

A Possibility for Taiwan English? Viewpoints Between English Teachers and
English-majored Students in Taiwan

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Abstract

The present research investigates a possibility for Taiwan English based on analyzing data drawn from interviewing English teachers and English-majored students in university. In addition, observational notes are also collected as the other source of data to complement the investigation for this study. The results show that the viewpoints towards Taiwan English from English teachers and English-majored students are quite different. What is more, students tend to be more sensitive and observant of creative usage in English in our daily life, thus providing more examples than English teachers. In the end of this paper, based on the data, I analyze whether Taiwan English has the possibility to become a nativized variety of World Englishes or just a kind of creativity of creative language use that blends English elements into the local usage.

Keywords: World Englishes, variety (varieties), creativity, perspectives.

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1. Introduction

With the advent of internationalization, English has become an essential part in our daily life. English nowadays is no longer the one traditionally divided into two varieties which are American English and British English as people normally have thought, but has already become “World Englishes” (Bolton 2005; Kachru 2006; Kirkpatrick 2007). A proof will be that we transform the typical singular form “English” into the plural form “Englishes” to signify that a variety of English is used in different countries, thus becoming “World Englishes.”

Although English as a lingua franca (ELF) has been a rising linguistic trend for study, in context of the usage of English in Taiwan, it is not clear that the English we use here in Taiwan should be considered Standard English, Pidgin English, or even nativized & local English. Not every country has its nativized English. We are yet to not know whether in Taiwan there could be nativized Taiwan English developed/developing, or is it just involved with a kind of linguistic creativity on the part of the language users who blend English elements into their local usage.

Among the countries in Asia, many of which have already developed their nativized English, like Singapore, Hong Kong, and even China. However, we can find little research on nativized English in Taiwan. Thus, as a Taiwanese student majoring in English, I would like to do research on “Nativized English in Taiwan” in order to understand more of Taiwan English that helps form the nativization of Taiwan English. Therefore, my research questions are: (1) Does Taiwan English exist? If yes, what is it? In what form does it exist? (2) Is Taiwan English a nativized variety, like Hong Kong English and Singapore English, or is it just creativity for more creative language use that blends English elements into the usage of the local language? If yes, how do we nativize these English words? To find the answer, I have collected miscellaneous nativized English words in Taiwan including hybrid words created from blending

English and Mandarin Chinese. Additionally, in this paper, I would explore different viewpoints of what is nativized English in Taiwan, i.e. Taiwan English, based on the interview data of English teachers and English-majored students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 World Englishes

The term “World Englishes” embraces a large range of meanings and interpretations. Bolton (2005) described the function of the term, “World Englishes”, as an umbrella label referring to approaches to the description and analysis of English(es) in various ways. Bolton also mentioned that some scholars prefer “World English” in the singular, and regard it as “global English” and “international English,” while others favor the plural forms. In light of the current cultural value, I support the plural form of “World Englishes” which represents the localized, indigenized, and nativised varieties, also highlighting the diversity of English integrating the local culture and dialect.

The most influential model of the spread of English is the following chart with three circles presented by Kachru (1992).

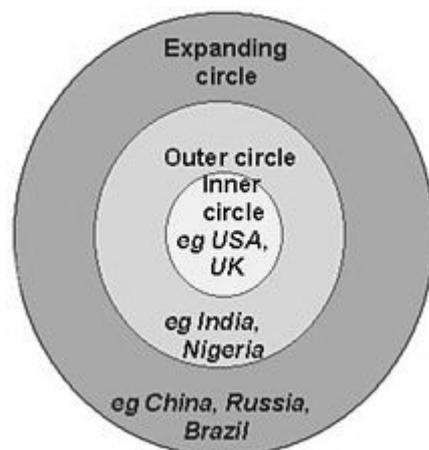


Figure 1: Kachru’s three-circle model of World Englishes (Kachru 1992)

