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Research Article

Is there a Recognition of World Englishes and ELF in International Tests of English?

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ABSTRACT

Thousands of non-native speakers have been taking international tests of English administered by long-established testing boards, such as ETC and PEARSON, for a wide range of purposes worldwide. These test-takers represent various Englishes of the Outer and Expanding Circle countries. However, little information is available as to the degree to which their Englishes are recognized and represented in the major international tests of English. Thus, this study explores the websites and policy materials that belong to universally distributed international English tests and further scrutinizes what Englishes are imposed on test-takers while measuring their proficiency through a documentary analysis approach. Informed by the content analysis of the textual data on the websites and the relevant documents and the multimodal study of the photographic data, the study indicates that there is not much recognition of the diversity of English speakers from non-Anglophone countries and their diverse ways of English use in the tests at the level of practice in particular, since they are rather standard English oriented for the desired practices. The findings suggest that the testing boards should adjust their rubrics and assessment criteria in line with the current sociolinguistic profile of their test takers whose ways of doing English are relatively different from NESs and standard English norms.

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Introduction

Nowadays, the dispersion of English and its global impacts are exceptional and there has been a remarkable shift in the roles of English from one kind of English to different Englishes (Brutt-Griffler 2002). The ever-growing diversity of English and speakers of English have recently led many language researchers to consider the implications of such a wide diffusion for language teaching pedagogy (Jenkins 2007, 2009; Leung 2005; McKay 2003). More specifically, as English has begun to be used by ethnolinguistically different people in multilingual and multicultural contexts, the question is about whether the international tests of English have adjusted their assessment methods and criteria in ways that reflect the diverse uses of English in the contemporary situation.

Recently, the number of those taking international English tests has increased dramatically. The majority of the test-takers are known to be non-native English speakers (NNESs) largely located in non-English dominant contexts. Due to the pressing and ever-increasing necessity of English proficiency for survival in the global environments of various domains, including primarily education, business, and service, thousands of people sit for standardized international tests of English administered by the international examination boards, such as TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC and PTE. The number of NNES students has one of the highest rates among the test takers as they are obliged to prove their English proficiency for admission to institutions not only in Anglophone countries but also in non-Anglophone countries, with scores taken from the recognized examination boards. This sociolinguistic position of English as the dominant language of the globe and the current profile of English users, the majority of whom are NNESs from the non-Anglophone countries (Kachru, 1986), is rather important to bear in mind while teaching English as well as assessing students' English proficiency.

As stated by Arik and Arik (2014), "[t]he legitimacy of using standardized tests, which take Inner Circle varieties of English as the norm for local institutions, has been highly criticized in recent years" (p. 8). Some scholars, such as Lowenberg (1993), raised their concerns with respect to the assumption "that the criteria for measuring proficiency in English round the world should be candidates' use of particular features of English which are used and accepted as norms by highly educated native speakers of English" (1993, p. 95). Opposing this assumption, Jenkins (2014) further argued that the standardized international tests of English assess students' English "proficiency in native British or American English" which is at odds with institutions' bold claim to being international with an alleged welcoming attitude towards the diversity of incoming students whose uses of English is rather different (p. 12). Another point of criticism centres on the argument that "the scores of large-scale standardized language tests such as IELTS and TOEFL are not necessarily reliable and sensitive predictors of future academic performance" (Leung, Lewkowicz & Jenkins, 2016, p. 57).

From a fairness and justice perspective, some researchers, such as Davies, Hamp-Lyons and Kemp (2003), perceive such tests to be 'discriminatory' as students are forced into using English in conformity with particular native English norms to avoid being penalized for likely divergent uses. That is, the state of whether these tests are good enough to measure language proficiency in accordance with real-world English use in diverse

contexts for various purposes has hotly been debated in scholarly circles. For that particular reason, this paper analyses various sources of the most popular standardized international English tests (e.g. the websites and language documents) regarding the Englishes overtly or covertly imposed on test-takers in the evaluation process.

Literature review

Global Englishes: World Englishes and ELF

Global Englishes has created a response to its previous points of reference, i.e. conventional SLA and EFL in conjunction with their inalienably tricky and obsolete ideas relating to language, e.g. native speaker, fossilization, interlanguage and language learners, who are, for example, labelled as eternal learners and failed native speakers (e.g., Jenkins, 2006; Mauranen, 2006). The approach to NNESs from a deficit perspective and the outdated understanding of English have severely been problematized by the Global Englishes scholars, who have not remained unresponsive to the English language's evolution through time and the pedagogical and theoretical ramifications of this evolution for classroom practices. In a broad sense, the Global Englishes paradigm sets out to address "linguistic and sociocultural dimensions of global uses and users of English (Global Englishes)" (Centre for Global Englishes, 2018, para. 1), challenging "the notions of geographic linguistic boundaries and distinct language varieties, and instead emphasizes the pluricentricity and fluidity of English" (Galloway & Rose, 2015, p. xiv).

The notion of Global Englishes is intended as a superordinate concept, including the concepts of World Englishes (WE) and ELF. Researchers seem to have agreement on this conceptualization, for they see WE and ELF as an integral part of it (e.g., Jenkins, 2011; Jenkins et al., 2011; Galloway & Rose, 2015; Widdowson, 2015). The former is concerned with "the identification and codification of national varieties of English" whereas the latter one, i.e. ELF, "examines English use within and across such borders, as well as focusing on the global consequences of English's use as a world language" (Galloway & Rose, 2015, p. xii). Widdowson (2015) describes these two research fields as follows:

> WE clearly follows the sociolinguistic tradition of variety description with a primary concern for the relationship between language and *community*, the study of ELF is essentially an enquiry into the relationship between language and *communication*, how linguistic resources are variably used to achieve meaning (p. 363, italics in original).

Although these two research fields seem to be competing with one another at a first glance, they are not, because they deal with different aspects of the pluricentricity in English. As is also evident from the above quote and prior descriptions, they do have similarities and differences. To start with similarities, Galloway and Rose (2015) elucidated that both WE and ELF

• take a plurithic view of English, taking into account its wide spread across the world;

• primarily deal with non-native ways of doing English, with a special interest in the impact of language contact;

• liberate English from the ownership of NESs and their corresponding norms, supporting the global ownership of it by its all users;

• offer pedagogical and ideological implications for English language teaching.

