

## **Teaching English Across Cultures. What do English language teachers need to know to know how to teach English?**

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*The question of how we teach who we teach can only really be answered by taking into consideration a range of contextual variables. In this paper I shall suggest the skills and attributes required by English language teachers who are teaching in multilingual Asian settings by considering specific ELT situations in Indonesia and Hong Kong. I shall first describe how an Australian-funded and led research project into the development of culturally appropriate ELT materials for Indonesian tertiary students was modified and shaped by local Indonesian teachers and writers. In particular I shall illustrate how the concept 'culturally appropriate' was adapted to suit the local context. I shall then describe the current ELT situation in Hong Kong, and consider the implications of Hong Kong's trilingual language policy on what and how English teachers should teach in Hong Kong's government schools. I shall conclude the paper by itemizing specific skills that ELT teachers in multilingual settings need.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many scholars have shown the importance of tailoring teacher training courses to the needs of particular contexts (Holliday 2005, Derwing & Munro 2005, Kirkpatrick 2002, 2006a).

In this talk I shall first describe two specific contexts. Both are within the government sector so can be classified as fitting within Holliday's TESEP classification of government-run or funded tertiary-secondary-primary institutions rather than his parallel classification of BANA, or British-Australasian-North American privately run language schools (see Holliday 2005: 2-4).

The first concerns an experimental project with which I was involved in Indonesia. This came to be known as the 'Asian culture-based' project. I shall show how the original idea behind the project became slowly but inexorably altered by my Indonesian colleagues in order for the project to better fit the local context, as understood by them. This gave me a salutary lesson in not assuming that what I thought would be useful for the Indonesian context would necessarily be thought so by my Indonesian colleagues. This was made even more illuminating as I had taken, I thought, great pains to try and see things from their point of view. I was very conscious that I should not try and establish myself as some expert who knew better than they did, but simply to be part of the team to help facilitate what I thought they wanted to achieve. As you'll see, I ended up ceding to their 'usurpation' of the project.

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The second context I shall describe is the ELT situation in Hong Kong's government schools, especially how it is shaped by the government's language and medium of instruction policies. While I have only been there on this occasion for some nine months, I have had the opportunity to visit a number of schools and, as Head of the English Department at the Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong's major teacher training institution, the training of English teachers for those schools is my daily concern.

After describing these two specific contexts, I shall consider whether it is possible or feasible to draw up a list of skills and knowledge that English teachers need in general, or whether the contextual demands of the specific situation means that these skills and knowledge will depend very much of the particular teaching situation. This potential general-specific conflict has obvious implications for the design of English language teacher training courses.

### ***Context 1 The Indonesian Culture-Based English Project***

#### ***Background***

It is probably fair to say that English teaching in Indonesia's government schools and colleges has been characterised by failure over the past few decades. Three Indonesian scholars have portrayed it in this way. Alwasilah (2001:20) lists as common problems 'unskilled teachers, abject facilities' and 'unfavourable learning environments'. In a survey of developments of ELT in Indonesia, Dardjowidjojo writes:

With few exceptions, generally a high school graduate is not able to communicate intelligibly in English. Those who are can be suspected of having taken private courses or come from a certain family background' (2000:27)

He goes on to list five contributing factors:

large class sizes;  
teachers with low levels of English proficiency;  
the low salary of government English teachers, which encourages (or even forces) many to moonlight;  
the lack of adequate preparation to teach the new curriculum;  
cultural barriers.

Adnan agrees, saying the quality of education is generally low and puts this down to a lack of financial resources, large class sizes and small salaries (2006:7).

At the college or university level, Indonesian college students who are not English majors are

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commonly required to take two or three credit hours of MKD *Bahasa Inggris*, an ESP-based course in college English, where students are provided with reading materials about their field of study. The focus of instruction is on developing reading skills, translation into Indonesian, and sometimes on writing in English. As the entry level of most students is very low, this ESP-based English class is a grammar and translation class. Most ESP programs fail to develop students' proficiency in English.

