ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA AND SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS
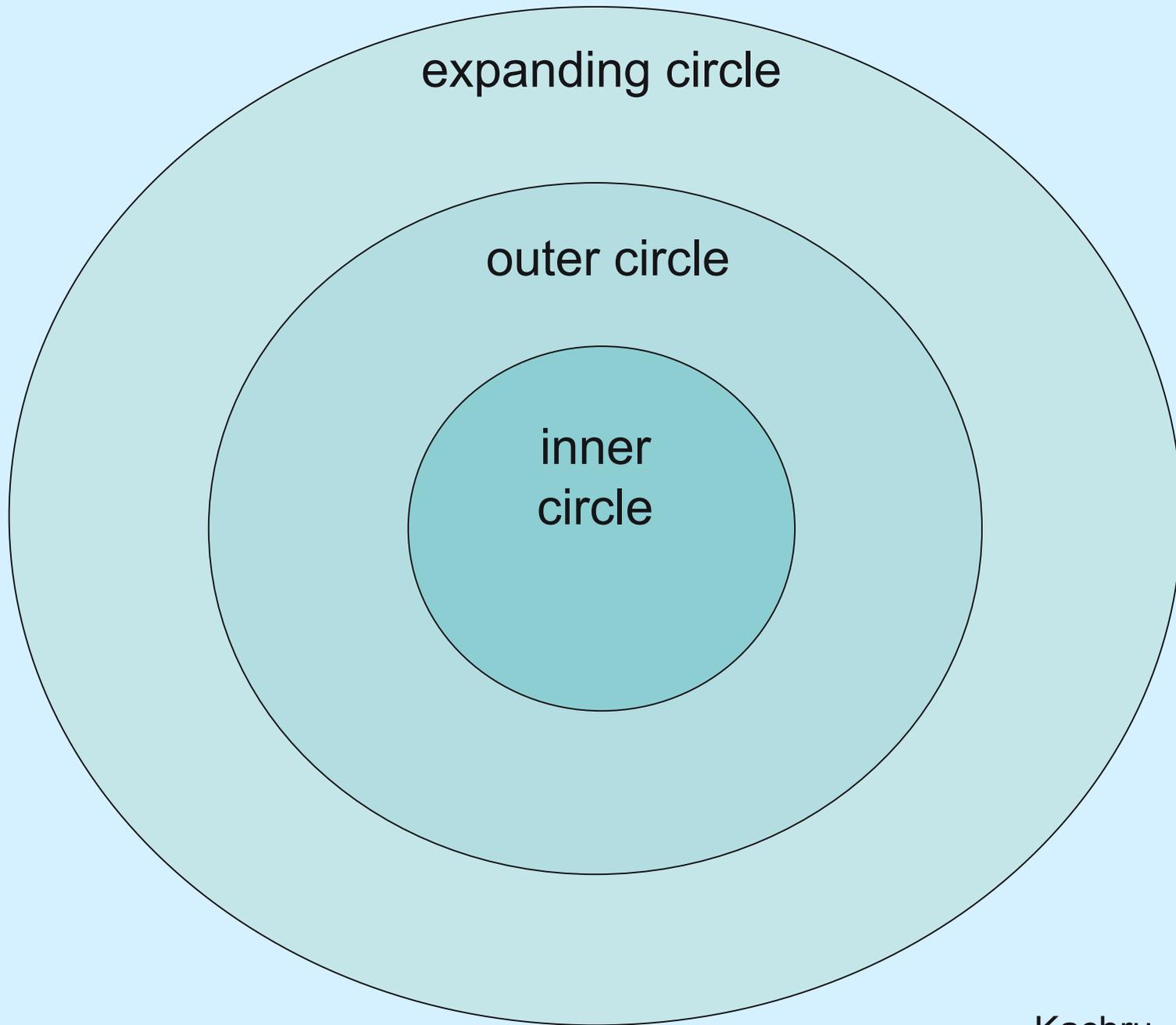
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Initial Concepts and Assumptions

Probably between two and three billion people speak English.

These may be defined according to Kachru's three circles: inner, outer, expanding (Kachru, 1992).

expanding circle

outer circle

inner circle

Kachru, 1985

Probably between two and three billion people speak English.

These may be divided into Kachru's three circles: inner, outer, expanding (Kachru, 1992).

But today the majority of English speakers are located in the outer or expanding circles, using English as a lingua franca (ELF).

It is used for: academic purposes; political negotiation; tourism; entertainment; business and finance; information; interpersonal relationships …

Most educated speakers of other languages are at least bilingual.

Both centrifugal and centripetal trends are developing: a proliferation of local 'Englishes', side by side with a generally comprehensible 'standard' variety.

Some general implications

The user of English as a lingua franca

May be either 'native' or 'non-native'

Is typically bi- (or multi-)lingual, or bi-dialectal

'An English-knowing bilingual' (Alptekin, 2005)

Is likely to be skilled in communicative and comprehension strategies.

