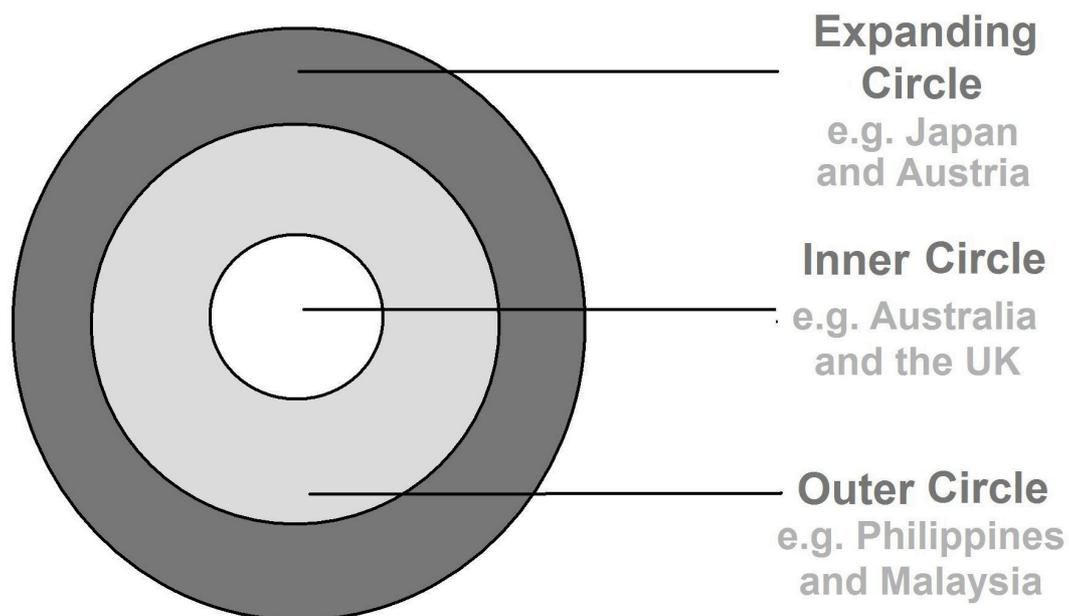


Figure 1: Kachru's (1985) Three Circles model.

English in Austria

English is spoken by 58% of Austrians (European Commission, 2006) and more than 96% of Austrian schools offer English as a second language, both at primary and secondary school (BMUKK, 2007). Most German speakers prefer native-like varieties of English (McKay, 2002a; Taylor, 2006), so there is a demand for native-speaking English language assistants (ELA) in Austrian schools. However, native-speaking ELAs are encouraged to challenge the norm-bound ideas that teachers associate



English with native speakers (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005) and question students' beliefs that native speakers are the correct 'model' to aspire to (Dalton-Puffer *et al.*, 1997; Hebenstreit, 1998). Few students who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) understand the concept of ELF and most do not know about the size of the different native speaking and non-native speaking populations (Walker, 2010). Therefore, native-speaking teachers are encouraged to make students more aware of the diversity of English, while promoting a culture-bound approach to learning the language. In doing so, students can integrate English culture into Austrian culture, rather than teachers imposing the native-speaking culture upon them. Students can also create cultural continuity by working with native speakers (Holliday, 2005) and get a "deeper understanding of who we are and what we do to each other" (Allwright, 2002, cited in Holliday, 2005, p.158). This idea will help students to see English in a broader context than in the classroom.