The paradigm of WE is primarily concerned with the codification of national varieties that particularly fall into the Outer circle in Kachru's (1986, 1992) concentric circles of dispersal of the English language, a framework consisting of three-layer circles (i.e. the Inner, the Outer and the Expanding Circles). In this division, those countries, such as the UK, the USA, Canada, where English is spoken as a mother tongue constitute the Inner circle; the ones (e.g. India) where English serves as an L2 (second language) for intranational communication objectives constitute the Outer Circle countries. The Expanding circle countries are the ones, such as Thailand and Turkey, where English has no official status apart from being taught and learned as a school subject and used for international communication.

In contrast to WE, ELF addresses the use of English across these three circles with a special interest in English use/users in the Expanding Circle but does not make any attempts for codification, as its main emphasis is on "linguistic accommodation where language is appropriated by speakers in response to situational demands" (Galloway & Rose, 2015, p. xii). That is, as Ishikawa (2016) aptly put, "ELF theories do not and cannot link legitimacy to geography", because "by definition, ELF transcends geographical boundaries" (p. 7). In brief, ELF deals with language use in situ where users can negotiate and change linguistic norms in response to changing circumstances and communicative needs of the speakers from different circles of English.

As WE deals with codification, it determines its own criteria for correctness by trying to determine stable forms and codes of any given WE variety, which will accordingly replace the forms and codes assumed to be 'correct' in standard native English. However, the notion of correctness is not a paramount concern in ELF communication in which language use is dynamic and fluid. This is why, as suggested by Jenkins et al. (2011), ELF "prioritizes successful communication over narrow notions of 'correctness' " (p. 284). For successful communication, ELF endorses the use of various intercultural communication strategies like accommodation by changing "their speech patterns to make themselves more understandable to their interlocutors" (Cogo, 2012, p. 99).

Following the discussion of the similarities and differences between the research fields of WE and ELF, one can infer that the following characteristics outline the Global Englishes paradigm:

• Most speakers of English are NNESs and they are not seen as 'eternal learners' or 'failed native speakers', but, rather, as 'successful communicators/users' in their own rights;

• Linguistic diversity and divergent language use are not considered a problem-causing element in communication;

• No particular emphasis is put on NESs as the target model for language use; the main emphasis is placed on gaining the skills of successful intercultural communicators;

• A global ownership of English is favoured over the NES ownership of English (Jenkins, 2011; Jenkins et al., 2011Galloway, 2013; Galloway & Czarnecki, 2014; Galloway & Rose, 2015).

These features of the Global Englishes necessitate instructional changes in ELT pedagogy since the current pedagogy is far from teaching and assessing English in line with these features. ELF users should be evaluated using tests with ELF awareness. With regards to assessment, it is assumed that typical standardized tests usually base their measurement criteria on monolingual English features, including phonological and syntactic forms. In the words of Davies et al. (2003), such standard tests adopt "[a]n International English (IE) view [which] insists that the only acceptable norms are those of native English speakers (NES)" (p. 571).

Taking issue with the notion of competence in assessment, Ma (2009) and Hymes (1972) point out that linguistic competence covers not only the knowledge of lexicogrammar and language awareness but also social uses. Therefore, English proficiency tests for ELF users should measure how communication in English is carried out in different communication situations. Basically, many scholars coherently agree that English learning evaluation for ELF users should measure strategic competence, i.e., the use of ELF in international settings and the accommodation skills (Galloway & Rose, 2015). Similarly, Kenkel and Tucker (1989) touched on the issue of 'errors' and suggested that what is regarded as "errors' in their [test-takers'] work should more accurately be called deviations from the native speaker norm[s]", especially if such deviations are habitually observed in their linguistic acts (as cited in Davies et al., 2003, p. 574).

Many ideas and reconceptualized measurement solutions have been proposed in response to the addressed problems. For example, Hu's (2012) input is to decide what linguistic norms are to be tested. The intended application and social preferences should guide the choice of an English variety. This input seems valid. While NESs could be the intended audience in some cases, there are also occasions where language users are engaged in conversations with interlocutors using other Anglophone and non-Anglophone English varieties. Therefore, a test recognizing both ELF and WE should comprise indicators for intercultural strategic competence.

Likewise, Canagarajah (2007) suggests that a test should measure one's ability to interpret the behaviours and expectations of other English users with diverse backgrounds and heterogeneous linguistic norms. Formal grammatical competence should no longer be the priority of tests. Instead, they should measure a language user through their "strategies of negotiation, situated performance, communicative repertoire and language awareness" (p. 936). A major ELF scholar, Jenkins' (2007) test priority is laid on accommodation skills. Test takers should not be penalized for their perceived mistakes that are proven common and intelligible among speakers using English as an additional language. Following Jenkins' (2007) argument, Khan (2009, p. 203) supports the idea that an English language evaluation should be customized to harmonize with international communication environments, global communities and people of diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Questioning the traditional view of communicative competence, Widdowson (2012) suggests that it should preferably be about language learning strategies than the quantity of

knowledge. He further adds that language learners tend to formulate personal language versions out of their classrooms and, later, become ELF users who use these new adaptations in real-life situations (Widdowson, 2012). Widdowson (2012) further stresses the importance of ELF studies as they help demonstrate how the language is employed in practices. Similarly, McNamara (2012) urges educators to redefine learning achievements and questions whether native English-speaker norms are still valid and relevant in ELF practices in respect of assessment.

Lastly, Harding (2012) proposes some measurement alternatives for English learning to replace the indicators for English language competence. Instead of determining how close one can demonstrate native-like English performance, the following competencies should be the focus of attention: (1) tolerance and awareness of various Englishes: discourse styles, syntactic forms and, accents; (2) negotiation of meaning; (3) use of phonology to achieve mutual understanding in intercultural communications; (4) awareness of pragmatics for intercultural suitability, e.g., politeness; (5) awareness of target listeners/hearers and prioritizing effective communication and; (6) strategic competence, i.e., awareness and approaches to overcome communication breakdowns.

Realistically, the process of change could be time-consuming before the paradigm shift becomes feasible since the current WE- and ELF-based English learning measurements are still insufficient. According to Matsuda (2012), most teachers are not prepared to deal with any existing Englishes in the world. Therefore, many students depend on limited resources to learn about English diversity. The problem is that most of the resources supposedly used worldwide are manufactured by only some American and British publishing businesses (Dewey, 2015; Jenkins, 2007; McKay, 2002; Methitham, 2009). As seen in several English learning measurements, the situation forces a false value and assumption upon WE and ELF users and educators. The assumption implicates that for one to be proficient in English, one must try hard to imitate native speakers and those who are incapable of performing such imitation are viewed as incompetent (Jindapitak & Teo, 2012).

