Euro-English: A Swedish perspective

MARKO MODIANO

An up-date from a particular national perspective on the position of English in Europe and particularly the European Union

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, fast becoming the *lingua franca* for the European Union, takes on many forms in mainland Europe. While the major accents and dialects of native-speakers (NS) in Britain and Ireland have been thoroughly scrutinized from the perspective of their grammatical, lexical, and phonological distinctness from standard British English (BrE) and are considered to be manifestations of regionally significant cultural identity, the English which distinguishes non-native speakers (NNS) in mainland Europe, and particularly the EU, has traditionally been marginalized, in the sense that any difference from standard English is usually defined as non-standard, indicating a stage of proficiency which falls short of the goal of native or near-native proficiency.

Thus, the distinctive ways in which mainland-European foreign-language speakers use English (their accents, lexical registers, idiomatic use of language, use of proverbs and expressions, as well as isolated grammatical phenomena) are not studied as if such kinds of English have social prestige or can be perceived as manifestations of regionally significant cultural identities. On the other hand, recent research in Mid-Atlantic English, Euro-English, and English as an international language supports a conceptualization of NNS English which is not based on the belief that the NNS, by default, is to be judged against the benchmark of NS prestige varieties (see Jenkins 2000, Jenkins *et al.* 2001, Modiano 1998, 2002, and Seidlhofer 2001a/b).

Moreover, it is clear that in institutionalized language-learning settings in mainland Europe, the notion that a European rendition of English for the NNS, one designed to accommodate the use of English as a *lingua franca* in cross-cultural communication, is gaining ground.

Linguistic hierarchization

For EFL teachers of English, and this is especially true for mainland Europe, the belief that usage should be judged according to the goal of near-native proficiency and consistency in BrE or American English (AmE), while on the wane, continues to have a strong bearing on educational practices. This teaching ideology, by default, devalues other varieties of English in the learning environment. Such forms of antiquated linguistic hierarchization represent the most formidable challenge to the establishment of Euro-English as a distinct and self-sufficient entity. There are, furthermore, other obstacles which are hindering Euro-English from gaining acceptance. First, there is the

MARKO MODIANO is a senior lecturer in English at Gävle University, Sweden. He holds a Ph.D. in English from Uppsala University. Among his publications in sociolinguistics are 'A Mid-Atlantic Handbook' (Studentlitteratur, Lund, Sweden 1996) and a number of articles on educational standards for English language teaching and learning in the European Union. Current projects focus on the definition of a 'standard English,' the theoretical platform for teaching English as a second/foreign language, linguistic human rights, the role of English worldwide, and the emerging definitions of English as an International Language. A native-born American, he has lived in Europe for nearly 25 years.

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argument that because there are no native speakers of Euro-English, it cannot be identified as a variety. Second, attempts to define such a variety will fail because Euro-English will always exist in a myriad of forms, many of which are quite diverse. Third, without a prescriptive standard, the variety will be impossible to teach.

The first postulation, that varieties can only exist if and when there is a native-speaker population, is a remnant philosophy among those who harbor conceptualizations of language centered on a *standard language culture* (see Milroy 2001). Here, there is the understanding that foreign-language speakers make approximations, and in such acts produce sub-standard forms of language, unless they succeed in mimicking to near perfection a native speaker of standard English. Thus, foreign-language speakers either join the native-speaker collective or else they are deemed to be in the process of attempting to do so. A perpetual inability to achieve near-native proficiency in BrE or AmE is a sign of inadequate education and training. One result of such lines of reasoning is that no effort should be made to legitimize, codify, or standardize the English of speech communities comprised of foreign-language speakers. Ironically, many second-language speech communities, through the liberation linguistics of Braj Kachru and others, have broken free, to a considerable degree, from this oppressive mindset. A similar program for foreign-language speech communities is only now beginning to take form.

Devaluing the English of mainland Europeans no longer has validity in an age where English operates as a *lingua franca* among large constituencies of non-native speakers. For the vast majority of non-native speakers, their English brings them into contact with other non-native speakers equally if not more often than with the NS collective. In both cases, what is most expedient for the NNS is the use of English which allows them to represent their own cultural and social identities, as opposed to assuming multi-identities and ceremonially joining the NS constituency through the use of NS accents, culture-specific lexical choices, discourse strategies, and the like.