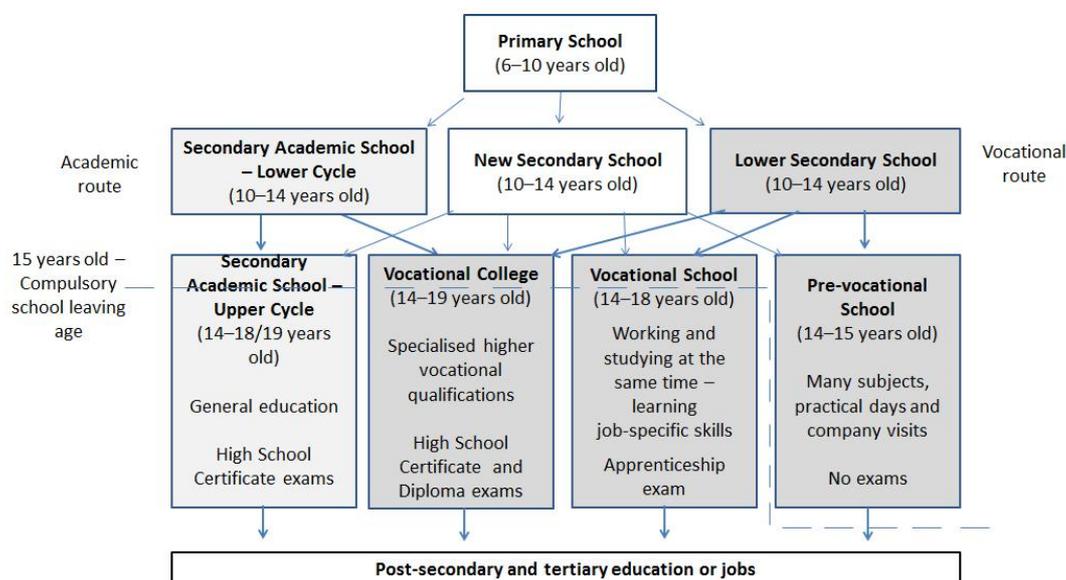


Figure 2: An overview of the Austrian compulsory school system, based on OECD (2012), Paulusberger (2012), Pühringer and Fürst (2012) and Weiß and Tritscher-Archan (2011).

Austria has a three-tier compulsory education system from six to fifteen years old. Students go to primary school from age six to ten and then they decide whether they want to go to a Lower Secondary School, a Secondary Academic School – Lower Cycle (Weiß & Tritscher-Archan, 2011) – or a New Secondary School – a new type of comprehensive school (OECD, 2012). By 2015/16, the government plans to have all Lower Secondary Schools converted into New Secondary Schools, “because it includes pedagogical innovations for a more efficient secondary education” (OECD, 2012, p.63). It also has a similar curriculum to the Secondary Academic School – Lower Cycle. Pupils go to one of these three schools until they are fourteen years old and then they choose whether they want to have a vocational or academic route. The vocational route has a work-based education, whereas the academic route has a more



general education. Although compulsory school leaving age is fifteen years old, only 6.4% of Austrian students leave school at this age without further education and 90% of pupils are still in formal training aged sixteen (Pühringer & Fürst, 2012, p.4).

The Lower Secondary School takes students to one of three vocational preparatory schools. Students can either go to a Vocational College, a Vocational School or a Pre-vocational School (Weiß & Tritscher-Archan, 2011). Vocational College lasts five years and students get higher work-related qualifications in different specialisations (Weiß & Tritscher-Archan, 2011), like commerce (Paulusberger, 2012). Vocational School lasts between two and four years (Weiß & Tritscher-Archan, 2011) and students work and learn specialised skills at the same time to apply their knowledge (Paulusberger, 2012). Pre-vocational school lasts a year and students learn many subjects, have practical days and visit different companies. Then they can either change school or do an apprenticeship for two to four years (Weiß & Tritscher-Archan, 2011).

In contrast, the Secondary Academic School – Lower Cycle takes students to one of the vocational preparatory schools – Vocational College – or on an academic route to study at one of three specialised upper secondary schools in the Secondary Academic School – Upper Cycle. When the Lower Secondary Schools become New Secondary Schools, students will have access to every vocational and academic school. The Secondary Academic School – Upper Cycle lasts about four years. If pupils choose to stay in the Secondary Academic School system, it is possible that they stay at the same school, like at the Bundesrealgymnasium (BRG) in Imst, Tyrol.

Learning English in Tyrol – A Case Study: Bundesrealgymnasium, Imst

This paper uses Bundesrealgymnasium (BRG) Imst (2009) – a Secondary Academic School – Lower and Upper Cycles in the town of Imst, Tyrol – as an example of a typical school where English is a compulsory language. It specialises in the sciences (Digruber, 2012) so it is interesting to consider why English may be a compulsory language in this school and in this region. Tyrol accounts for 40% of Austria's total tourism income (UNWTO, 2001), with tourism being the main stabilising factor that started economic growth in Austria after the recession (Platter, cited in AWW, 2011). It is likely that students will get jobs in this sector if Tyrol relies on tourism, especially where small towns have close-knit groups and few people migrate (ALCCE, 2004). Students may want to learn ELF to understand different accents, cultures and attitudes to keep their economy going. Therefore, it pupils should take full advantage of learning the language.

