

Strategies for Translators and Interpreters in the World Englishes Era



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Abstract

Centuries ago, English was spoken by only a small group of people in Britain, which was less than seven million. In the mid 1990s, English was spoken in some countries as International language. More recently, it acquires the new name of lingua franca. Currently, there are approximately 75 countries and regions in which English is spoken as either the native or second language. According to Crystal (2006), there are 360 to 400 million native English speakers, 400 million people using English as a second language and 600 to 700 million people speaking English as a foreign language worldwide. English, as a lingua franca, is playing an important role in the world. Two thirds of works are published in English, 90 percent of research papers, three fourths of e-mails, 50 percent of radios, 75 percent of TV program are in English, and it is preferred language for international agreements and contracts. The growing popularity of English all over the world bring both opportunities and challenges to people, especially for those translation and interpreting professionals whose work is closely linked to language. Faced with challenges posed by different varieties of Englishes, translators and interpreters can adopt some strategies to better prepare themselves in world Englishes era.

Keywords

Varieties, strategy, language, culture

1. Introduction

According to the three circles model put forward by Braj Kachru (1989), countries in which English is used can be divided into three types, inner circle, outer circle and expanding circle. Inner circle countries refer to the traditional bases of English in which English is spoken as the native tongue. Countries such as Australia, Britain and America are within the inner circle. In outer or extended circle countries, English is not a first language but serves as a useful lingua franca. These countries were mostly the colonies of English-speaking countries in history. India, Singapore and Philippine are the typical examples. Expanding circle countries refer to countries where English are spoken as foreign language varieties, such as China, Japan and Brazil. Despite these countries had not been colonized by the inner circle countries, they strongly support the spreading of English as an international language in their own countries.

2. Challenges

With English gaining its popularity around the world, it contributes to faster trade and commerce, easier international tourism, and accelerated globalization. However, every coin has two sides, the spread of English has also adversely affected language diversity and cultural identity. Particularly, for translators and interpreters whose main work is to enhance the communication and exchanges among people speaking different languages, they are confronted with severe challenges.

2.1 Difficulty of establishing a universally acknowledged standard.

The development of English has resulted in more variations of English worldwide, which makes it more difficult to establish a generally accepted standard for English, thus posing more challenges for translators and interpreters when they are doing translation or interpreting tasks.

Standard English has long been a topical issue when world English is mentioned. International standard English is blended with many variations of English in the world, thus it will not be easy to establish a universally acknowledged norm. The standard which is agreed by some English-speaking countries may be opposed by some others because of the different English variations in their countries. Furthermore, the norm will change with the time, situation and participants. It is dynamic rather than static. Without a standard universally acknowledged by people, it is hard to define the work of translators and interpreters sometimes. Ambiguity in the norms will make some translation and interpreting tasks tricky to deal with, which will surely increase the burden of translators and interpreters.

2.2 Large quantity of English variations

English varieties are often combined with local lingual and cultural elements. Taking Singaporean English as an example, in the course of development, Singaporean English has shown its unique features which may vary from other English varieties in the world. Largely syllable timed, tendency to omit articles, all purpose question tags ‘is ist?’ and ‘isn’t it’, bi-polar options to check answers to yes or no questions, such as “like or not?” “are you going or not?” are preferred by Singaporean people when they speak English.

Generally speaking, even if some translators and interpreters have equipped themselves with sound translation and interpreting skills, if they are lack of understanding of some world varieties, like pronunciation, syntax, and grammar rules, it may be difficult to bring out the best of them when they are working on it. For example, if the speaker is from Singapore, and the interpreter happened to know little about Singaporean English, it may not work because the interpreter can hardly catch what the speaker is talking about due to some distinct features of Singaporean accent, even though he has mastered many interpreting skills.

2.3 Cross- cultural communication in English among people

As the carrier of culture, language gives express to the cultural identity of speakers. Although people from different countries and regions can communicate in English, Englishes they speak reflect their respective cultural identity. They will mix their cultural traditions with language they speak, which makes work of translators and interpreters more difficult. Translators and Interpreters should have an understanding of not only language itself, but also cultural traditions hidden behind. For instance, Chinese people prefer to put their point of view at the end, while western people, being direct and forward, prefer stating their point at the beginning. If translators and interpreters ignore the features and follow the original order of Chinese speakers, westerners may still feel confused about the focus of communication.

3. Strategies

In spite of the fact that diversity in English has posed many challenges for translation and interpreting professionals, it does not mean that they can do nothing but be overwhelmed by those challenges. Some strategies can be adopted to better prepare themselves for the work with increasing number of English varieties.