It was against this background, therefore, that Daniel Wibowo, then the Rector of Christian Maranatha University in Bandung and I were in my office at Curtin on a morning in February 2001. I was proposing that the ELT curriculum in Indonesia needed to change so that it recognised the status of English as an Asian language and all the implications that such recognition would entail. Daniel interrupted me: 'Why don't we organise a seminar in Bandung on the topic?' It is testimony to Daniel's power of persuasion and ability as an organiser, that the seminar entitled 'A Seminar on Specific English for Indonesians' was duly held in Bandung four months later. The seminar was well-attended and, in addition to my own presentation, we were fortunate that Professor Darjowidjojo of Atma Jaya University in Jakarta and three academics from the Indonesia University of Education, Dr Chaedar Alwasilah, Professor Fuad Abdul-Hamied and Dr Aminudin Aziz also gave papers (Wibowo 2001).

The seminar considered the following interrelated concepts:

1. English is now an Asian language; it is commonly used as a lingua franca throughout Asia by so-called non-native speakers in order to communicate with other non-native speakers.
2. When these speakers use English, they need to be able to talk about each other's cultures in English.
3. There are many different varieties of English. Why can't Indonesians choose a culturally appropriate local variety, Malaysian, for example, instead of a native speaker variety?
4. If the English taught in Indonesia is to be based on a local model and if the materials are to be based on local and regional cultures, does that not imply that local and regional English teachers who speak the model to be taught and have knowledge of the cultures to be taught are the most appropriate teachers?

I think it is fair to say that the proposals received a mixed response among the seminar participants, most of whom were practising teachers of English in local universities. Some enthusiastically supported the idea but some were more dubious. However, Daniel and I decided that there was sufficient initial enthusiasm for the idea to write up a grant proposal for the Australia Indonesia Institute for funds to develop an English language curriculum and

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materials based on ASEAN cultures. Happily we were successful in winning funds from the All, to whom I record our most grateful thanks.

Before describing the actual process associated with the writing of the materials that have now resulted in an English textbook for Indonesian university students (*'Culture Based English for College Students'*, Aziz, Sudana & Noorman 2003) I shall briefly summarise in more detail the philosophy behind the idea (see also Kirkpatrick 2002).

Despite all the research into developing varieties of English in the region, English is still presented either as a communicative tool for use with native speakers of English, or as a tool for gaining access to 'Western' technology and skills. This is not just true of Indonesia, but many other parts of the world too, including, as we shall see, Hong Kong. The models that are introduced to the students have therefore been native speaker models under the assumption that these are the best and most useful models for these students to learn. In summary, the primary reason for Indonesians learning English is assumed to have been so that they can communicate with native speakers, or can read texts written by native speakers.

However, these premises are based on false assumptions. Worldwide, English is now more commonly used as a language of communication between non-native speakers of English than between native speakers of English (McArthur 1998). This is particularly the case in South East Asia. The primary role that English plays is as a lingua franca. It is the language of communication between Asians themselves. For example, English is the de facto language of ASEAN (Krasnick 1995). It is the de facto language of business throughout Asia. When Indonesian bankers sit down to discuss business with their Philippino or Thai counterparts, they will probably use English. When Japanese, Vietnamese and Indonesians meet to discuss projects, they will probably speak in English.

This has two important implications for the teaching of English in the region: the first concerns which cultures should be taught through English; and the second concerns which variety of English should be taught.

### ***Implication 1: which cultures should be taught through English?***

If English is used primarily for communication between so-called non native speakers of English, then the cultures and backgrounds of those people becomes more important than any culture traditionally associated with native speakers. For example, as it is most likely that Indonesians will need to use English in order to communicate with someone from the region, say a Thai or a Korean or a Vietnamese, then Indonesians will need to learn about the cultures of those people in order to be able to talk to them in a knowledgeable and courteous way.

Similarly, Indonesians will warm towards a person who can discuss with them, in English, aspects of Indonesian culture. This means that the ELT curriculum in Indonesia (and other parts of Asia) needs to change. Instead of giving students information about the cultures of native speakers, the curriculum should include information about the cultures and peoples of the ASEAN and Asian region. It is also important that students be prepared to be able to use English to talk about their *own* cultures and issues which are important to *them*.