The Inner Circle refers to the traditional bases of English, the countries including the USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The middle one, the

Outer Circle, involves the regions that have passed through extended periods of colonization. The Outer Circle countries cover Singapore, India, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and over fifty other territories. Speakers of English in these countries are liable to have a different mother tongue, yet since English plays a significant 'second language' role (ESL) in their multilingual setting (White 1997), they are likely to be fluent in the national variety of English, such as the well-known Singlish. In comparison with the Outer Circle, the Expanding Circle treats English as the foreign language (EFL). Japan, Korea, China, and Taiwan are all in this circle. Kubota and Ward (2000) indicate that "English does not have official status in these countries, but it is taught widely as a foreign language." (p.82)

Currently, our understanding of the term "World Englishes" is mostly derived from the Outer and Expanding circle countries, which are referred to as "New Englishes". Ridge (1988) points out that "New Englishes" are viewed as a "foreign language variety, representing the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages." Kachru (1992) categorizes the "New Englishes" into two varieties: "performance varieties and institutionalized varieties." Performance varieties are used as foreign languages, having a highly restricted functional range in particular field, such as tourism, commerce, and other international transactions (Kachru 1992: 5, cited from Hasanova 2007: 11). Institutionalized varieties, on the other hand, are revealed as the initiation of performance varieties. Kachru discovers the development of institutionalized varieties in three phases. The first phase is "imitation model", the basis of a native variety. The second phase is "related to extensive diffusion of bilingualism in English, which slowly leads to the development of varieties within a variety". The third phase focuses on the local variety, recognizing the national uses of English (Kachru 1992: 56-57, cited from Xu 2010: 11). I believe that Taiwan has already leapt from the

performance varieties. As a result, for my research on Taiwan English, I center on the third phase of institutionalized varieties to investigate the phenomenon of localized English in Taiwan.

2.2 Lingua Franca vis-à-vis pidgin

With the advent of globalization, the term “English as a lingua franca” (ELF) has appeared as a way to communicate in English among people from different language background (House 1999; Seidlhofer 2001; Cogo & Dewey 1988). Berns (2001) illustrates that, from the historical aspect, lingua franca is related to a variety of language that typically developed in trade colonies. These varieties were often composed of elements from several languages and then became as known as pidgins. The definition of pidgins is worth considering as derivation from lingua franca and it is provided by Mühlhäusler, who states:

Pidgins are examples of partially-targeted second-language learning and second-language creation, developing from simpler to more complex systems as communicative requirements become more demanding. Pidgin languages by definition have no native speakers – they are social rather than individual solutions – and hence are characterized by norms of acceptability. (Mühlhäusler 1997: 6)

As we can see, pidgins share several similarities with lingua franca, but there are still differences that need to be distinguished. In brief, lingua franca can be any proper language; yet, pidgin is spoken in simplified vocabulary and grammar for communication. Moreover, as Cogo and Dewey state, “pidgins vary a great deal in terms of the complexity of their lexical resources and grammatical systems, both of which will largely depend on the nature of the functions the language needs to fulfill” (Cogo & Dewey 1988: 16)

After differentiating lingua franca from pidgin, an extended statement about

lingua franca is given by Ammon as follows:

Lingua franca is not a formal, linguistic phenomenon; rather, lingua franca refers to contexts of use definable by extra-linguistic factors (Ammon 1994, cited from Berns 2001).

According to Ammon's viewpoint about lingua franca highlighting "extra-linguistic factors," we can quickly associate lingua franca with a distinctive variety of English that can be distinguished from Indian English, Singapore English, British English and American English, or any other institutionalized English variety (Berns 2001). Earlier when referring to World Englishes, I mentioned that my viewpoint is that Taiwan English is one of the institutionalized English varieties. However, it is not clear whether people in Taiwan do use English as a kind of lingua franca in their daily life or considering English as a foreign language.