3.1 Putting emphasis on the standard of inner circles while accepting other English varieties at the same time.

Standard English has sparked a heated discussion since the early 19th century. “This type of English is called ‘standard’ because it has undergone standardization, which means that it has been subjected to a process through which it has been selected, codified and stabilized, in a way that other varieties have not.” (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008: 6).

British standard English includes two parts, one is standard English and the other is received pronunciation. Some

people regard standard English as the best possible English among traditionalists, like the King and Queen's English. Standard English was firstly put forward in 1836, involving vocabulary, orthography and grammar. Received pronunciation firstly appeared in 1920s, referring to pronunciation and intonation. Standard English refers to English spoken among the upper class in its preliminary stage, aiming to educate young people in upper class family and boost the influence of England all over the world. BBC adopted received pronunciation as a norm, afterwards, a boom of "BBC accent" occurs.

The forming of general American English is not so closely linked to social class as Britain. America, as a melting port, boasts flowing population, and dialects in various regions, thereby, American English takes a tolerant attitude towards standard which will only be emphasized when they want to differentiate English spoken by Americans coming from different places of this country or their own English from that spoken by people from other countries. American English has distinct features in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Owing to its powerful political and economic status in the international arena, American English is playing an increasingly important role.

Meanwhile, the normalization of variations of English is undergoing rapid development, for example, such concepts as standard Indian English, standard Nigerian English and standard Caribbean English are put forward successively. International standard English came into being in the late 20th century. As an integrated concept, it is contrary to American English, British English or South African English etc, which accounts for the fact that being a lingua franca, international standard English is never a variation of English spoken in any country. Before WWII, many people maintained that only British English and royal English were standard English. Scholars like Kachru and Graddol hold that there is no standard English in the world so far, which is totally contrary to the opinion of Quirk. While some scholars like Greenbaum remains neutral. They acknowledge the special status of British English and American English, at the same time, they think the existence of other English varieties are inevitable.

Countries in inner circle are English native speaking countries, such as the America, Australia, Canada. English is used as both the mother tongue and official language. People learn it through natural acquisition. Outer circle is consisted of countries once colonized by English-speaking countries. English is used as a second language there. People learn to speak it by means of school education. English enjoys important status and is gradually nativized, evolving into new Englishes with distinct local color as official language or one of official languages. Expanding circle involves most countries and population, like China, Russia, Japan, Korea etc, which have recognized the significance of English, however, English is not the official language in these territories, but rather uses as a foreign language, playing the role of assisted language in such fields as education, science and technology, foreign trade and diplomacy. People acquire it through long-time exposure in school learning. "The features of English which tend to be crucial for international intelligibility and therefore need to be taught for production and reception are being distinguished from the 'non-native' features that tend not to cause misunderstandings and thus do not need to constitute a focus for those learner who intend to use English mainly in international settings."

Translators and Interpreters should be clearly aware that world Englishes nowadays is complicated with a lot of varieties and unclear standard. What they will be exposed to are not only American English and British English, but also German English, Spanish English, Indian English and some other varieties. English spoken by countries in inner circle has long been regarded as standard English in history, which should not neglected by translation and interpreting professionals when many new Englishes are newly emerging. Based on received pronunciation of British standard English and American English, meanwhile, they should be tolerant enough to accept some other English varieties. With the accelerated development of globalization, distances between countries and people are becoming closer, translators and interpreters will never know where their next customer comes from or what language they speak. Furthermore, the norm will change with the time, situation, participants of communication. It is dynamic rather than static. Translation and interpreting professionals should keep pace with the change of norms. Putting emphasis on the standard of inner circles while accepting other English varieties at the same time will contribute to their better preparation for helping people realize high-quality communication and exchanges.

3.2 improving knowledge about different English varieties and culture

While English is going global, it is branded with the mark of the lingual and cultural characteristics in different countries. Many kinds of English varieties take into shape with their distinctive features in terms of phonology, vocabulary, grammar, morphology, pragmatics and cultural conventions, for instance, Australian English, Singaporean English, Indian English. English is no longer the exclusive languages of native-speaking countries, but functions as a global language.

The word "English" also gets its plural form "Englishes". The emerging of such New Englishes as Indian English, Philippine English and Singaporean English greatly increase the number of English varieties with distinctive language

and cultural elements. Meanwhile, countries in expanding circle are drawing the attention of the world, such as Japanese English and Chinese English. "It would take me too far to examine why so many teachers should have turned away from concentrating on Standard English, from criticizing a student's poor usage as incorrect and should have preferred to explore the variety of language that students bring to their classrooms from very different social and regional backgrounds." (Quirk, 1990: 7).