***Implication 2: which variety of English should be taught?***

If English in Indonesia and Asia is used primarily for communication between non native speakers of English, then the way those people speak English becomes more important than the way native speakers speak English. In other words, instead of using native speaker models, we need to consider the possibility of using regional varieties of English in the classrooms. After all, if the primary role of English in the ASEAN and Asian region is to be a lingua franca between peoples of the region, then the English varieties that people in the region speak represent appropriate classroom models. Indeed, a number of Asian varieties have already achieved the status of being a standard. These include Singaporean, Malaysian, Philippino and the varieties of the Indian sub-continent. Given Indonesia's linguistic and cultural closeness to Malaysia, it would seem sensible that the Malaysian variety become model in Indonesian classrooms. Sensible it may seem, but whenever I have raised this idea with Indonesian ELT professionals they have gently reminded me how difficult it would be to persuade Indonesians to accept a Malaysian model. One might as well try and persuade an Australian that the New Zealand variety of English should become the classroom model in Australia.

A major role for English in the region is as a lingua franca between the peoples of the region, then the fulfillment of this role should be the primary goal of English language teaching in the region. Thus the model of English to be presented in the classroom can well be a local or regional model. This will be more appropriate than a native speaker one. And, as the primary function of English in the region is to operate as a lingua franca, it follows that the curriculum should be primarily concerned with regional and local cultures. Learners would be motivated by a curriculum that would allow them to study the cultures of the other people of the region and to discuss and explain *their own cultures* to other people from the region, the learners. It also suggests that local and regional English teachers are likely to be the most suitable teachers of this model and curriculum. A shift towards a preference for local teachers would have the practical advantage of saving the money currently spent on hiring native speaker teachers (and perhaps the money saved could be invested in training programs for local teachers), and, more importantly, raise their status and self-confidence.

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So much for the 'philosophy' behind the development of the materials. Now it is time to describe the actual process of their writing. Chaedar Alwasilah established a materials writing team, with Dr Aziz as the team-leader. First, the authors were to write a set of six trial units, each of which would deal with some aspect of ASEAN culture. Each unit would be sent to me for my comments and then trialed with six classes of college students in Bandung.

The units were duly sent to me and I was surprised to find that they dealt, almost exclusively, with the cultures of Indonesia rather than the cultures of ASEAN. Instead, therefore, of units on aspects of Thai or Vietnamese culture, there was, for example, a unit on the *becak* or pedicab drivers of Jakarta, one on Rendra, the celebrated Indonesian poet and playwright, and one on *dangdut*, a form of Indonesian pop music.

This put me in something of a quandary. My great plan of publishing an ELT text based on ASEAN cultures was being turned into a textbook about the cultures of Indonesia. I couldn't see how such a text would motivate Indonesian students to use English. Surely they would discuss these things in *Bahasa Indonesia*, their own lingua franca, not in English? This was when I had to take a deep breath and remind myself that this was their book, not mine, and what they were writing was what they wanted to write. So, I contented myself with suggesting that each unit should contain a discussion question that required the students to compare the Indonesian situation with the situations in parts of ASEAN. Thus the unit on 'Students and Brawls' obtained the extra writing task, 'Based on the texts, write a letter to a friend in Bangkok who asks about student brawls in Jakarta...' I also decided to wait for the results of the evaluation of the six trial units, before reminding the team of the original idea of a broad ASEAN focus for the materials. As it turned out, the results of the trials gave me little scope to argue for more ASEAN-based materials.

Figure 1 below shows the results of the teachers' evaluations of the trial units and Figure 2 shows the students' evaluations. These were prepared and collated by Chaedar Alwasilah.

*Figure 1 The teachers' evaluations of the trial materials*

- Topics are challenging (difficult) (66.6%)
- Good to introduce Indonesian cultures (66.6%).
- Appropriate for MKDU course (83.3%)
- Reflects Indonesian culture (50%)
- Difficult for students (50 %)
- Time consuming (66%)
- Not provide clear instruction (66.6%)

*Figure 2 The students' evaluations of the trial materials*

- Appropriate for MKDU course (83.35%).
- Appropriate for achieving course objectives (75%).
- Support their study (95.8%)
- Materials are suitable (100%)
- Need to incorporate global culture (79.2%)
- Activities are useful (95.8%)
- Improves reading (91.7%), listening & speaking (75%), writing ability (54.2%).
- Time allocated is sufficient (45.8%)
- The design is not attractive (66.7%).