2.3 English as an Asian language

As the Asian countries rise sharply in recent years, the notion of "English as an Asian language" has been accepted. Kachru expresses some general facts about English as an Asian language, inclusive of the "creative use of the language" (cited from Kirkpatrick 2000) reflecting the cultural background in different countries and society. Xu (2010) adheres to the fact that it is difficult to ignore the growing status of English as a lingua franca in Asia. A convincing example is its use as the official working language of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Many varieties in "English as an Asian language" have indigenized forms with unique characteristics (Xu 2010: 13). Butler (1999) holds that each form features the pronunciation, lexis and idiom, and many of those were born and educated within the particular English language community. Take Hong Kong English as an example. The lexical features in Hong Kong English are innovative. Bolton (2003) suggests that "a full inventory of the modern Hong Kong lexicon would include items across a wide

range of different domains” (p.93).

As a citizen in Taiwan, China is so close to us that the language they use will conspicuously influence us, not to mention the intimate association between China and Taiwan in culture. By virtue of our geographic and historical factors, both China and Taiwan speak Chinese, which means that Chinese English is not only owned by people in China but also by people in Taiwan. Hu (2004) indicates that “the Chinese variety of English will become more and more distinctive as an independent member of the family of world Englishes.” From this statement, it will be difficult for Taiwan English to be distinguished. The reason “why China English should stand alongside British, American, and the other world Englishes” (Xu 2006) is that the lexicon and grammar are too different from other countries’ languages. Japan and Korea also belong to this kind of category. However, since people in both China and Taiwan speak Chinese, we share the same language as well as some Chinese variety of English.

2.4 Nativization and Varieties

Nativization is a word that normally does not exist in the dictionary but only exists in the linguistic contexts. Kirkpatrick (2007) provides that “nativised varieties are newer varieties that have developed in places where English was not originally spoken and which have been “influenced by local languages and cultures” (p. 5). It also represents the significant change from World English to nativized English in different countries. The level of nativization depends on how English blends into the local culture and their mother tongue, or even dialect. Other similar terms include “acculturation and indigenization” (Kirkpatrick 2007: 7). Singapore English is widely known as “Singlish”, which is an appropriate example for nativized English that has mixed with Tamil, Malay, and Chinese.

“The vocabularies of varieties of English are enriched by words from local languages” (Kirkpatrick 2007: 20). Englishes need these words to show the local cultural practices and traditions. For instance, the image that people associate with Australia is always “kangaroo and koala”. In fact, these words come from aboriginal languages but now become understood around the world. I affirm that this is our goal of Taiwan English. The nativized vocabularies of Taiwan English can be largely contained in Taiwanese culinary industry due to our cultural backgrounds. However, sometimes we, Taiwanese, consider our local words been understood only by Taiwanese people.

Nativised English not only shows the local cultures but people’s identity of the country. Kirkpatrick points out that a broad, informal variety is best at signifying identity and culture (2007: 11). As English is acknowledged more widely in Taiwan, we need to create our own identity towards English and make Taiwan English a variety of English.

3. Methodology

As the purpose of my research is to acquire instances of Taiwan English, the study utilized a mixed-methods approach to investigating the nativized English lexicons used by people in Taiwan. First, I adopted semi-structured interviews centering on people’s thoughts and experiences of Taiwan English. Then, taking notes from personal observations of people’s language use was also an approach to collecting more examples of Taiwan English. The data collection lasted from December 2013 to February 2014. In the three months of data collection, the two approaches were employed simultaneously.

3.1 The interviews and Interviewees

I conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The interviewees were divided into two groups. The first group was students majoring

in English, who have learned English over ten years. I believe that English-majored students should be more sensitive to how English is used in Taiwan. The other group targeted on English teachers, who could provide their perspectives of Taiwan English. For the student interviewees, I had a focus group interview because I believe that they could provide more examples through group interactions and brainstorming. As to the interviews of English teachers, I took individual interviews because I suppose every teacher have his or her own viewpoints towards Taiwan English. All the teacher interviewees have had teaching experience for over ten years.