Methodology

Research Design

For the analysis of the websites and the documentary papers of the popular international English tests, a qualitative study design was embraced in this study in order to gather a mixture of documents, i.e. publicly available materials, such as competency assessment sheets, sample test materials, and manuals for candidates' images as well as audio texts from their websites. In the approach adopted for the analysis, it had "a policy focus, examining materials relevant to a particular set of decisions" about English, its use and assessment (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, p. 186).

Materials and Data Collection

To collect such documentary data, firstly, the websites of the following international exam boards were visited by turns: TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC and PTE. For visual materials,

several screenshots were taken from the home pages and relevant pages of the websites where the testing companies display photos of potential test takers. If available, we also decided to include the video content in the data set featuring those who already took the tests for promotional purposes and auditory materials in which one can listen to sample listening files. In collecting data on visual materials, the objective is to determine whether and to what extent such visual materials give coverage to the linguistic diversity of English speakers who are likely to take one of those tests. As for the video and auditory content, the attention was given to the speaker profiles, i.e. speakers' ethnolinguistic background and whether they feature a particular kind of (native) English in their speech or maintain their own first language traits when speaking.

Moreover, to determine if the international testing companies orient to a particular kind of English in assessment and enforce a particular target speaker on the test takers for language use, various sections of the websites were inspected and the files on various assessment issues were downloaded, including test formats, score calculators, the guide for teachers, practice and sample test materials, score descriptors, and assessment rubrics. These documents were saved as portable document files (pdf) for further analysis.

Data Analysis

To analyse the visual materials, particularly how they are positioned on the websites, Knox's (2007) website analysis model consisting of three dimensions was used. This model helps researchers determine the level of prominence ascribed to the display of visual materials on web pages. To illustrate, on web pages, focal attention is given "to the left-top corner of the screen immediately below the browser window" since it is "the guaranteed viewing area on any computer screen and is, therefore, a strategic location" for viewers (Johnson, Milani & Upton, 2010, p. 231). This location is what Macro Theme-Rheme is concerned with. As for the head-tail dimension, it includes the process of navigating through an online page on a specific website via moving higher or lower across visuals or texts on the web pages. The reason for this is that "the hierarchy of information is typically indexed according to a continuum of 'diminishing salience'" (p. 230). Namely, one can simply view vital material in a comparatively short period since they are presented in easily accessible sections whereas secondary level material is scattered towards the underside of the web page, thereby accessible to viewers in a long time. The Primary-Secondary dimension deals with if material is situated in the middle of the page or the right- or left-hand margins of it. Important information is mostly given in the middle column whereas secondary information tends to be offered in the left- and right columns.

As for the analysis of the textual data garnered from various documents, two data analysis tools, namely content analysis (Schreier, 2012) and negative analysis (Pauwels, 2012) were used in combination. The analytic procedure was shaped by a four-stage course: "finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesising data contained in documents" (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). During the process, the focus was on "the deep structural meaning conveyed by the message" instead of the literal implication of the content (Berg, 2001, p. 242). Considering the latent content of the documentary data, we attempted to supplement our content analysis via "negative analysis" with special attention on

"meaningfully absent" references to several matters relating to the use of language and its assessment (Pauwels, 2012, p. 253). These items, as Pauwels (2012) notes, "exactly by their absence seem to become significant" (p. 256). Paying attention to such absent items is of particular importance in the documentary analysis as their absence may be due to ideological assumptions regarding language, its use, its users and assessment. Additionally, such assumptions may be not in keeping with the information or message the visual and auditory data convey to the viewers of the websites. Additionally, the analysis of the sample listening files was based on the descriptive study (e.g. frequency) of the existence of the speakers from diverse cultural and national backgrounds in the audio files. However, it should be noted that the websites and their content are prone to immediate changes and updates. Thus, what has been presented in the analysis only applies to the websites and their content at the time they were visited, yet to safeguard validity, visuals from web pages and detailed excerpts from connected policy declarations and papers are offered in the findings to demonstrate that the inquiry is "*solid*," "*comprehensive*" and "presented in a *transparent* way, allowing the reader, as far as possible, to test the claims [and conclusions] made" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 173; italics in original).

Results and Discussion

Multimodal Website Analysis

In the website analysis, the first thing that was investigated is the visual data (mostly photographs of people) available on the home page of each international exam boards' website. In doing so, the objective was to specify which group or groups of speakers from Kachru's (1986) concentric circles are displayed on the home pages. The examination of the home pages indicated that the photographs of the speakers from the Outer and Expanding Circle countries were positioned on the strategic location, i.e. the area immediately below the browser, on each home page, thereby each being part of a Macro Theme-Rheme. That is, these photographs are the first items visitors see on the home pages without scrolling downward or sideways. None of the photographs included any speakers from the Inner Circle. The photographs mostly featured East Asian and South Asian people, probably with an eye to representing the largest body of their test-takers across the world.

The inclusion of NNESs on the photographs implies that the exam boards are aware of the current sociolinguistic profile of English speakers, the majority of whom are from the Outer and Expanding circle countries. In other respects, from a negative analysis point of view, the absence of any Inner Circle speakers can be indicative of the idea that such international tests are addressed to NNESs who are supposed to prove their English competence for whatever reason (e.g. academic studies, work, and migration) they are sitting any of these tests, yet once it comes to Inner Circle speakers (i.e., NESs), they do not have to sit such exams even if they are intent upon applications for similar purposes. Below are screenshots taken from the home pages of each international exam board, illustrating the exam boards' depiction of their future test takers:

Figure 1. A screenshot from the IELTS home page

Figure 3. A screenshot from the TOEIC home page

Figure 2. A screenshot from the TOEFL home page

Figure 4. A screenshot from the PTE home page

Then, the analysis moved on to a closer inspection of visual and textual items located in the areas of Head-Tail dimension and MacroTheme-Rheme dimension by scrolling down, left and right on each exam board's home page. When one scrolled down on the home page of IELTS, one can see immediately below the web banner photographs in Figure 1 that IELTS makes following description regarding itself: "IELTS is the high-stakes English test for study, migration or work" (What is IELTS, 2019, para. 1). This is followed by a promotional video, entitled 'Filip's IELTS story' on the left-hand column. It seems obvious from the MacroTheme-Rheme perspective that easy access to that promotional video is particularly prioritised. The video lasts 91 seconds, showing various sights from London and the UCL since Filip has been placed at university as a result of certifying his English proficiency through IELTS. What is remarkable in the video is that Filip retains his first language (Bulgarian) traits while speaking, disclosing his non-native speaker identity. That is, he speaks English in his own way without adjusting his pronunciation and accent to any conventions of standard (native) English.