With regard to the teachers' evaluations, I was particularly struck by their feeling that the materials were appropriate for the course and that they liked the inclusion of Indonesian cultures, but that half felt that they did not go far enough in the reflection of Indonesian cultures.

The students' evaluations were eye-opening to me, with very high percentages saying that the materials supported their study and that the activities were useful. Most tellingly, from my point of view, however, was the finding that 100% of them found the materials suitable. I was clearly going to have to put my plans for an explicitly ASEAN-culture-based textbook on hold for the time being.

The textbook, when it was published in 2003, contained 15 units, all of which deal with aspects of Indonesian cultures. The unit titles are listed in Figure 3. I am also happy to report that the textbook has been successful and has gone into several printings.

*Figure 3 The unit headings*

- Unit 1: Our capital city
- Unit 2: Becak
- Unit 3: We love dangdut
- Unit 4: Harmonious life
- Unit 5: Students and Brawls
- Unit 6: Preserving the traditions: Textiles
- Unit 7: Rendra
- Unit 8: The world of mysticism

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Unit 9: Business matters

Unit 10: Traditional wedding ceremony

Unit 11: Traditional arts: Wayang

Unit 12: Wanted urgently: Are you the right person?

Unit 13: The top five!

Unit 14: Caring for fauna

Unit 15: Indonesian cuisine: Ayam Taliwang

Most of the titles make explicit reference to an aspect of Indonesian life or culture and those that do not make explicit reference to Indonesia are all concerned with Indonesia. For example, Unit 9 Business Matters, describes the characteristics of Indonesian business people. For those of you who are wondering who the top five are (unit 13), this refers to Transparency International's list of the most corrupt countries in the world in which Indonesia was placed in the 'top five', coming 88<sup>th</sup> out of 91. And if you are wondering whether you are indeed the right person (unit 12), this unit deals with the 'dearth of statesmanship among the members of the Indonesian political elite'(Aziz et al: 89).

It is important, I think, to stress that, while many of these units deal with 'standard' cultural topics such as crafts, several also tackle tricky subjects, subjects of genuine concern to Indonesians. This, I think, might give some clue as to the popularity of the textbook. It is extremely unlikely that an international publishing house would have either considered including or have been allowed to include many of these controversial topics in an English language textbook. That the textbook was written by and for Indonesians may have given it a little more license. The textbook also gives learners the opportunity to learn about a whole host of topics of cultural significance to Indonesians and thus provides excellent materials for equipping them to be able to talk about their own culture and concerns in English to other people. Thus the textbook fulfilled the goal of preparing students to talk about their own cultures to others; the goal of informing learners about ASEAN cultures, however, was not really addressed. In the end, there were very few tasks that required the students to engage in a comparison of their own and ASEAN cultures. I suspect, however, that the emphasis on local cultures and concerns reflected the needs of Indonesians to talk about these, given the extraordinary social, political and cultural changes through which Indonesians were experiencing at the time.

### ***Context 2. The Hong Kong Situation***

The second context I want to describe is the English language teaching situation in Hong Kong, particularly as it applies to government primary and secondary schools. I do not have time here to summarise the complex history of English language teaching in Hong Kong. I refer

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those interested to a series of publications by Kingsley Bolton and his colleagues (see Bolton 200, Bolton and Kim 2000, Bolton 2003). Here I shall mention two crucial aspects of present Hong Kong government policy. The first concerns the issue of medium of instruction in schools. Before the hand back of Hong Kong to China, the British government moved from its laissez-faire position of allowing secondary school principals to decide which medium of instruction would be used in their schools. It now decided that only one hundred secondary schools, out of a total of some 460, would be allowed to continue to use English as a medium of instruction. The remainder would teach in Cantonese. This was met with considerable public opposition and, as a result, the government slightly increased the number of English medium secondary schools to 114. The government also recognised that this switch to Cantonese medium schools meant that students will need extra help with their English. To this end, each Cantonese medium school receives extra funding to hire a native speaker of English as an English teacher (Kirkpatrick forthcoming). The situation with regard to government primary schools is quite different. There, Cantonese is the medium of instruction in all and English is taught as a subject. However, it should be noted that the demand for English has led many of those parents that can afford to, to enrol their children into the schools run by the English Schools Foundation (ESF). This has led to many recently arrived expatriate parents becoming extremely disgruntled, as they can't find places for their children in the ESF schools.

