The Influence of Global English on the Contemporary ELT Classroom: The Case of the Linguistic Landscape

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**KEYWORDS:** ELT, Global English, Linguistics, Language Learning, English Language

**INTRODUCTION**

In recent years English has grown into its role as a global language and can often be found on online platforms such as YouTube and Instagram as well as offline in the open streets of urban environments all over the world, not just in English-speaking countries. For English language teachers in countries where English is studied as a foreign language, this means that their learners are increasingly exposed to English outside of the foreign language classroom (the Linguistic Landscape [LL]).

Student teachers of English as a foreign language in such contexts need to be aware of the fact that their role as the single source of English language input for their learners is being diminished. English in the environment, however, can be seen as a new source of English language input that opens up new possibilities for language learning. In order to fully exploit the potential of this situation, teachers must undergo a shift in their assumptions about language learning and their role in the language learning process.

So far, “language teachers’ general beliefs about the pedagogical values of LL” (Shang & Xie, 2020, p. 37) have not received a lot of research attention. While some efforts have been made to investigate the usefulness of the LL for language learning purposes, there are only a handful of studies which investigate the attitudes of...
teachers in relation to the LL. In particular, there have been no studies that specifically focus on student teachers. The LEAP Interface project at the University of Graz in Austria aims to support student teachers in the ELT program in fostering their awareness of English in the environment and using it in their teaching. In my thesis, I use data collected in the project using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to investigate the connections between student teachers’ use of English outside the classroom, their beliefs about language teaching and ideas for tasks based on English in the Linguistic Landscape (LL).

CONTEXT

The growth of English and its rise to the role of a global language has been well documented (Galloway & Rose, 2019, p. 3) and research into this phenomenon is often conducted under the umbrella term Global Englishes, which encompasses investigations into English as an International Language, English as a Lingua Franca, and World Englishes.

The term ‘global language’ recognizes that English is a universal language spoken by many and suggests that it will spread even further in the years to come. Already today, English is spoken by politicians of many countries, displayed on signs and advertisements, provided in forms of translated menus in hotels, and omnipresent in news reports (Crystal, 2012, pp. 1-2). It is often seen as a symbol of globalization, progress and even diversification; attributes that lead to English being proclaimed as the first global lingua franca. Research is increasingly focused on the scale and nature of the influence of English on non-English speaking countries, rather than questioning whether it even influenced these countries at all (Hickey, 2020, p. 1).

In terms of English language teaching, there is a growing awareness that learners are more likely to use English to communicate with other non-native speakers than with native speakers of English. Learners thus have to learn to use the language for lingua franca purposes as they will inevitably be in contact with people from all around the world. This has given rise to the idea of Global English Language Teaching (GELT) to prepare students for global contexts (rather than for interactions with native speakers of English) and support them in the development of abilities to navigate these international and often multilingual situations (Galloway & Numajiri, 2019, p. 122).

Hence, teachers clearly have to consider the implications of Global English(es) for their own classrooms and the importance of successful communication in these multilingual and global contexts that are the norm nowadays. It seems obvious that training students to successfully act in these settings should be one of the goals for language development in secondary education institutions (Galloway & Numajiri, 2019, pp. 118-119).

It has been argued that changes in the use of English around the world demand a reconceptualization of “the notion of language, [and] the very subject they teach” (Galloway & Rose, 2019, p. 16). Galloway & Rose (2015) hence proposed six broad GELT principles:

1. Increasing World Englishes and ELF exposure in language curricula
2. emphasising respect for multilingualism in ELT
3. Raising awareness of Global Englishes
4. Raising awareness of ELF strategies in language curricula
5. Emphasising respect for diverse culture and identity in ELT
6. Changing English teacher-hiring practices in the ELT industry
Points 1 to 5 are of particular relevance for my thesis and will be discussed in more detail below.