In the follow-up data, I would use the abbreviations T1. T2. T3 and T4 to represent the four teacher interviewees. In addition, I would like to introduce their teaching backgrounds. T1 is a lecturer in university and is also a cram school teacher who is professional in English teaching. T2 is a lecturer majored in public communication in the English department in university. T3 is a lecturer of translation field in university. T4 is a dean in an English cram school. The interviews were recorded. Moreover, to avoid misunderstanding, the interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese.

The questions are as follows:

1. Have you ever heard of Taiwan English and do you have any ideas about it?
2. Could you provide some examples of Taiwan English?
3. Do you think that it is possible for Taiwan English to become a nativized variety of English like Singlish?

3.2 Field notes taking of personal observation

It was arduous to search for examples of Taiwan English on the Internet, so I chose to explore the information by taking notes from my personal observations in the daily life. In order to gather the data as much as possible, strong sensibility to Taiwan English was essential and significant. I collected the data from my surroundings and

took notes whenever examples were found. The data came from miscellaneous sources, such as the Internet, advertising, slogans, signboards, and even the casual conversation among people. By virtue of the diverse data sources, I categorized and analyzed them after collecting the data. The classification helped differentiate the kinds of Taiwan English.

4. Data analysis

From the open-ended questions of the interviews, I categorized the analysis into two parts. The first part is analysis of the interview data of the viewpoints from language teachers and students. The second part is that of the linguistic data, including the examples provided by the student interviewees and the field notes taking from my own observations.

4.1 Interview data

4.1.1 Students' linguistic behavior of English

According to the interview data, the language teachers expressed that the existence of Taiwan English correlates closely with Taiwanese students' linguistic behavior of English. T1 believed that the most common English mistake made by students is literal translation, which is resulted from the lack of appropriate language skills and insufficient reading. "Are you full enough?" is a good example to show how people translate the greeting "哩甲霸沒" in Taiwanese into English despite the fact that the native speakers of English will not understand its meaning. Another similar literal translated example provided by T2 is the sentence "台北很方便" which students always directly translate into "Taipei is convenient." However, we cannot use the adjective "convenient" to describe a city or an item. Consequently, the correct sentence should be "Taipei is a modern city and it is easy to get around."

4.1.2 Possibility for Taiwan to become a variety of World Englishes

T1 and T4 believed that Taiwan has the potential to become a variety of World

Englishes. T1 thought that the frequency of interaction and language use is the main concern. Moreover, the cultural and creative industry as well as the audio-visual industry has the profound effect. Take Taiwanese drama and movies for example. When the copyright was sold to other countries, Taiwan English is likely to be seen/heard and recognized by the world. The Internet also plays a significant role in broadcasting Taiwan's video. On the other hand, T4 said that "Creating catchy phrases can be a good way to develop Taiwan English." However, the frequency of using the catchy phrases is the key to develop and even preserve our Taiwan English.

As for the students' point of views, they thought that the food naming in Taiwan is more possible to make Taiwan English become a variety of World Englishes. For example, stinky tofu and bubble tea are two of the most famous food in Taiwan known to the world.

4.1.3 No possibility for Taiwan to become a variety of World Englishes?

T2 and T3 believed that it is difficult for Taiwan to have a variety of World Englishes. Nevertheless, they held different viewpoints. T2 thought that Taiwan English is a creativity of language demonstration because only those who understand Taiwanese and English can understand the meaning. For native speakers of English, Taiwan English does not make sense to them. Singlish is so well known because most Singaporeans speak English with a peculiarly local accent and use certain distinct expressions and phrases very often. This phenomenon does not occur in Taiwan. Therefore, Taiwan English would not be prevalent and become world-recognized.