This current demand for English shows that the people of Hong Kong have maintained their consistent mercantile and pragmatic attitude to English (Sweeting & Vickers 2005). This position is succinctly captured by Boyle, "Hong Kong Chinese have always wanted English" (1997:176). Li (2002), in answering the question why Hong Kong parents tend to favour English medium schools, stresses that Hong Kong parents "are not passive victims but pragmatically-minded active agents acting in their best interests" (2002:55). Their decision is a pragmatic one "driven largely by an aspiration for social mobility". Li continues:

....English helps one access more information and people – through higher education, on the job, in cyber space and international encounters. In writing, English has a greater potential to help one reach out to wider audiences compared with other languages. In this light, rather than a tool of hegemony, English may be looked upon as a resource to enhance the learners' linguistic repertoire, which in turn has good potential for enriching their quality of life through higher education and professional development (2002:55).

Now that Hong Kong is a Special Administrative region (SAR) of China, the linguistic situation has become more complex as all children must now learn *Putonghua*, the national language of China. This raises a potential contradiction between the plans of the Beijing and Hong Kong

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governments. On the one hand, it would appear that Beijing would like to see Hong Kong undergo some form of re-sinification and sees the learning of *Putonghua* as an essential arm of this policy. On the other hand, the Hong Kong government is desperate to retain Hong Kong's position as, in the words of its own advertising campaign, 'Asia's World City', and sees the learning of English as an essential arm of this policy. The situation is made even more complex as, of course, the Hong Kong government can't actually say this openly. Upsetting Beijing is bad for Hong Kong.

The introduction of *Putonghua* has led to a language policy that seeks to make its citizens trilingual in Cantonese, *Putonghua* and English, and biliterate in Chinese and English. This is a laudable policy, but its implementation is problematic and I shall now move to discuss the causes of these problems as I see them. First, I present four undisputed facts about Hong Kong's English language learners and teachers.

- a) Despite an increase in diversity, the great majority of school children in HK government schools have Cantonese as their L1.
- b) The great majority of children in HK are institutional bilinguals, by which I mean they primarily learn their other languages (English and *Putonghua*) in a school setting.
- c) The great majority of English teachers in HK government schools are L1 speakers of Cantonese, who themselves learned English in schools.
- d) Thus the great majority of HK school children are L1 Cantonese speakers who develop bi-/tri-lingual skills in schools by being taught English (and *Putonghua*) by L1 Cantonese teachers.

The key issue is that the current policy seeks to ensure that the citizens of Hong Kong become *trilingual*, but uses linguistic benchmarks based on a *monolingual* native speaker model. In other words, a plurilingual policy is using a monolingual model as a linguistic benchmark which treats any variation from the monolingual model as an error (cf. Blommaert, Crewe & Willaert 2006). This means that, in the context of Hong Kong, the variety of English that will naturally be acquired by L1 speakers of Cantonese is classified, from the outset, as deviant, simply because it differs from a native speaker monolingual model. This, in turn, means that local English language teachers, even though their English may be highly proficient, will be classified as speaking a substandard variety, as their English is measured against native speaker benchmarks.

An example of this is that local English language teachers (native speakers are exempt) who wish to work in government schools have to pass the feared Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (LPAT) exam. In order to achieve the top band in the pronunciation

assessment, candidates must satisfy these criteria.

*Pronunciation, stress and intonation scale*

Level 5 'Pronunciation is completely error-free with no noticeable first language (L1) characteristics. Any mistakes that occur can be categorized as 'slips' rather than systematic errors. Sentence stress and intonation patterns are always appropriate and communication is never impeded in the slightest. (Government of the Hong Kong SAR:2000:121)

This, in effect means that anyone whose first language is Cantonese – and this would be the huge majority of local teachers – will be unable to achieve the top band in this assessment.

