Attitudes of German secondary-school teachers towards a didactic approach of ‘World Englishes’

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Introduction

- “I would say that I speak British English, because I started to learn it in school and continued it from there onwards...”
- “I observe myself, when I speak in class, to be speaking the British variety, because...”

Literature & Research gap

- BR and AmE score highest for correctness, fluency and so forth, but teachers are uncomfortable with these varieties in the classroom.
- “At the moment I teach in 7th grade myself...”

Methods

Research instrument

- Qualitative content analysis of 2 interviews (each 30 minutes of length)
- Direct approach

Participants

- 2 Secondary school teachers of English
- Both native speakers of German

Contexts

- They were asked questions concerning
- Their own use of English in and outside the classroom
- Preferences for a specific variety of English
- Attitudes towards “World Englishes” in general and
- Its productivity by the EFL classroom, using the textbook “The Amazing World of Englishes”

Results

1) Ambivalent relationship between concept acceptance and realization

Teacher 1: “Well I found it [WE] to be a nice concept, quite implementable, maybe not to such a large extent, but it makes sense.”
Teacher 2: “I think it is quite important that pupils know that there is more than one English in the world.”
Teacher 2: “...but it would never be about describing certain characteristics in particular.”

2) Lack of desired realization due to institutional and learner constraints

Teacher 1: “At the moment I teach in 7th grade myself...”
Teacher 2: “But...”
Teacher 1: “...and that is why it is simply good for students that initially not too much is mixed there.”
Teacher 1: “Well, if I try to imagine 5th grade, I would say, that they would be overwhelmed with such a complex content, as comparing grammatical sentences.”
Teacher 1: “Problems (related to the implementation) here could be the relationship (of the students) of their immediate surroundings (to the concept of WE).”

3) Teacher varieties often restricted to EFL types (BrE, AmE)

Teacher 1: “I would say that I speak British English, because I started to learn it in school and continued it from there onwards...”
Teacher 2: “I would say that I like speaking American English a lot, because I find it very authentic, personally. I think it sounds beautiful.”

4) Standard English viewed as adequate foundation and common ground

Teacher 1: “I observe myself, when I speak in class, to be speaking the British variety, because...”
Teacher 2: “But it is also relatively easy to understand RD, right? (meaning compared to other varieties)
Teacher 1: “As a teacher you are encouraged, well this is partly out of date already...”
Teacher 2: “In daily teaching and also in teacher training, heads of department say, this is what you have to adopt, either BrE or AmE, and either one flawlessly.”

5) Lack of authentic material initially brought forward as argument for non-adoption

Teacher 2: “As a teacher, I cannot shoulder to constantly be a linguistic role model for various World Englishes.”
Teacher 1: “Well I found it [WE] to be a nice concept, quite implementable, maybe not to such a large extent and leaves not enough room for the pupils to explore it in more detail.”

Conclusions

Generally, the concept of WE is said to be important and should therefore be considered in the 7th grade. Nevertheless, teachers agree that a standard form of English (like BrE or AmE) should be taught first before other varieties of English are introduced. ELI varieties should be taught in upper grades or advanced courses only.

Although there is an overall agreement about the necessity of raising the awareness that there is more than just one English in the world, it is still unclear how this can be realized and implemented in the classroom. The respondents mentioned obstacles like unauthentic material, the fact that some sort of standard English has to be adopted first, which already poses a problem to many pupils and another aspect that was brought up is the time constraint. This latter issue is probably the most important one since it was stated over and over again by the interviewee-teachers. As it turns, the curriculum only incorporates the concept of WE to a small extent and leaves not enough room for the pupils to explore it in more detail.

For future research it would be helpful to collect more interview data so that the results would be more significant. The two teachers that were interviewed on 1st English in EFL classrooms with little teaching experience. Therefore, it could be interesting to compare attitudes of teachers with many years of experience with those who just started their career. In addition to that, it would be useful to see how parts of the book “The Amazing World of Englishes” can be included in 7th grade and how this would be perceived by the pupils.

References

Cornill, B. (2003). ‘We would have to invent the language we are supposed to teach’: The issue of recognising the ‘standard’ in World Englishes. [Online]. In Jennifer Jenkins (ed.), The Concept and Practice of World Englishes. [Online]. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
"We as a teacher, I cannot shoulder to constantly be a linguistic role model for various World Englishes."