Unlike Singapore, English is not the official language in Taiwan. Students in Taiwan are taught in Standard English. Therefore, T3 thought that it is not easy for Taiwan to acquire a variety of World Englishes. Even if we create a new phrase by mixing Chinese and English words or by transliteration, it can only stay with the trend for a while. When the popularity of a newly-coined phrase faded away, it would

disappear easily. What is more, it is hard for foreigners to accept Taiwan English. For example, they do not know why Taiwanese say “fu” to substitute “feel.” They may think that it is interesting but they will not approve it just because we say it in that way.

4.2 Linguistic analysis

In this part, the data analysis is presented by examples of creative English usage in Taiwan. I also categorized them by their property of different expressions.

4.2.1 Phonomorphic representation

Phonomorphic representation is also known as transliteration. It is a process in which English lexicons are transliterated into Chinese in various forms according to the pronunciation of words. The table below is the examples of English to Chinese transliteration.

English	Transliteration in Chinese
1. I love you.	愛老虎油
2. What’s your name?	花枝魷魚麵
3. Miss you.	米修
4. happy	黑皮
5. line	賴
6. cool	酷
7. loser	魯蛇
8. match	麻吉
9. motel	摩鐵
10. handsome	嗨森

Compared to examples 3-10 which transliteration is more directly based on the pronunciation, examples 1 and 2 focus on the Chinese meanings rather than the pronunciation. In fact, the pronunciation of the English phrase “love you” does not

perfectly fit the Chinese phrase “老虎油.” However, due to “老虎油” has already been a Chinese lexicon inferring a kind of ointment, the transliteration in Chinese chose an easier one to represent the English phrase. Example 2, “What’s your name?” transliterates to “花枝魷魚麵” which refers to a kind of noodle, is the same way to transliterate.

4.2.2 Lexical Hybridity of Chinese and English

The following examples of the way of hybridity of Chinese and English are quite different, which are thus to be illustrated separately.

1. Hold 住: It means “撐住” in Chinese.
2. 好 A 噢: The letter “A” here originated from the first letter of “adult video.” It means lustful in English and “色” in Chinese.
3. A 咖: It can be referred to A-lister in English. As there are B-lister and C-lister, we also have “B 咖” and “C 咖” in Chinese. With regard to the Chinese word “咖,” it is derived from the pronunciation of Taiwanese(Minnan dialect), meaning a role.
4. Fun 輕鬆: It is a creative way to express “放輕鬆,” meaning “relax,” and have fun simultaneously.
5. 很 high: It describes a person in high spirits. In Chinese, it means “高昂”. In addition to describing people’s emotion, it can also describe an exciting condition.
6. Try try 看: It means “You can try it.” The reason why we use “try” twice is that in Chinese we tend to say “試試看” which owns a reduplication of the word “試”. Another similar way of Chinese reduplication is “估估看” in which “估” is from the pronunciation of the first syllable of “google,” meaning searching for information.
7. 好 der: It is a way to imitate the accent in Mandarin China, meaning “好的” in Chinese.

8. 有 fu: “Fu” here means “feel.” As Taiwanese people have difficulty in articulating the pronunciation of the phone [l], they tend to articulate [fju] instead of the correct pronunciation [fil].
9. 好 Q: Taiwanese people tend to say “好 Q” to express “so cute.” The purpose for Taiwanese people use “Q” instead of “cute” is to simplify the pronunciation and also the lexical expression, in which the English alphabetical letter “Q” is substituted for a whole word “cute.”
10. 台客: Although the Chinese phrase did not have any English on the surface. The Chinese suffix “客” actually is from “紐約客” which means “New Yorker” . Because the suffix “er” represents “people,” after modeling “ker” as “客” from “New Yorker(紐約客),” stereotypical Taiwanese people are referred to as “台客”.
11. 很 man & 很 relax: These two examples apply change of the grammatical category. “Man” is originally a noun meaning a male. “Man” in the phrase “很 man” becomes an adjective, which can be used to describe someone who is full of masculinity. The phrase “很 relax” is used the same way. A verb “relax” is used as an adjective in the phrase “很 relax.”