The choice of a native speaker model also means that the model that children are required to learn in schools is a model that does not take into consideration their bilingual (or plurilingual) background. As Cook has pointed out, if the target of language learners is passing for native, 'few are going to meet it. Both teachers and students become frustrated by setting themselves what is, in effect, an impossible target' (2002:331).

This insistence on a native speaker model thus creates great problems for both teachers and students alike (Kirkpatrick 2006a). What is needed, in my view, is a *bilingual target or model* based on the English of highly proficient users who are L1 speakers of Cantonese. This would be more appropriate than a native speaker model because it would be more attainable and locally relevant. The choice of the local bilingual model could advantage and legitimise local English language teachers, as their bilingual variety of English would now become the linguistic model for their students. This would thus validate their variety of English as opposed to classifying it as deficient.

A codified description of the Cantonese-English bilingual variety would also be vital because it would provide the linguistic benchmarks for English language teachers and teaching in Hong Kong's government schools. As codification brings with it the notion of acceptance as a standard, learners could be tested and evaluated against codified norms and standards. As Bamgbose has pointed out for nativised varieties of Malaysian or Nigerian English, 'The importance of codification is too obvious to be laboured' (1998: 4).

In a multilingual society such as Hong Kong where the government's aim is to establish a trilingual and biliterate citizenry, there is a particular need to understand the implications of implementing what is being termed in the European Union a policy of 'plurilingual education' (Beacco & Byram 2003: 8). Plurilingualism describes the situation in which bi- or pluri-lingual

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people extend their linguistic repertoire. The goal is not native speaker fluency in two languages for a small elite but the ability of the majority of the population to use different languages for different purposes at different levels of proficiency, depending on their needs and goals. In such contexts, far from the monolingual native speaker representing the ideal linguistic model and language teacher, a bilingual model becomes an appropriate linguistic model. At the same time, being multilingual and knowing the language of their students become important strengths for the local English language teacher for a range of reasons (Cook 2002, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000), including a knowledge of their students' LI, an understanding of the potential difficulties their students might face and an empathy with their students (Medgyes 1994, Braine 1999).

Bilingualism needs to be seen as 'a normal, rather than special, condition' (Graddol 2006:117). The teaching of English should be framed within the goal of creating bi- and pluri-lingual citizens. 'Schools are very significant contributors towards bilingualism in Europe' (Hoffman 1996:54). At the same time, the avoidance of a native speaker model means that bilingualism in English does not need to equate with learning about British or American culture (Hoffman 2000). Instead, English is seen as providing a conduit to a whole host of other cultures. Thus, one of the aims of 'Networking English/European language learning in Europe' (NELLE) is to promote materials about European cultures and values and 'to develop awareness of English as a supplementary language of communication in Europe and as a means to the richness of other cultures' (Goethals 1997: 61). Plurilingual forms of English are used throughout the world as non-native speakers of English communicate with each other through English. By removing English from a specific native speaker culture, learners of English can learn about the cultures of other people through English. Thus, for example, the people of Hong Kong can learn about the cultures of the region through English and express their own sense of identity (Bolton and Kwok 1990).

However, as I learned while working on the Indonesian project, for any project of this nature to be successful, it must have the full co-operation and support of the locals. The outsider, especially if s/he is from the inner-circle, is always open to the 'imperialist' charge of making decisions for and on behalf of the locals. Holliday (2005) recounts a salutary example of this when reporting a Taiwanese English teacher's reaction to what is, in my view, Jenkins's path-finding work in providing criteria based on mutual intelligibility for determining content for inclusion in English language teaching curricula. In contrast, Kuo sees Jenkins (2000) as presenting yet another 'Centre-led definition of what English should be' (2005:9). She continues, 'I prefer to speak for myself' (2005:9). And, of course, she should.

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It would therefore also be important to survey local stakeholders, including relevant government officials, parents, teachers and students, to identify their attitudes towards a codified Cantonese-English bilingual model being used to provide linguistic benchmarks for the schools. Any proposed change needs the support of the local stakeholders.