BRG Imst has over 500 pupils and 50 teachers. School starts at 07:45 and ends at 17:35. There are 11 classes per day and each class lasts 50 minutes. Typically, the workload for teachers will involve teaching 10–19-year-olds (Digruber, 2012) for approximately 24 hours per week. The typical workload for an ELA will involve teaching the same age group for approximately 13 hours per week.



Teaching English as a lingua franca – Implications for native speakers

Preconceptions in the classroom

Native speakers often bring “discoursal baggage” (Holliday, 2001, p.124) with them from their home country that tends to rationalise Austrian pupils’ behaviours by reducing them to “culturist national or regional cultural stereotypes” (Holliday, 2001, p.88). The pupils, for example like the ones at BRG Imst, may also have stereotypes to explain a native speaker’s behaviour. Therefore teachers are encouraged to plan lessons to help pupils and native speakers to look beyond generalisations and see similarities and differences between each other. Native speakers and non-native speakers should be able to identify that the characteristics of the other person, the generalised ‘other’, are a doctrine of their own characteristics, the ‘self’, rather than a truth about the other culture. Native speakers and non-native speakers could also reduce native-speakerism by searching for different ideas and experiences that each person brings from their culture. They are also encouraged to reduce the ‘us’ and ‘them’ divide by acknowledging that stereotyping is a global issue.

The roles of native and non-native speakers

Some schools, like BRG Imst, employ native speakers to work with a non-native speaking teacher. Using Kachru’s (1985) Three Circles model, this recruitment protocol shows that schools value both inner circle culture (the target) and Austrian culture (the source). Native speakers are encouraged to teach English through elements of their own culture, because pupils “cannot acquire language without an understanding of the [target] culture” (McKay, 2002b, p.86). Non-native-speaking teachers will teach with elements from Austrian culture, because pupils are more motivated to learn “if the language is presented in contexts that relate to their lives” (McKay, 2002b, p.87). However, there are no clear boundaries and native speakers may like to teach with resources that reflect Austrian values, and vice versa. For example, Austrians participate in outdoor activities, like hiking in the Alps (Arnold & Taylor, 2009). Native speakers could compare and contrast bushwalking in Australia with hiking in the Alps. This would help students to understand cultural diversity and reflect on their own culture, which McKay (2002b) says is necessary in teaching EIL. Students would also get a range of knowledge and interpretations about similar cultural activities to help them to learn.

The non-native speaker and native speaker may typically work together with a class of thirty pupils (BRG Imst, 2009). The non-native-speaking teacher will lead lessons, manage the students’ behaviour and be responsible for following the syllabus. Native speakers will support the teacher by preparing lessons, helping pupils in class and teaching small groups (British Council, 2012).

It is likely that native speakers will work with Austrian pupils who want help to prepare for exams. The pupils’ English will already be at a high level, so native-speaking teachers will need to teach more intricate levels of grammar. For instance, they may teach metalanguage, like the types of nouns and rhetorical terms. Native-speaking teachers may also challenge the pupils more, perhaps by asking them to interpret advanced literature or to write and perform their own plays. Native speakers



are encouraged to vary the topics of conversation and structure lessons around the examination topics so that pupils are well-prepared.

Pupils at BRG Imst are examined at least three times a year. These are held in the first six weeks of the year, in the six weeks from the beginning of February and finally during the last nine weeks of the school year (Plankensteiner & Zimmerman, 2003, p.1-2). School leavers can choose to take preliminary tests before their main examinations. If they take the preliminary tests, they either have written, oral, practical or subject-specific (Fachbereichsarbeit) examinations. If they do not take the preliminary tests, they have written and oral exams (Plankensteiner & Zimmerman, 2003, p.1-1). Teachers and ELAs will help pupils to prepare for their oral tests.

Native speakers are also encouraged to help pupils to interact with different cultures by creating a “sphere of interculturality” (McKay, 2002b, p.83). When the non-native-speaking teacher shares Austrian culture with students, native speakers may follow McKay’s advice to pose questions, ask about the cultural meaning and then share reaction to the topic. When native speakers share their own culture, they are encouraged to give pupils information and ask them to reflect on the similarities and differences. For example, a native speaker might ask pupils to consider why Austrians tend to dress formally to go out for dinner (Sheehan, 2004) and Australians tend to dress informally, because “most dressing in Australia is extremely informal ... formal dress is an exception, rather than the norm” (Clancy, 2004, p.89). Creating a “sphere of interculturality” and questioning cultures will help pupils to have cross-cultural encounters and be more aware of interculturalism, which could be useful if pupils work in tourism after they leave school.