Finally, towards the bottom of the home page, IELTS displays six photographs, of which five feature scenes from the Inner Circles countries (i.e., the UK, the USA, Canada) and one features a spotted world map to prove its worldwide acceptance by universities, governments and non-governmental organizations in response to a query shared on the left-hand side under the promotional video "Where can IELTS take you?" (see Figure 5 below). The photographs illustrating the Inner Circle countries are positioned on the right-, left-hand side and middle column while the photograph titled in bold red lettering 'Travel the world with IELTS' is positioned at the bottom right-hand-side column of the home page. More precisely, relative to the content of the other areas, the photograph of the world map located at the far right-hand column seems to be attached less importance since according to the

Primary-Secondary dimension, items of subordinate value tend to be located in the left- or right-hand columns and from a Head-Tail perceptive towards the bottom of the page far from the first screen.

The assumption of the testing company appears to be that test takers of IELTS will mainly choose an Inner Circle destination after taking the exam; however, recent research into the language entry requirements of higher education institutions provides proof that most people taking IELTS for academic purposes by and large use the scores to be able to enter an EMI university in their own country or in a European country where English is not spoken as an L1. The testing company seems to overlook this reality, deliberately promoting the company as a passport to Anglophone countries as the first consideration.

Figure 5. A screenshot of the IELTS home page

As for the TOEFL's home page, it was identified on the MacroTheme-Rheme dimension that TOEFL spared the left-hand side column to present information on itself employing some statistics about the number of institutions recognizing TOEFL scores. It follows a similar strategy to that of IELTS, mentioning the number of countries where the

test results are recognized, yet first explicitly stating the names of the Anglophone countries and then Asia and mainland Europe. In their promotional description on the left-hand column, it makes the following remark:

> "TOEFL scores are accepted by more than 10,000 universities and other institutions in over 150 countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.K., the United States, and all across Europe and Asia" (The TOEFL Test, 2019, para. 1).

The above statement makes clear that there is an acknowledgement of the fact that the majority of the test takers make use of IELTS scores in non-Anglophone contexts, particularly European and Asian countries. However, out of the countries where the IELTS scores are accepted, the IELTS home page only refers to Inner Circle countries by their names while others are constrained to continent names. This strategy may be due to the desire of depicting TOEFL to the viewers of the website as an entryway to native-English-speaking countries. On the middle column stand some links that give access to some practical information about the test, e.g. how to register for it, test centres and alike. It also presents some information on a newly introduced test type.

When viewing the left-hand side column, one can see that the column is divided into three rows positioned on each other from top to bottom. At the top column is a photograph of a student named Samir with a hyperlink to his TOEFL story. When clicked, the hyperlink takes the viewer to a promotional video on the centre of the new page, showing some scenes and parts from Samir's childhood and adulthood, with a TOEFL preparation book in his hand when he was a teenager and then saying 'Thank You' while graduating from an Anglophone university. Although he did not speak much in the video, when he did, he sounded like an Indian speaker of English.

Beneath 'Samir's story', viewers see the 'TOEFL MOOC' section that presents a hyper video that can be viewed upon clicking. The video introduces 'The Insider's Guide to the TOEFL Test course', first featuring some photographs of NNESs, followed by a briefing on the course given by a native English speaker, also one of the members of having created the exam.

Figure 6. A screenshot of the TOEFL home page
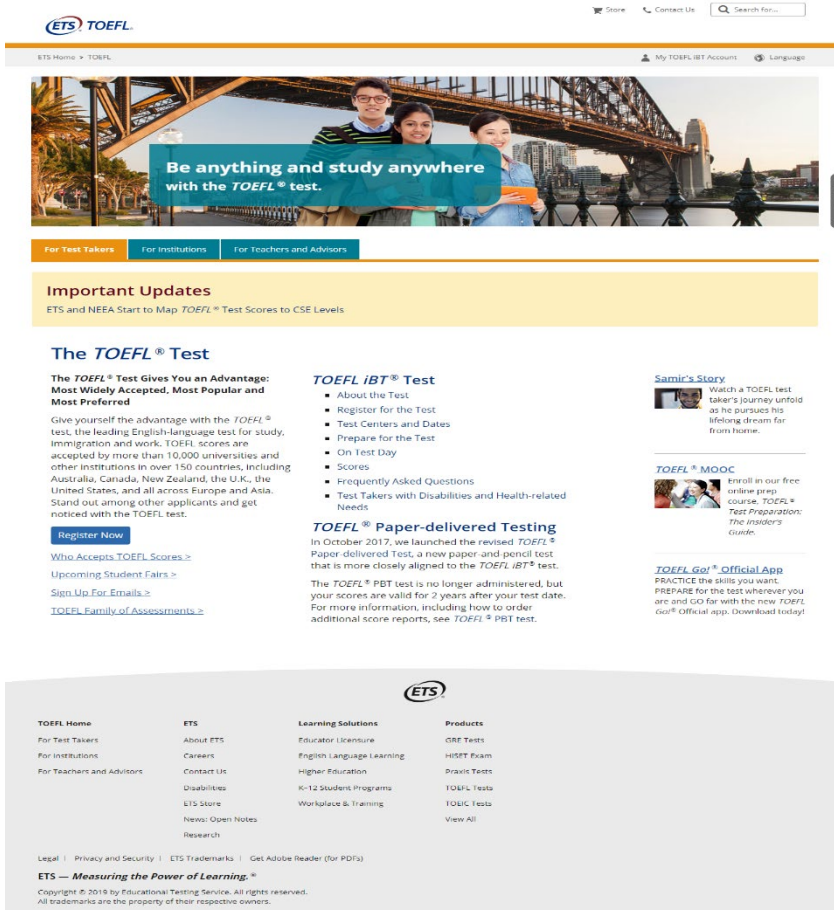
The underlying idea behind such showcasing of the profile of test-takers and test makers may be the assumption that speakers from Outer and Expanding Circles, i.e. language learners, need to be tested by language 'experts', i.e. authentic users of the language, from the Inner Circle countries. This conclusion also finds support from the TOEFL test preparation webpage, at the bottom of which viewers can see the course instructors, all but one are NESs. Only the listening instructor is a non-native speaker (Chinese) as is understood from the profile of the instructor at the bottom of the TOEFL test preparation page. Further to this, the sample listening files accessible to the visitors of the website are also voiced by NESs.