It would be naïve to think that codification alone would be enough to bring public acceptance to the local variety (Kirkpatrick 2006a). New varieties have to go through many phases before receiving local acceptance, and, in some cases, this may take many years (Kachru 1992). However, the codification of the local bilingual speech of Hong Kong Cantonese-English bilinguals would be a vital first step in helping legitimize it as a variety of English. Similar work on the codification of systematic regional and bilingual varieties of English in other parts of the world is needed in order to ensure their incorporation into regional ELT curricula along with the cultures associated with them.

### ***Implications for what a language teacher needs to know***

I have briefly described two specific contexts. Both have their own unique complexities and could hardly be more different. In Indonesia, the students lack motivation to learn English and there are insufficient resources and nowhere near enough trained teachers. In Hong Kong, there is a high demand, fuelled by pragmatic concerns, to learn English, but the government's medium of instruction policy and the benchmarks it uses to measure the students' and teachers' proficiency seem perversely designed to de-motivate people, despite the government's wish for an English-speaking populace. Anyone who wanted to teach well in either of these contexts would need in-depth knowledge of them and would also need to be open to the ideas of local professionals and stakeholders. But does this mean that all ELT training courses must be tailored to specific contexts? To refer back to Holliday's distinction between TESEP and BANA contexts, almost all government-run courses are tailored to specific contexts. For example, the Institute of Education in Hong Kong runs a 4-year B Ed course for people who want to become English teachers in the Hong Kong school system. Curtin University, my previous employer, runs courses for people who want to teach in the West Australian school system. The problem arises within courses in both TESEP and BANA systems, which are designed to prepare people to teach in contexts divorced from their own and with which they are not familiar. These would include the raft of university MA TESOL courses (TESEP) and the many CELTA-type courses (BANA). So is it possible to identify the skills and knowledge that such courses should impart to all teachers?

The question of what skills and knowledge English language teachers need to have has been debated many times, of course. The current President of TESOL, Liu Jun, recently presented four major areas in which he believed all language teachers should be proficient (2006). These

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were: language; instruction; culture; and assessment. What matters most, however, is professionalism (1999).

In the context of Australia, Ellis (2002) has presented an extremely strong and effective case that language teachers should be multilingual and multicultural, although these skills are seldom demanded by employers. In the Canadian ESL context, Derwing and Munro argue that TESL graduates must have:

a thorough understanding of teaching practices and philosophy typical in Canada;  
a high level of English proficiency;  
and speak a variety of English 'that is intelligible to local members of the community'  
(2005:184).

This leads us to the most well-known, perhaps infamous, distinction in English language teaching circles, namely the distinction between the native and the non-native speaker of English. The various advantages and disadvantages of being an NS or an NNS have been debated by several scholars in recent years (see Medgyes 1994, Braine 1999, Ellis 2002, Canagarajah 2005, Llorca 2005).

The resilience of the argument that a monolingual native speaker of English represents an excellent choice of language teacher precisely because s/he cannot use the language of the students in the classroom and that this forces the learners to speak in English is curious to say the least. It is hard to see how anyone could deny the importance of language learning experience and a proven ability to learn languages for those wanting to be language teachers.

It is, I think, time, to bury this distinction once and for all and instead develop a list the skills and knowledge that all language teachers should have, irrespective of whether they can be classified as native speakers or not. Last semester I gave my second year B. Ed. language students a page from a Hong Kong newspaper that carried advertisements for a range of English language teaching positions in Hong Kong. I asked them to look through the adverts and decide which of the jobs they would like to apply for once they had become qualified English language teachers. It was not long before initial interest was replaced by emotions verging from anger to despair, as they soon realised that each advertisement insisted on the applicants being 'native-speakers'. In other words, linguistically highly proficient 4-year trained trilinguals were unable even to apply for these jobs. This was somehow made more shocking, as these were jobs within their own country.

The NS-NNS distinction also overlooks the linguistic and cultural complexity of all multilingual and multicultural societies. I am sure you have all known people who find it difficult to say what

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their first language is. Many people may feel that they have so-called native speaker proficiency but prefer to be culturally labeled as non-native speakers. For example, a Tagalog-speaking ELT professional surveyed by Liu Jun (1999:93) reported that she felt she was an NS in terms of English competence but an NNS in term of cultural identity. We all have multiple identities.