To successfully prepare learners for using English international contexts, educators first need to be able to recognize the current role of English. Only an awareness of global English will allow them to make informed decisions about their teaching and the needs of their students. Studies have shown, however, that teachers of English as a foreign language display very little understanding or awareness of English as a global language or the incorporation of EFL practices into their teaching yet (Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2017). Regarding the attitudes towards Global Englishes specifically, few studies have been conducted (Doan 2014; Hall et al. 2013; Kemaloglu-Er & Bayyurt 2018; Dilek & Özdemir 2015).

None of the studies mentioned above investigated the use of the linguistic landscape in relation to the teachers’ awareness of the English language and its position in the global context nowadays. This is the gap that my thesis attempts to fill. In doing so, a broad definition of LL is used. Initial definitions of the linguistic landscape were quite restrictive, only referring to “the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 23). This included “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). More recent adaptations suggest, however, that the definition must go beyond its former limits and include “images, photos, sounds [...] graffiti, [and] clothes” (Shohamy, 2015, p. 153) as well.

**METHODOLOGY**

Attempting to fill the research gap concerning Austrian English teachers’ language awareness in connection to the successful incorporation of the LL in their teaching, this study aims to explore how aware novice and student teachers are of their LL, how well-versed they are in the use of the LL for language learning, and how well-developed their own language awareness is in relation to the previous two points. It aims to answer the following questions:

RQ 1: What are student teachers’ attitudes towards English in the environment (LL)?

1. How can the linguistic landscape be integrated into speaking or writing tasks to support language learning?
2. In what ways can the LL contribute to language learning?

RQ 2: Are there any contradictions between reported attitudes of student teachers and their realization of the LL language learning tasks?

Following a mixed methods approach allowed for a real-life contextualization and the integration of multiple perspectives, investigating both student teacher’s beliefs about Global English and their ability to integrate it into the foreign language classroom. As part of the LEAP Interface project cycle of 2021/2022, an online questionnaire was distributed to 47 university students in the ELT MEd program. The questionnaire consisted of 16 thematic sections, 6 of which are relevant for this thesis, resulting in a total of 16 questions (closed & open-ended) The remaining questions concern other areas of the LEAP Interface project. The selected pool of questions was analyzed with the software SPSS.

The students who completed the questionnaire were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews, and five students volunteered to do so. In addition to questions about their attitude towards English in the LL, they were invited to discuss a LL task they had designed themselves. The objective of the task was to use the LL as a source of input for language learners (ages 10-14; CEFR levels A1-B1).
The interviews were transcribed and coded with the software MAXDQA and analyzed according to Braun & Clarke’s (2006) guide for thematic analysis. Nunan’s (1988) communicative task design structure as well as Galloway & Rose’s (2015) GELT principals were used for the analysis of the task designs. Overall, the data acquired through the questionnaire was supported by similar results from the interviews. These findings were also detectable in the task designs of the student teachers.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Awareness of English in the LL

In order to gain an insight into the LL that the student teachers themselves experience in their lives, they were asked to report on how much time they spend participating in activities in English. They were specifically asked not to count their university courses where English is the medium of instruction or their teaching placements in schools where they teach English as a foreign language. Out of 47 participants 22 said that they spend 0-10 hours, 12 said they spend 11-20 hours, and 13 said that they spend 21-50 hours per week participating in activities in English (see figure 1), hinting at a growing predominance of English in their daily lives.

*Figure 1: Hours spent doing activities in English*

Student teachers were then asked to list the activities they carry out in English on a daily basis:

- playing computer games
- watching movies, tv-shows, and YouTube videos
- talking and messaging friends
- listening to podcasts, audio books, and music
- reading books and articles
- consuming social media (Instagram, TikTok)
- singing songs
thinking (in English)
watching sports
interacting with tandems (conversation partners; often native speakers)

When asked about where they encounter English in their environment, participants responded that they spotted English in the following contexts:

- a menu at a restaurant
- advertisements (poster in a store window, movie poster, regular posters in the old city center of Graz, posters at cafés, posters at the university)
- on a t-shirt
- English magazine
- announcement on public transportation
- at the university library
- drive-in sign at the Covid-19 testing station
- English signs at the airport
- graffiti
- news (written, on the radio)
- labels on groceries (incl. list of ingredients, recipes)
- social media ads
- tags on pieces of clothing (e.g. handle with care)

The great variety of answers clearly suggests that student teachers nowadays are aware of the predominance of English in their own as well as their learners’ environment.