# The fully competent speaker of English as a lingua franca

A speaker with a wide vocabulary, accurate grammar, easily understood accent.

May or may not be originally a native speaker.

Three circles redefined?

Perhaps it is more useful, therefore, to define the three circles of users of English internationally simply in terms of their level of competence in the language rather than in terms of where they live and whether or not they are 'native speakers'.

ELF Speakers

Limited

Competent

Fully
competent
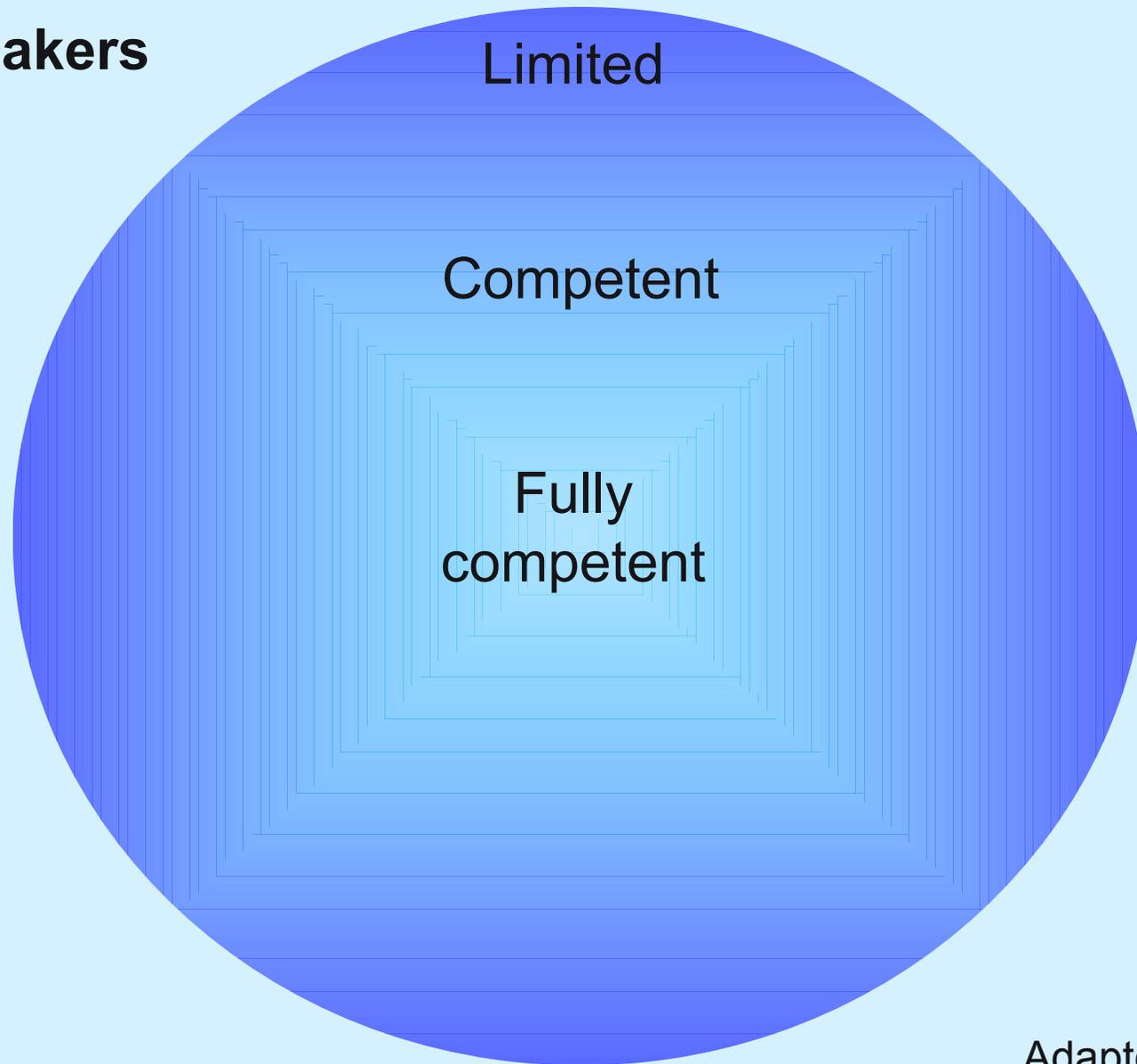
Adapted from
Rajadurai, 2005

Some implications for English teachers worldwide 1

The language to be taught

Various options:

1. One of the mainstream native varieties

2. A 'common core' reduced syllabus

3. Varied models: diversity

4. A world standard model

A native model

Advantages:

- Accepted by many teachers and learners

- Prestigious

- Defined and codified

- Clear basis for materials and tests

A native model

Disadvantages:

- Not the variety used by most fully competent ELF speakers

- May not be appropriate for ELF contexts

- Difficulty of deciding which native variety to choose

- Full competence not usually achievable

A 'common core' syllabus

The argument: we need to teach for communication, and a lot of users of English as a lingua franca are communicating perfectly effectively with limited vocabulary and non-standard grammatical usages.