4.2.3 Language used for substitution

Some lexicons cannot be written in Chinese characters, so English letters are used for substitution to express their meaning. For example, “軟 Q” and “黏 TT” are Taiwanese (Minnan dialect) which respectively mean “chewy” and “sticky.” Another particular example is for the following situation. In schools, especially in junior and senior high schools, when the teacher checks the answers, they normally say “A,” “B,” “C,” and “豬” instead of “D.” It is because the pronunciation of “B” and “D” is too close, the teacher is afraid that students may be confused with “B” and “D”. Accordingly, Taiwanese “豬” is used to replace the English letter “D.”

4.2.4 Transliteration + hybridity

1. G 排 → 雞排
2. D 排 → 豬排

“G 排” and “D 排” are the phrases combining the method of transliteration and lexical hybridity. The pronunciation of the letter “G” is similar to the Chinese word “雞”. The pronunciation of “豬” in Taiwanese is the same as the English letter “D.” Therefore, we can always see some catering stores use “G 排” instead of “雞排” on their signboards. Additionally, some bento box shops wrote “D” on the bento box to imply the content of the box is pork chop. It can be regarded as a kind of convenience because the strokes of the traditional Chinese word “豬” are too complicated and it takes more time to write down the word.

4.2.5 Abbreviations of English alphabetical letters on the Internet

1. BJ4: It is an abbreviation of alphabetical letters according to the pronunciation of the Chinese meaning “不解釋”. In English, it means “no explanation.”
2. LKK: It is an abbreviation of alphabetical letters according to the first phone of each word from “老叩叩” in Taiwanese, meaning “very old.”
3. GG: The origin of “GG” comes from online games, meaning “good game.” However, because when the screen showed “good game,” it means the game is over. Therefore, the meaning of “GG” is gradually developed into “結束了”. “完蛋了” which means something is finished and does not have a good outcome.

4.2.6 Literal translation

The following examples are literal translation which translates the lexicons word-by-word with improper grammar (examples 1) or without conveying the original meaning (examples 2-5).

1. 如此多 → are so many: It is inappropriate grammar, influenced by Chinese syntax order.

2. 紙老虎→paper tiger: It means something seem to be threatening but powerless in reality.
3. 學長/姊→school brother/sister: It should be “schoolmate” instead of “school brother/sister.”
4. 黃色笑話→yellow joke: In English, the color “yellow” does not have erotic meaning. Instead, it should be “blue joke” or “dirty joke.”
5. 二手車→second hand cars: It should be “used cars.”

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings from the interview data, it is found that the viewpoints towards Taiwan English from English teachers and students are quite different. Even for English teachers, they held disparate arguments for whether Taiwan English could become a variety of World Englishes. With regard to the most apparent distinction between English teachers and students, English teachers could only indicate some Taiwanese students' non-standard English behavior; yet, students tended to provide a variety of creative English usage in Taiwan, implying that students are more observant of the English usage in our daily life. Furthermore, a fact was revealed that many Taiwanese have not noticed that English has played an important role in Taiwan and even blends into our local culture. Even though the knowledge level in English of most Taiwanese is just in alphabetical or vocabulary level, they are inclined to apply simple English like some easy vocabularies or alphabetical letters to transliterate or make lexical hybridity of Chinese and English.

As to the possibility for Taiwan to have a variety of World Englishes, though two teacher interviewees thought that it was not possible, and even students thought the same in the beginning, I believe that possibility still exists if more examples of creative language use that blends English elements into the usage of the local language can be found in the near future. In order to explore more about Taiwan

English, I would like to further conduct the research in graduate school level. I will focus on more examples of other creative English usage in Taiwan, trying to find more patterns based on categories arrived at.

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