Similar to the home pages of IELTS and TOEFL, the TOEIC home page provides information about its administration across the world and the number of organizations that accept the TOEIC tests while making decisions on people's language proficiency under its home page header image. In the middle of the page, there are three columns positioned from the left-hand side to the right-hand side column. The ones on the right-hand-side column and middle column provide links to further information on testing the passive skills, i.e. listening and reading and productive skills, i.e. speaking and writing, in TOEIC via 'LEARN MORE' buttons, while the column at the far left-hand side takes viewers to a page where a different type of TOEIC (i.e. TOEIC Bridge Test) test is introduced to visitors. Under this area is a promotional blurb about TOEIC program teaching and preparation resources, which facilitates navigation to different pages for Test Takers and Organizations. When the 'For Test Takers' button is clicked, a new page featuring an Asian female opens whereas if one

clicks on the 'For Organizations' button, a white European man is displayed as the header image. To warrant that organizations can trust their tests, TOEIC makes the following account:

> The TOEIC tests offer you a complete, accurate picture of proficiency in all four language skills. And with scores mapped to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages, the comprehensive and comparable data you receive helps you make better informed decisions within your organization (Organizations, 2019, para. 3).

At the centre of the home page is a written promotional testimonial in which a statement by a former test taker, a Brazilian, extolling the TOEIC test for the "trust and transparency in its results" (TOEIC Success Story, 2019, para. 5).

Figure 7. A screenshot of the TOEIC home page

Finally, the far left-hand side column of the page features a graphic video to inform the test takers about the key features of the TOEIC, lasting exactly 10 minutes.

Unsurprisingly, the informative graphic video is delivered in two (male and female) native English speaker voiceovers. As with the other home pages of major exam boards, the TOEIC makes use of NNESs in header images, and testimonials but when it comes to introductory videos and course introductions, the voiceover immediately turns out to be that of a native English speaker.

Similar to the home page of the IELTS, the PTE home page (see Figure 8 below) includes less textual materials but the text-based information is located at the bottom of the page. It can be inferred thus that particular attention is given to the visuals in areas where they will see earlier than the textual materials. Under the header image, there is a section called 'Why PTE Academic?' in which PTE portrays itself as a key to moving and studying abroad, again ignoring the fact that most test-takers now sit this exam for international purposes, such as academic studies, employee promotion, and financial incentives in the workplace.

In the middle column, there are links to the steps of the test process accompanied with photographs of NNESs studying in the study areas of most likely an Anglophone university. Under these photographs, there is another photograph of an Asian female student studying on her laptop and taking notes on the left-hand side column. What is notable is the statement on the left-hand side column beside the Asian student's photograph, which writes 'Helping You Succeed', getting over an underlying message to the test takers. This message is that if they also take the PTE test, they will be also successful and have the opportunity to be placed in a program at an Anglophone university. Beneath that photograph are written testimonials by several former test takers, exalting the test for its various aspects, including the kindness of the staff in the test centre, fast administration, quick release of the results, and objective scoring. All testimonials belong to NNESs based in not only Outer (e.g. Philippines, India, Singapore and Nigeria) and Expanding Circles (e.g. Brazil, Saudi Arabia, China) but also in the Inner Circle countries (e.g. New Zealand, Canada).

It is obvious that such testimonials by different speakers of English are part of promotional strategies pursued by the testing company. What is striking in the testimonials is that some test takers praise the test for its emphasis on improving their standard English use. For example, two of the test takers made the following remarks in their testimonials:

> PTE Academic accurately reflects an individual's ability to communicate in standard English. I would prefer this exam to other available tests as it removes the elements of human bias in scoring. Unlike other proficiency exams, PTE Academic is less time consuming when it comes to exam preparation and scorecard report fulfilment (Selva Mariappan; our italics).

> PTE Academic oriented me to write correct English every day. I loved the test and even more after achieving my desired score (Shallu; our italics).

Figure 8. A screenshot of the PTE home page

We can conclude from the above remarks that the PTE is standard (native) English oriented, paying attention to its takers' adjustment to the conventions of standard English in written and verbal communication. We also understand that the scores are produced through automated scoring via specialized computer programs. This might well serve the purpose of testing standard English norms, yet non-native ways of doing English, in other words, creative and deviant language use, may be penalized. Additionally, the first quote by Shallu does not specify whose English should be taken as correct and whose as incorrect. Evidently, such remarks are rooted in the belief that correct English is used by NESs and incorrect English by NNESs. That is, there is a covert reference to NESs as norm providers. We will inspect this issue in more detail in the following documentary analysis section.

Documentary Data Analysis

In the document analysis, the primary purpose was to identify the exam boards' orientation towards a particular variety of English as the benchmark against which test takers' English proficiency is judged. Secondly, part of the attempt was to find out whether there is any consideration of the implications of the well-attested findings of WE and ELF research as discussed above (see, for example, Jenkins, 2007; Harding, 2012; Hu, 2012; McNamara, 2012; Widdowson, 2012) in relation to assessment in their scoring rubrics. Thirdly, the acknowledgement of the speakers of WE and ELF along with their diverse and non-standard ways of English use has made way into these international tests. To this end, we especially paid our attention to the documents on listening, writing and speaking.

The first thing that is investigated in the analysis is the documentary data on speaking, more specifically how the exam boards mark and assess speaking, and if there is

an implicit or explicit expectation of a certain kind of English from the test-takers. To find answers to these questions, content analysis has been conducted on such documents as speaking rubrics, sample speaking test format, the content of the speaking test, and examinee handbooks. It has been noticed that overall, exam boards base their assessment on some components of speaking, such as lexical resource, pronunciation, fluency and coherence and grammatical range and accuracy.