By working together, the non-native speaker can tell native speakers what aspects of their native behaviour they would prefer their pupils not to see (McKay, 2002b), like different religious or moral beliefs (Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi, 1990). The non-native speaker can also help native speakers to motivate pupils by advising them what may be “irrelevant or uninteresting to some students, or even present cultural conflicts” (McKay, 2002b, p.89). The teacher and ELA will also combine Mahboob’s (2003) native speaker and non-native speaker strengths: the native speaker’s oral skills, broad vocabulary and cultural knowledge with the non-native speaker’s good knowledge of grammar, appropriate teaching methods and understanding of the pupils’ experiences. This combination will create a productive learning environment.

When the native-speaking and non-native-speaking teachers work together, they will reduce the ‘us’ and ‘them’ divide. Native speakers are encouraged to follow Kubota’s advice that “it is important to engage in the critique of cultural difference” (2001, p.10), which will reduce the idea that behaviour can be explained in terms of a foreign culture (Kubota, 2001). If the teacher and ELA behave in a similar way, the pupils will see that native-speaking and non-native-speaking behaviours are not culture-specific, but that culture “flows and shifts between us” (Holliday, 2005, p.29).

Native speakers are encouraged to reduce the idea of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. Holliday *et al.* found that colleagues and pupils often talk about “the situation in country X’s culture” (2004, p.21). Native speakers are advised to avoid such phrases that create the ‘us’ and ‘them’ divide and use more specific examples, like “the situation in my family”, as long as it falls within appropriate self-disclosure. Native speakers could also discuss the similarities and differences between behaviour in Austria and in other countries. This would show the pupils that behaviour is often



culture-bound, rather than country-bound. These actions will help to “dissolve native-speakerism in the quest for a fully inclusive profession” (Holliday, 2005, p.37) and help people to understand one another.

Intelligibility and Comprehensibility

Native speakers are “the main resource for native speaker reading, pronunciation, dictation and speaking” for pupils (British Council, 2012). However, there is validity in Deterding and Kirkpatrick’s (2006) view that inner circle English (using Kachru’s Three Circles model) is not the most appropriate English paradigm for EFL students to learn and a teacher’s “role in teaching pronunciation is relatively unimportant” (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005, p.470). This is especially the case when pupils “mastering the fine nuances of native-speaker language” may be “redundant or even counter-productive in lingua franca settings” (Seidlhofer, 2005, p.340). Therefore, native speakers are advised to help pupils to sound intelligible to interlocutors (Jenkins, 2006). They could facilitate a student-led discussion about “their motivation for acquiring a particular pronunciation norm, and creat[e] opportunities for [students] to realise their own potential” (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005, p.470), which would be more beneficial for pupils and teachers. Native speakers may focus more on international intelligibility, rather than inner circle diction, to make more time for more valuable lessons, like “general language awareness and communication strategies” (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005, p.470). Three examples include teachers working on phonemes, standard communication and intonation with the students.

Austrian pupils, for instance, may raise their intonation to mark the start of an utterance, looking at Barker’s (2005) research, which lends importance. In contrast, people in inner circle varieties of English tend to raise their intonation to indicate new information (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Therefore, it is unrealistic for a native speaker to expect Austrian pupils to use the native-speaking model of intonation to represent the patterns used in the English spoken in Austria, known as ‘Austrian English’. As long as the words are intelligible and the meaning is comprehensible, there is no reason to change an Austrian’s intonation.

Though intonation may not affect intelligibility or comprehensibility, the English language needs a standard form for communication. It is likely the Austrian pupils will say English words in the wrong order, because the sentence structure in German is different. German is a highly inflected language, for instance, because adjectives, articles and nouns change their form depending on whether they are a subject, owner or direct or indirect object in the sentence. English does not have the same language rules, so “[t]he lack of any systematic inflectional system in English often leaves German-speaking students to feel that English has ‘no grammar’” (Swan & Smith, 2001, p.41). Consequently, native speakers are advised to correct sentence structure and explain grammatical points when necessary, to help interlocutors to communicate effectively.