Examples of typical culture-specific vocabulary often taught to pupils are BrE *abattoir* for *slaughterhouse*, BrE *public school* for *private boarding school*, BrE *surgery* for *doctor* or *doctor's office* (as in, *I have an appointment with my doctor* or *I am going to the doctor's office*), and BrE *barrister* for *lawyer* or *attorney*. The use of such BrE terminology defines the NNS as someone catering to a British perspective. Similar American associations are elicited by the use of culture-specific AmE vocabulary, such as *condominium* for *privately owned apartment*. In informal speech, something usually not taught in the classroom but nevertheless evident in the speech behavior of many non-native speakers, we find even more pronounced culture-specific lexical items.

Examples for BrE are *cheers* for *thank you*, and for AmE *dude* for *man* and *later* for *goodbye*. Also, in BrE there is the excessive use of *brilliant* for *good*, the use of *suss*, *suss out*, and *sussed* for *understanding a situation*, and *ruddy*, used for emphasis when angry, etc., while in AmE there are culturally identifying markers such as the overuse of *great*, of **kind a*, and of *like* to suggest disbelief (as in, *I'm like, suddenly your friend?*). *Cool* for *good*, *far-out* for *strange*, *interesting*, or *very good*, and *mellow out* for *relax*, or, if someone is angry or overly excited, for *calm down*, are Americanisms. Indeed, in NNS-to-NNS interaction, the use of culture-specific terminology, as opposed to the less culturally charged alternatives, has little communicative relevance, unless a NNS aspires to be perceived as an auxiliary member of a NS community.

The NNS as communicatively expedient

Many foreign-language speakers of English are quite good at communicating in cross-cultural forums, not only because they have considerable experience accommodating people from other cultures in and through English, but also because the actual English which they speak is often easily understood to a wide cross-section of English-language users. Thus, when there is no logical argument to devalue the English of foreign-language users on the basis of comprehensibility or communicative expediency, and as it has become apparent that English is fast becoming a basis for the establishment of a common European social and cultural order, it is evident that the English of mainland Europe should go through processes of legitimization, codification, and standardization.

As a member of a speech community, the NNS of English in mainland Europe requires an identifying culture-specific designation for the

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English which they speak. The alternative, to insist on defining their use of English from the standard language culture perspective, one which is intrinsically ethnocentric as well as hegemonic, is not in the interest of speakers of English living in mainland Europe.

Diversity within varieties

The second challenge, that Euro-English, because it exists in a myriad of forms, is impossible to codify, deserves greater attention. It is evident that in standard-language cultures there is the belief that there exists a standard form of the tongue, that this standard is promoted in formal education and respected by people in positions of power, and following in tow there are social-class and regional accents and dialects. While some of these accents and dialects have higher status than others, many are perceived to be socially inferior and, moreover, less communicatively expedient. Moreover, deviation from standard English on the part of those who do not have English as their native tongue is by definition incorrect and potentially poses a threat to the structural integrity of the language.

Such beliefs are intrinsically detrimental to the social equality of those who have foreign-language accents. Unfortunately, many educators and school administrators support these oppressive social attitudes. In multicultural Europe, where English is the primary lingua franca, the argument that non-native varieties can be forced into systems of hierarchization which render them stigmatized is no longer an acceptable basis for the proliferation of the English language. Instead, all forms of English have equal rights to *participation*, and this holds true for the multiplicity within Euro-English as well as for world English (see Brutt-Griffler, 2002).

Those who actually speak RP, the proposed pronunciation standard for learners pursuing proficiency in English with BrE as the educational norm, are a tiny minority. The speech of people in the British Isles, in fact, gives testimony to the heterogeneous nature of English in that part of the world. Widespread linguistic diversity constitutes the very nature of English as it is spoken in Britain. There is diversity within all speech communities, and this is especially evident in languages of wider communication. Indeed, variance, divergence from a proposed norm, is intricately tied to the sense of identity, at both macro *and* micro levels, which social groups inevitably construct.