Marking and Assessing Speaking

As a beginning, it is seen in the 'IELTS Speaking – How it's marked' section that it expects the candidates "to talk with normal levels of continuity, rate and effort and to link ideas and language together to form coherent, connected speech", specifying "[t]he key indicators of fluency" as "speech rate and speech continuity" ("IELTS test format", 2019, para. 3). In respect of grammatical range and accuracy, it seems that IELTS covets the test takers' range of grammar to consist of "the length and complexity of the spoken sentences, the appropriate use of subordinate clauses, and the range of sentence structures, especially to move elements around for information focus" and further adds that "[t]he key indicators of grammatical accuracy are the number of grammatical errors in a given amount of speech and the communicative effect of error" ("IELTS test format", 2019, para. 5). Lastly, with respect to pronunciation, the test takers' speaking will be judged in terms of "the amount of strain caused to the listener, the amount of the speech which is unintelligible and the noticeability of L1 influence" ("IELTS test format", 2019, para. 6). It is obvious that there are several absent references in the speaking assessment criteria as to who 'talks with normal levels of continuity and whose English should be branded as correct, and why L1 influence in speech is a sign of deficiency.

Turning to the TOEFL 'Independent Speaking Rubrics', it emerged that speaking is assessed in terms of topic development, delivery, general description and language use. For the test takers to get the highest score (i.e. 4) from the speaking part, their English should meet the following criteria:

> **Language use:** The response demonstrates effective use of grammar and vocabulary. It exhibits a fairly high degree of automaticity with good control of basic and complex structures (as appropriate). Some minor (or systematic) errors are noticeable but do not obscure meaning.
>
> **Delivery**: Generally well-paced flow (fluid expression). Speech is clear. It may include minor lapses, or minor difficulties with pronunciation or intonation patterns, which do not affect overall intelligibility.

On one hand, the TOEFL seems to give much weight to the issue of intelligibility and to be not much concerned with minor errors provided that they do not hinder the communication of meaning; however, one the other hand, it expects the test takers to display 'a fairly high degree of automaticity' and 'effective use of grammar'. Additionally, some subjective descriptors stand out in the descriptions. For example, TOEFL requires clear speech from the test takers but the notion of clear speech might be interpreted differently depending on who the listeners are. That is, a non-native speech may be clear to another NNES while a NES can find it unclear. This shows that there is a lack of consideration of the role of the previous familiarity for effective communication and the linguistic repertoire of speakers. Moreover, only minor lapses are not penalized, yet in real-life English use, ELF

speakers often resort to not only short but also long pauses as a communication strategy, not because of a deficit in their English.

It appears that the burden is placed on speakers solely in the TOEFL speaking exam. Some evidence for this conclusion exists in the descriptions of the delivery aspect of speakers getting 1. A speaker who gets 1 out of 4 in the speaking section is required not to demonstrate "[c]onsistent pronunciation stress and intonation difficulties" and "cause considerable listener effort" (TOEFL Speaking Rubrics, 2014, p. 1). What is implied here is that the speaker deviating from the standard ways of applying stress and intonation drives listeners to put more effort into communication. In fact, since communication is a mutual act, listeners also are as responsible as speakers for effective communication. From an ELF perspective, there should be an equal share of the communicative burden between speakers and listeners.

To determine the expectations of TOEIC from its test-takers about speaking, we analysed its 'Examinee Handbook: Speaking & Writing'. While fulfilling the tasks included in the speaking exam, the test takers are expected to fulfil some criteria to be regarded as a very high-level speaker. The first criterion is as follows:

> "1. The test taker can generate language intelligible to native and proficient nonnative English speakers" (Examinee Handbook, 2019, p. 2).

It is obvious from the above accounts that the test takers are assumed to use English in an ENL (English as a native language) context, thereby being held responsible to make their speaking comprehensible to NESs. However, there is no information as to who can be counted as proficient NNESs. Probably, what is meant by 'proficient' speakers here is near-native like speakers. When this expectation is linked to the description of the TOEIC speaking test, which goes as follows

> "The TOEIC Speaking Test is designed to measure a person's ability to communicate in spoken English in the context of daily life and the global workplace" (Examinee Handbook, 2019, p. 2).

It becomes clear that moving from an EFL approach to English use, TOEIC takes it for granted that much of daily life and workplace English use will occur between NESs and NNESs. Nevertheless, this is not exactly the current linguistic scenario anymore as much communication now occurs among NNESs and outside the Inner Circle countries. As TOEIC is also administered by ETS, it adopts the same assessment criteria as to the assessment of language use and delivery, with a particular emphasis on clear speech, well-paced flow, good control of language forms, and suprasegmental features (e.g. pronunciation, intonation and stress being intelligible all the time to the listener) as well as good use of basic and complex grammar. The idea seems that if the test takers can fulfil these criteria, only then can they make themselves intelligible to the listeners in the exam.

Looking at the Score Guide of PTE, it becomes clear that PTE also attaches special importance to test takers' oral fluency and pronunciation. Test takers' oral fluency and pronunciation are graded with six descriptors, which are, (0) Disfluent, (1) Limited, (2) Intermediate, (3) Good, (4) Advanced and (5) Native-like in the order of scores attached to each descriptor from the lowest to the highest (PTE Score Guide, 2018). According to the scoring criteria, a test taker needs to fulfil the following scoring criteria to be in the 'Native-like' category:

All vowels and consonants are produced in a manner that is easily understood by regular speakers of the language. The speaker uses assimilation and deletions appropriate to continuous speech. Stress is placed correctly in all words and sentence-level stress is fully appropriate (PTE Score Guide, 2018, p. 24).

It does not take much to infer that the target model is set as NESs for test-takers to hit the highest score. Therefore, PTE implicitly sends out the message that the more test takers can imitate the ways NESs use English, the higher scores they will get, covertly obliging them to adopt certain ways of speaking and to discredit their own divergent speech. Another point of interest is the lack of description about 'regular speakers of the language'. On one hand, test takers are advised to sound intelligible to the regular speakers; on the other hand, the exam board does not give any account about the characteristics of those speakers. To the researcher, by saying regular speakers of the language, they allude to NESs. This conclusion was reached drawing on their scoring criteria where native-like English is of the highest importance.