Contribution of the LL to language learning

A total of 83% of the participants agree that teaching English is not the same as it once was, which again suggests an awareness of the growing presence of English in the learners’ lives (see table 2). However, their assessment of the value of the LL for language teaching varies greatly. While some student teachers say that it has become easier to teach English “because pupils play [E]nglish computer games like Minecraft for example” or because “the world has become more connected due to social media and globalization”, others argue that teaching today’s student has become more difficult for teachers as the need to prepare their own materials “based on current events in the media” rather than using materials that their learners would perceive as outdated. As their students have an “easier access to the language”, some student teachers expect to have to deal with more heterogeneous groups as learners may enter school with immensely differing language abilities.
While acknowledging the increasing exposure to English of their learners, student teachers show a certain degree of hesitation when it comes to teaching Global English, ELF, or the Linguistic Landscape. Especially in lower secondary schools (ages 10-14; CEFR levels A1-B1), student teachers say that they would not provide theoretical information to their learners (e.g. definitions of ELF and LL) even though they would, for example, use materials including ELF usage in their teaching (e.g. an audio recording of two non-native speakers talking). Interestingly, however, student teachers reported that they would prefer to teach native-speaker varieties of English rather than non-native speaker varieties, suggesting that despite their recognition of the global role of English and the importance of international communication, there may still exist remnants of the formerly predominant pro native-speaker bias.

Contradictions between reported attitudes and task design

The five LL tasks submitted by the student teachers were assessed based on the principled for GELT put forward by Galloway & Rose (2015). For each of the tasks, it was determined whether they increase World Englishes and ELF exposure; emphasize respect for multilingualism in ELT; raise awareness of Global Englishes; raise awareness of ELF strategies in language curricula; and emphasize respect for diverse culture and identity. The author’s initial assessment was validated by two other members of the LEAP Interface project team.

Table 1: Language change over the years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13,0</td>
<td>13,0</td>
<td>13,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree strongly</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37,0</td>
<td>37,0</td>
<td>50,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree very strongly</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33,3</td>
<td>33,3</td>
<td>83,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11,1</td>
<td>11,1</td>
<td>94,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>100,0</td>
<td>100,0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Brief description</td>
<td>ELF exposure</td>
<td>Respect for multilingualism</td>
<td>Awareness of global English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Christmas Advertisements (A2+; giving reasons; vocabulary for describing objects [adjectives], functional language for giving reasons)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Use of English in Christmas advertisements in Austria (shop windows, online ads)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Linguistic Foodscape (A2+; writing a short recipe; vocabulary for talking about food)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>English used for food packaging, recipes, ingredients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Graffiti and street art (A2+; creative writing; past tense; vocabulary for colors, functional language for describing a picture)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Potential for exposure to other languages used for graffiti &amp; street art</td>
<td>Use of English for graffiti &amp; street art; little connection to the Austrian context/LL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results indicate that while the tasks all provide ELF exposure and are strong in the area of global English awareness, they do not aim to promote respect for multilingualism and diverse cultures and they do not attempt to teach the learners ELF communication strategies. This is in line with the student teachers overall positive attitudes combined with their stated reservations concerning the implementation of ELF in their teaching.

CONCLUSION

This master’s thesis research has shown that while Austrian student teachers in the ELT program are aware of the changes occurring concerning the use of the English language, specifically the role of English as a global language with an increasing presence in the LL, they are not yet able to successfully integrate the LL in their task design.

This has implications for the ELT MEd program. Global English(es) and the LL should receive a more prominent place in the curriculum to further develop student teachers’ awareness of these issues. In addition, they should be supported in designing tasks that fulfil all the criteria for global English language teaching (GELT). Moreover, in light of the ever-growing importance of English worldwide, more research is needed into student teachers’ approaches to teaching English effectively in a diverse, multicultural and multilingual world.

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REFERENCE LIST