Keeping in mind how we perceive English-using speech communities such as the UK, the argument that Euro-English cannot be defined as a variety because of the divergence of English in mainland Europe is illogical. The ideology of Euro-English, in opposing linguistic hierarchization, presupposes diversity as a defining characteristic of the variety, thus setting the stage for perceiving regionally characteristic speech (for example, the English of the French or of the Germans) as part of a larger unifying structure. This perspective on variation *within* a foreign-speaker based variety of English is what distinguishes Euro-English from conceptualizations of language steeped in 'standard language' ideologies.

Euro-English ELT

As for the implementation of Euro-English as a platform for the teaching of English in mainland Europe, this requires guidelines, reference materials, and textbooks. Such methodologies and materials will, I suppose, be forthcoming as Europe continues to integrate and evolve. Euro-English will play a key roll in this Europeanization process. The Euro-English classroom, in reflecting the new Europe, is a multicultural forum. There, the goal of the instruction is to learn how English can be used by mainland Europeans in cross-cultural interaction. The instructor, primarily interested in how English is used in mainland Europe, encourages students to develop communication skills as opposed to targeting the impersonation of an idealized native speaker. The use of native-speaker accents, lexical choice, and discourse strategies, moreover, does not negate the need for mainland Europeans to represent their own cultures in and through English. Furthermore, awareness of what near-native proficiency means in terms of cultural identity will ensure that greater numbers of students who target such goals do so out of choice and not because such behavior is imposed upon them.

A distinction is made between culturally esoteric language and language which falls within the parameters of core English (students are trained in the use of core English for their international contacts). Knowledge of culture-specific language is acquired so that learners can gain awareness of where various features of language have communicative value and where they are not readily comprehended.

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When transference from the L1 is discussed, debates are initiated as to the likelihood of interlocutors comprehending the feature. Students in Euro-English classrooms focus on communicative interaction in differing forums (interaction with various segments of the NS constituency, NNS to NNS interaction in mainland Europe, and the use of English in international settings). In language exercises and in the cultural-studies modules which accompany language learning, students acquire knowledge of mainland European institutions and culture, and practice explaining their own unique social and cultural makeup to others. Beyond Europe, the perspective is global, with international organizations and intellectual properties targeted. Grading in this context is an appraisal of the communicative expediency of language and not the ability of the student to mimic native speakers.

English among speakers of Swenglish

In time, transference from the L1, through discoursal nativization and fossilization, will contribute to the distinctiveness of a Euro-English variety. As an example of this process in its early stages we have the English of native speakers of Swedish living in Sweden who do not speak English with near-native proficiency in a prestigious NS variety (see Axelsson 2002, Linnarud 1986, Mobärg 1998, 2002, and Ruin 1996). The study of their 'foreign' pronunciation, lexical and idiomatic use of language, and grammar can reveal some interesting aspects of the English used in this part of Europe. An investigation of such phenomena can lead to the isolation of elements of the English used by Swedes that are not deemed to be communicatively expedient in the cross-cultural matrix of mainland European English, and thus very much what among Swedes is considered to be *Swenglish* (just as for German it is *Denglisch* and among Singaporeans it is *Singlish*). This knowledge has value for instructors because it informs them of what they should discourage learners from adopting when they communicate with speakers unfamiliar with such language. Secondly, we may isolate features of the English used by Swedes which, while rooted in cross-over from Swedish and thus not familiar to the native speaker, are nevertheless potentially valuable communicative tools.

English influence on Swedish

Swedish itself has been influenced to a considerable extent by linguistic Americanization (see Modiano 1996). In the field of computers, many loan words, such as the verb forms *chatta, boota, maila,* and *surfa,* for *chat, boot, mail,* and *surf,* are now common in Swedish (these terms have also adapted to the Swedish inflectional system). *Websajt* is the common term for *web site*. Terms such as *server* and *laptop* are in everyday use. In other domains, *Halloween* has become a common word, as has the Americanized celebration of *All Saints Day*. *Att dejta* (to go on a *date*) is now in common use (the social convention of dating in the American sense of the term is relatively uncommon to the mainland European experience).

In sports and physical fitness, *att jogga* (*to jog*) is in use, as are the nouns *aerobics, snowboard, sudden death*, and *timeout*. Other words, such as *brainstorming, campus, city, code, franchise, jeans, layout, logotype, mind map, race,* and *workshop* are in everyday use, as are designations such as *PR* (for *public relations*). The term *overheadkostnaderna,* literally *overhead costs,* is now accepted. The increased use of such terminology among Swedes indicates how the mindset of youth culture, information technology, sports, and business become globalized to the extent that people throughout the world, in scores of languages, find it natural to adopt American-English terms.