Marking and Assessing Writing

Scrutinizing the 'IELTS test format' page in order to discover marking and assessment criteria for test takers' writing performance, it was found that test-takers' responses to the tasks on a short descriptive essay of a chart/ graph and an extended essay on a predetermined subject of academic or semi-formal style are judged against the succeeding criteria: grammatical range and accuracy, task response/achievement, lexical resource and coherence and cohesion. The performance descriptors on lexical scores relate to "the range of vocabulary used and its accuracy and appropriacy in terms of the specific task" ("IELTS test format", 2019, para. 3) and the descriptors on the range of grammar and accuracy is concerned with "the range and accurate use of grammar as manifested in their sentence writing" (para. 4). It is somewhat surprising that while the test pays attention to "the overall clarity and fluency of the message" in terms of coherence and cohesion" (para. 6), it requires the test takers to meet this criterion by conforming to the norms of standard English, with an emphasis on grammatical correctness and accuracy. That is, following the writing conventions of standard English in academic writing is set as a priori to get high scores for coherence and cohesion as well as lexical resources. For this, evidence is also available in the IELTS guide for teachers where the description of a test taker in Band 9 (Expert User) is made as follows: "Uses a wide range of structures with full flexibility and accuracy; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips'" (IELTS guide for teachers, 2017, p. 23). It is evident that errors happening as blunders only are tolerated and the non-standard uses of English in writing by WE and ELF speakers are less likely to be welcomed when marking.

Regarding the TOEFL writing test, the document we first analysed was the 'Independent Writing Rubrics' where one can see the scores for each task description according to the bands (0 to 5) test-takers can be placed. The marking criteria in the task descriptions provide sufficient evidence that grammatical correctness and accuracy, as well as native-like lexical usage have a significant role in determining whether test takers get a high or low score. For instance, for a test taker to get the highest score (5) from the writing test, s/he is required to display "consistent facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety, appropriate word choice and *idiomaticity,* though it may have minor lexical

or *grammatical errors*" (TOEFL Writing Rubrics, 2014, p. 1; our italics). This criterion is revealing in that the test not only requires the test takers to use standard English but also hints that the standard should be that of NESs. This is because idiomaticity is something acquired by NESs while it is unpredictable for NNESs to get idiomatic usage right and often they use it creatively by innovating the existing idioms, which, however, is labelled as incorrect usage.

On the assessment of writing, the TOEIC Examinee Handbook sets the following evaluation criteria according to the tasks the test takers have to fulfil: relevance of the sentences to the pictures, grammar, vocabulary and organization and quality and variety of sentences. More specifically, a test taker whose score falls into the range of 4, the highest score, in response to questions 6-7 is described as follows in terms of his/her response to the tasks:

> • The writer uses organizational logic or appropriate connecting words or both to create coherence among sentences.
>
> • The tone and register of the response is appropriate for the intended audience.
>
> • A few isolated errors in grammar or usage may be present, but they do not obscure the writer's meaning (Examinee Handbook, 2019, p. 21).

Similar to the TOEFL marking criteria, in response to question 8 on the test, TOEIC wishes that the test taker's writing "displays consistent facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety, appropriate word choice, idiomaticity, though it may have minor lexical or grammatical errors" (Examinee Handbook, 2019, p. 23). It is evident that test takers are guided in implicit manners towards using standard (native) English to be able to get high scores from the written exam, with a minimized number of grammar mistakes, and inclusion of native-like usages, such as idiomatic phrases in their writing. And the considerable overlap between the assessment criteria of TOEFL and TOEIC may be explained by the fact that they are both administered by the same testing company, ETS (English Testing Service).

Finally, as to the PTE writing exam, it becomes clear from the Score Guide that the main concern is with test takers' grammar, spelling and written discourse. These are considered as part of 'enabling skills' and described as is seen below:

> **Spelling**: Writing of words according to the spelling rules of the language. All national variations are considered correct, but one spelling convention should be used consistently in a given response.
>
> **Grammar**: Correct use of language with respect to word form and word order at the sentence level.
>
> **Written discourse**: Correct and communicatively efficient production of written language at the textual level. Written discourse skills are represented in the structure of a written text, its internal coherence, logical development and the range of linguistic resources used to express meaning precisely (PTE Score Guide, 2018, p. 6; our italics).

The kind of English PTE expects from the test-takers in their written exam seems to be that standard English as could be inferred from the italicized parts in the above descriptions. The principal focus of attention is placed on 'correctness' and 'communicative efficiency' yet without any explicit mention of the yardstick for correct use and efficient communication. However, we can infer from the descriptions of spelling that the yardstick

is taken as national varieties of English, i.e. the Inner Circle countries. Again, they do not name any of these national varieties explicitly, leaving it to the reader to infer the acceptable kind of academic English. It may be also attributed to the exam board's assumption that the kind of English test takers should follow is either British English or American English, thereby seeing no need to explicitly state these varieties as they are already beyond question.

Speaker Profiles in Listening Exams

While analysing the documents on listening, our primary concern was with the profile of speakers the test takers are required to listen to. The assessment criteria for listening were thus subordinate in our analysis. To that end, we particularly attempted to find any relevant piece of information as regards whose voiceovers will be in the listening tracks. We first examined the relevant pages where vital information is shared with the candidates. Drawing on the inspection, the following remarks on the TOEFL iBT Test Content Page were reached regarding the speaking and listening sections:

> Native-speaker English Accents
>
> The Listening and Speaking sections of the TOEFL iBT test include other native-speaker English accents in addition to accents from North America. You may hear accents from the U.K., New Zealand or Australia. ETS added these accents to better reflect the variety of native English accents you may encounter while studying abroad ("TOEFL iBt: Test Content", 2019, para: 6-7).

The above descriptions reinforce the conclusion that TOEFL's understanding of varieties of English is limited to the Inner Circle Englishes, overlooking the speakers of Outer Circle and Expanding Circle. One can also speculate that test takers are deemed to speak English with NESs in ENL countries, which is at odds with the existing sociolinguistic truth of English largely shaped by NNESs in non-Anglophone contexts.

Likewise, IELTS states on its 'Test Format-Listening' section that test-takers "will listen to four recordings of NESs" ("IELTS Test format", 2019, para. 5). It further adds in the 'Paper format' section that "[t]he recordings are heard only once. They include a range of accents, including British, Australian, New Zealand, American and Canadian" (para. 3). These descriptions demonstrate the lack of ELF awareness in the exam in two respects. First, the test-takers listen to the recordings only once, yet in real-life English communication, speakers apply various communication strategies such as repetition, self-repair and other-initiated repair. Therefore, the criterion does not represent the actual nature of listening in real-world English use. Second, although each recording represents different contexts of language use, such as monologic and dialogic everyday social contexts, group discussions in an educational context or "a monologue on an academic subject, e.g. a university lecture" ("Test Format", 2019, para. 2), it is reckoned that the target speakers will be NESs in each communication context.