So maybe we shouldn't worry too much about teaching wide vocabulary and 'accurate' grammar.

What are our priorities?

Some applied linguists claim that many so-called errors are in fact 'variant' forms commonly used by many users of English as a lingua franca and therefore should not be corrected.

Examples:

She go

The people which…

A 'common core'

Advantages:

- includes common 'unproblematic' variants

- does not include 'difficult' vocabulary

- universally comprehensible

- at present being researched and documented

A 'common core' code

Disadvantages:

- fully competent ELF speakers don't accept or use it.

- no evidence that it represents the most common / acceptable forms worldwide.

- unacceptable to most teachers, learners, materials writers and test designers.

Diverse, flexible models

Rather than set up a code which all users of ELF have to follow, it is surely time that we recognised the diversity among users and the multiplicity of uses to which English is put worldwide and think in terms of varied processes of interaction rather than a single prescriptive model.

Prodromou, 2007: 40

Diverse, flexible models

Advantages:

- ideologically acceptable

- allows for local variation

- sidesteps need for codification and
definition

Diverse, flexible models

Disadvantages

- no clear model or set of priorities

- very difficult to teach

- very difficult to assess

- very difficult to design syllabus and materials

A standard variety

Based probably on one of the main native varieties, or a combination

But eliminating specific local idiom, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, grammar

And allowing variants that are acceptable worldwide.

Examples of local usages, not useful for ELF

fortnight

'cheers!'

aluminum

Further arguable trends

fall / autumn

mad / angry

schedule (/sk/, /ʃ/)

program / programme

rhotic/non-rhotic pronunciation

A standard variety

Advantages:

- comprises a range of acceptable forms

- based on usages of fully competent speakers

- comprehensible / acceptable worldwide

- achievable

A standard variety

Disadvantages

- its existence is questionable

- ideologically unacceptable to many: rejection of 'imposed' standards

- not (yet) defined or codified: based largely on teacher intuitions

Some implications for English teachers worldwide 2

Learner goals

The goal was: to be like a native speaker

The native speaker is the role model.

Hence:

Let's try to learn British or American English.

We assume that European English or SEA English usages are is inferior.

Let's try to try to 'think in English', eliminate L1 from the classroom, banish translation or comparison with L1, → implied inferiority of the mother tongue.

Let's read 'native-speaker' literature, learn about 'inner-circle' culture and try to imitate it.

The goal is to be a fully competent 'English-knowing bilingual':

To be a French-speaker, who can also function competently in English.

Hence:

- Let's try to learn internationally acceptable English rather than a particular native variety.

- Let's accept the equal rights and worth of different varieties of English worldwide.

- Let's not try to think in English: accept that we are native speakers of our own language, and use it, where appropriate, to help us learn English better (compare, translate etc.)

- Let's read any literature written in English, not just 'inner circle) (including, in some cases, translations); let's learn about all sorts of different cultures that can find expression through English.

Some implications for English teaching 3

The 'model' English teacher

The native-speaker or the fully competent non-native?

Many today still prefer a 'native speaker' model.

But

a) Native speakers often speak a local dialect.

b) More and more non-natives are today 'fully competent'.

c) Non-native fully competent speakers are good role models.

d) The language level of the (non-native) fully proficient speaker is achievable.

Bottom line: irrelevance of native/non-native question

Important:

- level of competence

- teaching ability

- intercultural competence

Some implications for English teachers worldwide 4

Culture and cultural awareness

Is English as a lingua franca a culture-free language?

(Alptekin, 2005)

Possibly a 'chameleon' of a language.

Able to represent and communicate a diversity of identities and cultures rather than imposing the identity or culture of an 'inner circle' community.

Implications

English needs to be used as a vehicle to raise awareness of three types of culture:

1. The 'home' culture

2. International culture(s)

3. The culture of the (native) English speaking peoples?

Intercultural competence

Intercultural competence: the sensitivity to other cultural norms and the ability to adapt and function appropriately when interacting with people from other cultures.

Some implications for English teaching 5

Materials and tests

Content: culture, situations, texts, characters …

Culture: 'source' and 'international', not just British/American

Situations: more international

Characters: more likely to be 'international' or 'home'.

Texts: more adaptations of international or local sources, fewer 'inner-circle' 'authentic' texts or literature.

Language

Based on international usages rather than any particular native dialect.

More acknowledgement and use of the learners' L1

To Summarize

The teaching of English as a lingua franca rather than as a foreign language implies…

-       A change in the concept of what 'English' is: an internationally comprehensible variety of the language rather than a single 'native' model.

-       A change in the goal of English teaching: to produce fully competent English-knowing bilinguals rather than imitation native speakers.

-       A change in the cultural background to English courses: 'home' and 'international' culture predominate.

-       A change in the image of the English teacher: 'native-speaker-ness' less important than linguistic competence, teaching competence, intercultural competence.

-       A change in materials and test design, relating to both content and language.

Thank you for listening

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