The Swedes have been both interested in and willing to accept loan words from English for quite some time. In the 1930s, for example, the use of *all right* was already popular, as were expressions such as *fit for fight,* which foreshadowed the extensive influence that evolved in the last three decades of the 20th century. Today, as a result of increasing exposure to music, television and film, information technology, Internet, e-mail, and printed material, as well as direct contact with Americans, the Swedes are adopting words and phrases from AmE in particular at an unprecedented rate. On the other hand, Swedish has had an interesting although minor influence on English at large: the terms *ombudsman* and *smorgasbord* are well known examples.

From Swedish to English

This discussion will be restricted to the occurrence of cross-over from Swedish to the English

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of the Swedish NNS as it pertains to lexical items and multi-word units. It must be kept in mind that under the right circumstances many features of English used by Swedes can potentially become a part of the core of Euro-English. One can, furthermore, speculate as to why certain features gain popularity and why others remain esoteric. Popularity can be gained as a result of individuals with a great deal of social prestige promoting an aspect of language, through repeated use in advertising, etc. Language features rooted in Swedish can also spread because a feature provides the language with an item supposedly 'missing' from the standard repertoire, or because it is efficient, providing an opportunity to express a sentiment with few words where the standard alternatives are lengthy and perhaps even cumbersome.

If we take the phrase, *we have to hunt costs* (Swedish: *vi måste jaga kostnader*), which one hears from time to time when Swedes speak English, it is apparent that this phrase has been introduced into Swedish from American business ideology. The use of *red thread* (Swedish: *röd tråd*) as a theme or unifying idea which can be traced throughout a structure, as in *the red thread running through her argument*, is used by Swedes and other mainland Europeans, and has roots in several European languages. This phrase is now gaining widespread acceptance. Swedes often say *I like to walk in the nature* (Swedish: *jag tycker om att promenera i naturen*), instead of *I like* to *walk* (or *hike*) *in the woods* or *forest* or *countryside*. The use of the definite article preceding the word *nature* is interference from the Swedish *naturen* (with the definite-article marker *en* coming at the end of the noun). Many Swedes believe that the term *the nature* is acceptable in standard English, whereas native speakers prefer other designations.

In Swedish, if changes do not influence the final result, one can say that the outcome is *plus minus zero* (Swedish: *plus minus noll*). The sign *(Ø* is used to indicate that no change in a result has taken place, although there may be internal redistribution. A common English designation for such expression could be *these shifts in the statistics have no bearing on the final result*, a much more elaborate construction. Perhaps the inclination to use *plus minus zero* can be traced to a desire to (a) use an exacting designation for the sentiment, and (b) select a phrase which is the most efficient in terms of length.

The phrase *he is blue eyed* (Swedish: *han är blåögd*) expresses the notion that a person is naive and thus easily fooled. Note that an alternative, *han har blå ögon* (literally, *he has blue eyes*) is factual and does not have the idiomatic function. The phrase *to salt* (Swedish: *att salta*), can be used to indicate that one suspects that a bill of charge (for example, a restaurant bill) includes unreasonable or even fictional costs. We hear people saying that *a bill has been salted* to indicate *overcharging*. These phrases, while not familiar to native speakers, represent a logical use of language and are not grammatically problematical. Swedes and others who understand these multiword units may feel that they enrich the English language. With enough exposure and acceptance such constructions could conceivably become a part of the core of Euro-English.

To take an example of the fossilization of grammar, there is the answer, when abroad, to the question, *Where are you from?* Here, it is common to hear the Swede reply, *I am coming from Sweden*. This use of the progressive form of the verb, where native speakers use the simple present, is problematical because it implies that Swedes are travelling from one place to another, and that they last traveled from Sweden. They have not therefore answered the question, which, answered in standard English, is *I come from Sweden*. It would seem to be the case, however, that among non-native speakers of English in mainland Europe (and in other linguistic contexts) the NNS interlocutor understands exactly what the Swede means. Thus, it is conceivable that among speakers of Euro-English, *I am coming from . . .* can be used to reply to the question *where are you from?*

The questions which can be asked here are: (a) if Swedes are capable of eliminating such language from their repertoire, (b) if the use of such language contributes to the construction of the social identity of the Swede communicating in the lingua franca, and (c) if this use of English impedes communication. As to the elimination of these features, it is reasonable to assume that with study and practice most learners can eradicate transference features from their speech. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that such transference can contribute to the creation of identities reflecting the L1 social and cultural orientation of the NNS.