As for the TOEIC listening exam, we closely analysed its can-do statements as regards what a test taker needs to do to get a score between 51-70. One of the criteria that immediately catches the reader's eyes is that someone whose score is between the range of 51-70 "understands the main points of standard speech on familiar matters when people speak slowly and clearly" (TOEIC Can-Do Guide, 2013, p. 12; bold in original). Regarding

the listening skills in TOEIC, over a decade ago, Trew (2007) made the following observation as to the listening section:

> **Familiarity with the different native speaking accents** – The Listening Section of the TOEIC test includes US, Canadian, British, and Australian speakers. Many students develop a bias for a given variety of English and have difficulty understanding speakers with other accents. To overcome this it is important that students be exposed to *a variety of English accents* (p. 7; the writer's own italics).

Confirming Trew's (2007) observation, Case (2011) discussed the widely mentioned True-False statements about the TOEIC listening and in relation to the assumption that "[s]tudents mainly need American English for the exam", he gave the following response: "This is mostly true. Although the new TOEIC has some British and Australian accents, most of the voices are still American and Canadian". Additionally, relating to the "students who have mainly studied American English usually" he argues that they may

> lose confidence in the exam the first time they can't understand people with other ways of speaking, so people taking the new exam should spend some time listening to other accents, for example by watching Australian films or British comedy programmes (para. 2).

The above remarks make it clear that TOEIC is orientated towards a particular kind of native English, i.e. American English, as the kind of expected academic English from the test takers. Besides, the understanding of other accents in the descriptions is limited to the accents of Inner Circle speakers merely, probably due to the assumption that the test takers take the test to use English with NESs in ENL contexts, disregarding the fact that much English use occurs in the Outer and Expanding Circle Countries in which the presence of NESs is almost none or very restricted.

Finally, with regards to the **PTE** listening exam, it emerged from our analysis of the Score Guide that the subskills test includes "comprehending variations in tone, speed and accent" (PTE Score Guide, 2018, p. 13). It is also stated on the 'About the Test' page that

> PTE Academic assesses real-life, academic English, so you will hear excerpts from lectures and view graphs and charts. You will hear a range of accents in the test, *from British and American to non-native speakers*, so you will be exposed to the type of accents you will encounter in everyday life ("PTE Academic Test Format", 2019, para. 3; our italics).

It is clearly inferred from the above statements that, unlike other exam boards, PTE seems to have at least some awareness of the current linguistic reality of English, such as who speaks it, where it is spoken and with whom it is mostly spoken. There is also a recognition that test-takers may encounter not only NESs but also NNESs depending on the purposes people take the test, e.g. for academic studies in a non-Anglophone country, for immigration in an ENL country. However, considering the PTE's marking and assessment criteria in relation to speaking and writing, the inclusion of NNESs in listening recordings does not mean that it considers non-native ways of doing English that do not follow the standards of native English legitimate and acceptable. Evidence for this comes from their orientation to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Not only PTE but also other international tests rely on CEFR band descriptors and can-do statements with respect to each major skill. However, Jenkins and Leung (2013, p. 1608) claim that the CEFR "corresponds to native-like proficiency in the respective language"

(Jenkins & Leung, 2013, p. 1608). Therefore, the CEFR is in no way appropriate in the assessment of speakers' proficiency from WE and ELF perspectives.

Conclusion

The use of English is now inevitably widespread and its diffusion as a global lingua franca has given rise to new English varieties under the WE research field. During the past decades, NNESs have constituted the majority of candidates in language proficiency examinations, e.g., IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC, and PTE due to the growing needs to meet requisites in education, business, and service. As time progresses, a controversy over the legitimacy of the tests has become more intense whether it is discriminatory to test NNESs, who are now speaking various types of Englishes, against the norms of NESs. To mirror the representativeness of how widely English is used today, a proficiency test of English should take into account more pluricentric approaches, performance-based measurements and diversity awareness.

As discovered in this study, international test takers are treated with a favourable approach in the marketing strategies of the testing boards; however, the ground reality showcases that this is not the case when it comes to the expectations regarding test takers' language use because much of the exam content is built on NES conventions or, in other words, 'standard English'. Evidently, their homepages aim to communicate with the Outer and Expanding Circle audience since most of the images utilize non-native models as if the tests are designed to measure the performances of non-native speakers. The phenomenon indicates that these tests are aware of the non-Anglophone linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the candidates. Nonetheless, the tests' elements and measurement criteria tell otherwise. Their foci are on NES grammatical rules, vocabulary items, and idioms, disregarding intercultural communication performances. Similarly, many advertised testimonials and success stories are made by NNESs whereas the introductory videos and audios are formed by NES-made contents: British and American. Such visual portrayals indicate the recognition of English diversity with the intention of embracing multi-ethnic candidates. Nevertheless, practise-wise, such principles do not seem to translate into their testing practices in that the tests and measurement criteria are still based on NES norms.

From the visuals displayed on the websites of testing companies, it is evident that they desire to appeal to NNES candidates on their websites with the hidden message that they are the target group who are expected to sit for these tests. Likewise, NES voiceovers are largely preferred n speaking exercises and sound files. Albeit their allegation that the voices in the audio files represent diverse accents, they mostly include NES accents, particularly those of Americans and the British by failing to miss the point that the varieties spoken in the Outer and Expanding settings are far richer than those in the Inner Circle settings. As a result, these standardized tests make wrongful claims to cover wider English varieties while deliberately limit their test contents only to the Inner-Circle Englishes.

In conclusion, based on the findings, it may be suggested that the international tests partly recognize WE and ELF at a theoretical level, yet at the level of practice, they lag behind the current pedagogy suggested by ELF and WE scholars as their benchmark in assessment is skewed towards native competence and their standard norms. It seems like

these tests do a rough job in trying to impress non-native speakers and showing that they value English varieties. Realistically, scoring matrixes of the tests are still determining how close a non-native speaker can perform to imitate a native one. Last but not least, as aptly argued long time ago, "[t]he question of which English(es) should be privileged on tests is particularly problematic and interesting in academic contexts where traditionally `standard' forms of English are the only ones accepted" (Lyons & Zhang, 2001, as quoted in Davies et al., 2013, p. 524). Furthermore, it seems evident that this question will continue to be problematic in the upcoming decades, too.

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