Nowadays we can often hear non-native speakers talk in English fluently, but they usually have some accents different from standard English, furthermore, quite few people speak the localized English whose vocabulary and syntax may not be so appropriate. In the translation or interpreting process, translators and interpreters may encounter customers from any country. They all have different language and cultural backgrounds, therefore, English spoken by them may not always be standard English. Only when translators and interpreters have a good understanding of the specific English variety can they better serve their customers.

As early as 1960s, some scholars have pointed out that English varieties with local colors have been undergoing rapid development and this trend is going to continue, which is best reflected in countries once colonized by English-speaking countries in history. In such countries as South Africa, India, Malta and Singapore, English, as the second language, has actually been long used as the main language or official language. Especially in some official occasions, English has replaced their mother tongue and is gradually employed in the field of law, education, administration, science and technology, commerce and public service. In addition, it serves as their main means of learning all kinds of knowledge. Ghana, located in West Africa, has over 50 languages with a population of 90 million, and English is the officially specified teaching language in high schools and universities. Nearly all the public places use English, so do the public radios and newspapers, which began before WWII. Ghanaians have lived in an environment which encourages the learning and speaking of English in their growing up.

The difference of culture and language policy in different countries may result in the evolvement of each English variety which contains cultural connotation of English speakers. Taking Chinglish as an example, "which is used to emphasized the structurally and phonologically intermediate status of a learner's language system between mother tongue and target language" (Zhen, 2008: 21). As a newly emerging English vibration, Chinglish has its own characteristics. In terms of pronunciation, people tend to replace some phonemes they feel difficult to utter by similar ones in Chinese. In lexis, some Chinglish violate the grammatical rules of English. For example, "good good study, day day up" derives from "hao hao xue xi, tian tian xiang shang" in Chinese, which means studying hard to make progress each day. "People mountain people sea", derives from "ren shan ren hai", which means crowded with people. Imagine how an interpreter with Singaporean English background will interpret those phrases and sentences with distinct Chinese characteristics.

Faced with challenges posed by various English variations, translators and interpreters can their knowledge about different English varieties and the culture hidden behind. Particularly, interpreters may have to deal with various accents in interpretation, thus mastering features of different English varieties will help them better tackle the accent issues.

3.3 deepening the understanding of cross-cultural communication and strengthening the capacity of cross-cultural communication

Translation and interpreting involves not only language itself, but also political, economic, cultural, religious issues. Interpreters contribute to the exchange of people with different lingual backgrounds, as well as the friendly exchanges among people. Thereby, apart from language proficiency, translators and interpreters should equip themselves with knowledge about culture and thinking patterns of both sides, so as to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding and embarrassment.

Each English variety enjoys its own language and cultural tradition which is unique. What considers to be polite in one culture may not be the same case in another culture. For interpreters, cross-cultural awareness refers to the cognitive norms and adjustment methods formed consciously or subconsciously in cross-cultural communication. In other words, it is a specific thinking modes and judging capacity of interpreters. Once an interpreter has the capacity, the interpretation can be not affected by the negative influence of cultural differences.

Interpreting aims to convey what the speaker intends to say rather than the literal translation. If interpreters always interpret word by word, sometimes what the listeners receive is not the same as what the speakers intend to convey. That is because one word may mean different things in different cultures, and polite expressions in one English variety may sound impolite in another variety.

Working in the environment with increasing number of English varieties, interpreters should always bear the essence of cross-cultural in mind, keep deepening their understanding of cross-cultural communication and enhancing the ca-

capacity of cross-cultural communication.

4. Conclusion

Currently there are about 75 varieties of English that exist in the world and the number is still on the rise. The growing number of English varieties bring both opportunities and challenges to translation and interpreting professionals. They are given more opportunities, meanwhile, they have to confront the challenges posed by the diversity. It is more difficult to establish a universally acknowledged standard with growing number of English varieties, putting higher requirements to the cross-cultural communication. However, it does not mean that translators and interpreters have nothing to do but overwhelmed by these severe challenges. Some strategies can be taken by translation and interpreting professionals to prepare themselves for the varieties of English they may encounter. First of all, they can put emphasis on the standard of inner circles while accepting other English varieties at the same time. Secondly, they need to enhance their knowledge about different English varieties and the culture hidden behind. Thirdly, they can deepen the understanding of cross-cultural communication and strengthen the capacity of cross-cultural communication.

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