As for the role which such language plays in the disturbance of the communicative act, it is possible that while the features mentioned

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above may impact negatively on native speakers in their efforts to comprehend their interlocutors, with NNS-to-NNS communication such use of language does not necessarily cause breakdowns in the communicative act to the same degree or in the same manner. Rather, they could very well be acceptable because interlocutors in such communication are in general more focused on the actual *content* of language, and not so much on its *form*, in comparison to NSS-to-NS communication where the native speaker may find it annoying that their interlocutor uses seemingly 'incorrect' language.

Fossilization and nativization of language features from the L1 are characteristic of the speech of the majority of non-native users of English, and where it does not impede communication, it is becoming acceptable to use such 'non-standard' language, at least among the NNS constituency. One result of this development is that native speakers who consider themselves guardians of standard English may feel that they are being coerced into accommodating the mainland European in the same manner as they are interacting with people from Asia and Africa, for example, who speak second-language varieties. I do not think, however, that Euro-English will evolve to such a point of divergence.

Conclusion

The traditionalist ELT practitioner has almost exclusively considered transference from the L1 into the English of foreign-language users to be indicative of incorrect usage and furthermore detrimental to the communication process. As a result, great effort has been made to eradicate structures perceived to be born of 'interference' from the repertoire of the learner. The 'irregularities' produced by the L2 speaker which are indicative of discoursal nativization and/or fossilization, however, are not only sometimes useful, and an enrichment of the tongue, they also communicate an underlying cultural context, or, if you will, a cultural code. Thus, when Swedes say that they enjoy *walking in the nature*, or that someone is *blue eyed*, the very act itself becomes the promotion of the cultural contexts of the Swedish experience, where walking in a wooded area embellished with a Scandinavian ambience is what is expressed, or where being *blue eyed* is a self-perceived Swedish characteristic. Thus, the Swede, in using such phrases, brings to the English language a linguistic possibility, and in the process transfers the culture-specific context associated with *walking in the nature* or being *blue eyed* in Scandinavia to the sociocultural context of cross-cultural communication in the European lingua franca.

The entire enterprise of enforcing adherence to a culture-specific native-speaker-based standard in ELT is being undermined by the emergence of language which, as a result of discoursal nativization and fossilization, is altering the shape of English as it is defined through use by non-native speakers. This line of reasoning effectively challenges the hegemony of native-speaker norms and standard-language culture ideologies in the development of the educational standards and practices deployed in institutionalized English language teaching and learning. Growing numbers of mainland Europeans do not want the cultural context of mainland European English to take form within the confines of an ELT which promotes the mimicking (to near-native proficiency) of an idealized native speaker of BrE or AmE.

One of the first steps in this linguistic liberation of the NNS constituency is to rethink the way in which ELT practitioners react to the language which our students actually use. Instead of lavishing red ink on 'errors' without further reflection, it is perhaps high time that we begin looking at the way in which L2 speakers enrich the tongue by transferring features of their L1 into the English language. ■

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Harry Potter continued (from p.29)

- In China, The People's Literature Publishing House, which once issued the collective poems of Chairman Mao, this year released some 600,000 boxed sets of translations of the first three Harry Potters, the largest first printing of any fiction since the communists came to power in 1949.

Rowling's books have bridged political and cultural chasms; they have altered publishing industries; they have even spurred censorship moves by some religious fundamentalists.

From a Reuters report in the *South China Morning Post* of 7 Oct 2000

Harry Potter made a splashy official debut in China yesterday despite anxious debate within the People's Literature Publishing House over whether the schoolboy wizard was politically correct.

An initial print run of 200,000 copies of each of the first three children's books by British author J. K. Rowling was rushed to market to beat pirates already making a killing.

The biggest first edition run of a work of fiction in the 51-year history of Communist China attracted queues stretching half way around the block outside Wang-fujing Bookstore in Beijing's main shopping district.

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