We also need to recognize, however that prejudice exists and, as language professionals, we must recognize this and take all possible steps to overcome it. As Derwing and Munro report (2005:187), ESL students may reject instruction from an individual whom they do not accept because of his/her ethnic background. They provide the example of ethnically Asian teaching practice students being bullied by students of East European backgrounds. The crucial point they make however, is that this discrimination applies to native speakers and non-native speakers alike. The native speaker versus non-native speaker status 'is irrelevant' (2005:180).

Not only has the difficulty in providing linguistic criteria for the NS-NNS classification now been established, there are often also racial issues associated with it that need to be exposed and excised. As Liu Jun has pointed out, we need to know who is doing the labeling between NS and NNS and why and who is defining TESOL professionals as NNS or NS and why. Inner circle membership and whiteness are often the criteria (Liu Jun 1999:97).

A final reason for discarding the NS-NNS distinction in the context of ELT professionals is that many countries and institutions employ untrained native speakers on the strength of their being native speakers alone. A Japanese ELT recruitment company provides just one example (for further examples see Kirkpatrick 2006b). This company advertises in England for native speaker teachers to work in Japanese primary and secondary schools. These people do not have to be trained, but 'they must like children'. The importance, therefore, of insisting on qualified professionals can hardly be overstated, if for no other reason than to protect children.

Discarding the native speaker – non-native speaker distinction allows the move away from what Holliday has termed 'native-speakerism' (cf. Holliday 2005:10), the idea that so-called native –speaker varieties are necessarily superior to new varieties of English and that they should therefore provide the linguistic norms in all contexts. In Holliday's words:

'Native speakerism represents a desire to know about a foreign other in order to change and 'improve' it. Native speakerism is concerned by *cultural correction*, which is driven by a chauvinistic desire to dominate and control.....' (2005:157).

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I have elsewhere (Kirkpatrick, forthcoming) dealt at length with the importance of recognising new varieties and of understanding the nature of variation itself, so will now conclude with a list of skills or knowledge that all English language teachers should possess, regardless of context and background. In addition to this list, therefore, the teacher must be prepared to learn as much as possible about the context in which s/he is going to teach.

### ***A list of what skills and knowledge all language teachers should have***

English language teachers should:

be multilingual and multicultural and ideally know the language of their students<sup>1</sup> and understand the educational, social and cultural contexts in which they are working

either be able to provide an appropriate and attainable model for their students or, if they speak another variety, understand that where a local variety of English exists, it is an appropriate and well-formed variety that is not inferior to their own

understand how different varieties of English have developed linguistically and the ways in which they differ phonologically, lexically, grammatically, rhetorically and culturally

understand how English has developed in specific contexts and how it has spread across the world

understand the role(s) of English in the community and how these interrelate with other local languages

have an understanding of the methods of teaching used in the community and be able to evaluate methods for specific contexts

be trained in the use of relevant technologies both to enhance their teaching and to encourage autonomy in their students

be able to evaluate ELT materials critically to ensure that these do not, either explicitly or implicitly, promote a particular variety of English or culture at the expense of others

be able to evaluate the specific needs of their students and teach towards those needs

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, it would be absurd to insist that a teacher in ELICOS teacher show know the languages of all the students. But all language teachers should have had the experience of learning languages and be 'plurilingual' in the sense defined by Beacco & Byram (2003:8).

be able to contribute to the extra-curricula life of the institution in which they are working

know the context and respect local knowledge

If these are the skills required of English language teachers, it follows then that the curricula of TESOL courses and the like should be designed to equip teachers with these skills. Sadly, few appear to do so. A survey of MA TESOL courses offered by institutions across the United States suggests that few courses actually do provide their students with these skills (Govardhan, Nayar and Sheorey 1999). The authors of the survey reported that US MATESOL courses were more suited to those wishing to teach in the United States; they were therefore unable to identify any program specifically designed toward preparing ELT teachers to teach abroad.

In conclusion, governments, ministries and employers, need to recognize that well-trained plurilingual teachers who are culturally sensitive and sophisticated are required to teach today's learners of English, the overwhelming majority of whom are bilingual and who are learning in culturally diverse contexts for an extraordinarily complex range of needs, stretching from local to international.

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