Phonemes are also important to ensure interlocutors communicate effectively. Native speakers may anticipate their students having problems with pronouncing some phonemes. Sometimes there is an equivalent or near-equivalent in German, which does not cause too many communication barriers. For example, German-speaking students may pronounce stressed vowels over-long before unvoiced



consonants (as in ‘shape’) (Swan & Smith, 2001, p.39) but the word is still intelligible, so there is not a misunderstanding.

However, teachers are encouraged to correct phonemes that lead to misunderstandings, in particular in minimal pairs. For instance, some English phonemes are rarely used in German, like /dʒ/ that is often pronounced as /tʃ/ in English (‘chain’ for ‘Jane’) (Swan & Smith, 2001, p.39). Therefore, teachers are advised to remind students of such German equivalents, where possible, to help them to pronounce the phoneme in English. Other English phonemes do not exist in German, like /θ/ that students may replace with /s/ (‘useful’ for ‘youthful’) (Swan & Smith, 2001, p.39), so teachers may like to practise drills and other exercises to aid students’ pronunciation. Finally, some voiced sounds at the end of English words are not used at the end of German words, such as /g/, so German-speaking students may confuse or replace such voiced sounds with unvoiced equivalents (‘dock’ for ‘dog’) (Swan & Smith, 2001, p.39). Native speakers are advised to make students aware of such mistakes when it clouds intelligibility and comprehensibility. Most importantly, teachers and ELAs may try to improve students’ pronunciation by identifying the problematic phoneme and looking at it in the context of both languages. Then native speakers can find an appropriate example of the correct phoneme and demonstrate it to students, so that they are able to communicate more clearly.

Resources

Native speakers may use teaching materials such as, “newspaper/magazine articles, photos, pictures, maps, CDs, videos, DVDs” (British Council, 2012) and schools have a range of facilities for native speakers to use, like a library and a computer laboratory (BRG Imst, 2009). Native speakers are encouraged to use technology to expose pupils to different varieties of English. They could ask pupils to watch the ABC or BBC news and compare it to Austrian news, to show pupils how each country’s media interprets the same event. This will “present a wide variety of cultural values, reflecting the diversity of EIL” (Hino, 2009, p.114) and reduce culturism and the ‘us’ and ‘them’ divide.

While Hino (2009) notes that “contact with other users of EIL from different cultural backgrounds (is) still rather limited” (p.115), native speakers could take it a step further and arrange for the class to Skype with international contacts. Teachers use this initiative in countries such as Malaysia, where Ministry of Education encourages interactive communication between Malaysian pupils and pupils from other countries (Chan, 2002). Alternatively, native speakers could ask the pupils to listen to international voices and imitate what they hear. These experiences would help pupils to become exposed to a range of dialects, accents, ideas and experiences and enable them to interact further with World Englishes.

Exposure to the concept of World Englishes will show pupils that people from the inner circle (like Australians), outer circle (like the Malaysian teacher) and expanding circle (like the Austrian teacher) use different words and phrases. Pupils will see that English is not clear-cut, but lies along a continuum (Moussu & Llurda, 2008). This method will help the students to find their own voices, become confident speaking English and reduce the idea of native-speakerism.



Conclusion

Native speakers are encouraged to balance the use of English against Austrian values and consider what kind of ‘normality’ they bring to the classroom. They are advised to use a variety of material to teach about different cultures and EIL. It will be a native speaker’s responsibility to dispel common misconceptions, like the idea that a native speaker is better at teaching English than a non-native speaker (Moussu & Llurda, 2008), and break down the associated linguistic imperialism. More importantly, native speakers could encourage students to reflect on cultures in order to create McKay’s “sphere of interculturality” (2002b, p.83). This knowledge will reduce native-speakerism and the ‘us’ and ‘them’ divide. It will also give students cross-cultural encounters and promote cultural continuity and World Englishes. This will lead to native speakers and non-native speakers living and working together without discrimination (Holliday, 2005), dealing with “the cultural dilemmas implicit in language” (Holliday, 2005, p.158) and getting a deeper understanding of each other’s worlds. In doing so, native speakers and non-native speakers will be encouraged to respect others, communicate more effectively in this globalising world and help ELF to be fully realised.

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