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DECONSTRUCTING THE 'NATIVE SPEAKER' IDEOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY ELT TEXTBOOKS: PROMOTING GLOBAL ENGLISHES AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN THE MODERN CLASSROOM

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Abstract: The contemporary landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) is undergoing a major paradigm shift driven by the global expansion of the language. Historically, ELT textbooks have prioritized the "native speaker" ideology, presenting Inner Circle varieties—specifically British and American English—as the exclusive pedagogical standards. However, since non-native English speakers now vastly outnumber native speakers globally, this monocentric approach fails to prepare learners for real-world communication. This article deconstructs the native speaker ideology within ELT materials and advocates for an inclusive framework centered on Global Englishes (GE) and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Utilizing a critical textbook analysis methodology grounded in Kachru's Three Concentric Circles, this study evaluates the representation of diverse linguistic varieties, intercultural contexts, and non-native interlocutors in globally distributed ELT coursebooks. The findings indicate that while modern textbooks show minor improvements in including Expanding Circle characters, they remain heavily biased toward Anglo-Saxon cultural norms and standardized Inner Circle phonetic models. The analysis highlights that over-reliance on idealized native standards causes student self-marginalization and restricts the development of pragmatic accommodation strategies. The article concludes with a comprehensive framework for curriculum designers to integrate pluricentric linguistic inputs, interactive translanguaging practices, and deep reflective intercultural tasks in the modern classroom.

Keywords: Global Englishes, Native-Speakerism, Intercultural Communicative Competence, ELT Textbooks, Pluricentric Pedagogy

Introduction

The global spread of the English language has altered its sociolinguistic profile. According to records tracked in linguistic tracking repositories, the total number of English speakers worldwide has reached approximately 1.27 billion [1]. Within this demographic, native speakers constitute fewer than 370 million users, whereas non-native speakers comprise nearly 900 million individuals [1]. Statistically, the vast majority of modern English interactions occur as a lingua franca between individuals who do not speak it as a first language [2]. Consequently, traditional ownership of the language has shifted away from historical centers like the United Kingdom and the United States toward a decentralized, global user base [3].

Despite these developments, English Language Teaching (ELT) has been slower to reform. The profession remains influenced by "native-speakerism," an ideology defined by Adrian Holliday as the systemic belief that native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) represent the ideal pedagogical model and Western culture [4]. This ideology is directly reinforced by globally distributed ELT textbooks, which routinely treat native structural and phonetic patterns as the

sole benchmarks for success [5]. Any deviations from these Inner Circle norms are frequently categorized as linguistic deficits or errors rather than legitimate signs of regional variation [5].

This monocentric orientation creates significant challenges for modern language learners. Preparing students to interact exclusively with native speakers limits their ability to navigate the diverse phonetic, lexical, and pragmatic realities of international communication [6]. Furthermore, prioritizing native-speaker culture prevents the cultivation of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)—the ability to interact effectively and appropriately across diverse linguistic and cultural boundaries [7]. This article provides a critical analysis of the native speaker ideology in contemporary ELT textbooks, examines its pedagogical consequences, and establishes structural recommendations for implementing Global Englishes (GE) and ICC in modern language classrooms.

Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative and quantitative content analysis framework designed to evaluate linguistic and cultural representation in ELT coursebooks. The analytical matrix relies on Braj Kachru's foundational Three Concentric Circles model, which divides the spread of English into three distinct zones:

- **The Inner Circle (IC):** Traditional bases where English is the primary native language (e.g., UK, USA, Australia) [2].
- **The Outer Circle (OC):** Institutionalized post-colonial contexts where English serves as a vital second language in multilingual societies (e.g., India, Nigeria, Singapore) [2].
- **The Expanding Circle (EC):** Contexts where English is learned primarily as a foreign language for international communication (e.g., China, Japan, Brazil, Uzbekistan) [2].

[Expanding Circle]
[(Outer Circle)]
[(Inner Circle)]

To determine how these circles are represented, the study implements an adapted version of Mishan and Kiss's textbook integration scale [7]. The analytical sample consists of reading passages, audio listening tracks, and conversational roleplay activities selected from popular elementary and intermediate adult ELT textbooks widely used in international contexts, including editions of *English File* and *Language Hub* [1].

The evaluation criteria track four objective indicators:

1. **Interlocutor Identity:** The demographic background, nationality, and accent profiles of characters featured in text and audio.
2. **Linguistic Variety:** The inclusion of non-standard lexical items, regional grammatical structures, or localized varieties (e.g., Indian English, Singaporean English).
3. **Phonetic Exposure:** The presence of non-native accents or regional dialects in listening tasks.
4. **Cultural Depth:** The categorization of cultural tasks as either "surface level" (static mentions of food, flags, festivals) or "deep level" (critical reflection, cultural comparisons, and behavioral adaptation) [7].

Results

The empirical text analysis reveals a persistent imbalance in linguistic and cultural representation across standard international coursebooks. While minor differences exist between publishers, the general trends show a clear preference for Inner Circle norms.

Evaluation Metric	Inner Circle (IC) Representation	Outer Circle (OC) Representation	Expanding Circle (EC) Representation
Character	68% to 75%	Absent or under 5%	20% to 27%

Evaluation Metric	**Inner Circle (IC) Representation**	**Outer Circle (OC) Representation**	**Expanding Circle (EC) Representation**
Profiles			
Audio Accent Types	90% (Standard British/American)	Less than 2%	8% (Heavily modified for clarity)
Cultural Themes	72% (Anglo-Saxon traditions)	Negligible	28% (Superficial tourist spots)

Quantitative tracking shows that *English File Fourth Edition* displays a strong bias toward Inner Circle characters and Anglo-Saxon culture [1]. Conversely, *Language Hub* demonstrates a slightly more inclusive approach by integrating a wider variety of names and characters from Expanding Circle countries [1]. However, both titles completely omit the rich sociolinguistic tapestry of Outer Circle nations like India, South Africa, or the Philippines [1].

Audio materials remain an area of significant linguistic exclusion. Over 90% of listening comprehension activities feature standard varieties such as Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American (GA). When non-native accents are introduced, they are typically limited to brief, highly modified EC speech samples. These samples are systematically adjusted to ensure they mimic native phonology, removing authentic regional features like syllable-timed rhythm or distinct dental fricative variations [5]. Furthermore, cultural tasks in these textbooks score poorly on deep ICC integration. Approximately 60.34% of cultural content is categorized as moderate or low integration, focusing largely on observable traits without encouraging critical cultural self-reflection [7].

Analysis and Discussion

The empirical findings demonstrate that contemporary ELT textbooks do not accurately reflect the sociolinguistic reality of English as a global lingua franca. By over-representing Inner Circle standards and minimizing Outer Circle and Expanding Circle variations, publishers reinforce the problematic assumptions of native-speakerism [5]. This dynamic has several negative impacts on teacher recruitment, student confidence, and cross-cultural communication.

The Problematic Construct of the "Native Speaker"

The conventional binary division between native English speakers (NES) and non-native English speakers (NNES) has long been questioned by applied linguists. Defining a native speaker based on birth or early childhood exposure is increasingly unrealistic in a highly globalized world characterized by regular migration and widespread multilingualism [8]. For example, bilingual individuals in localized environments often identify as native users of regional varieties, which challenges traditional boundaries [8].

By positioning Standard British and American English as the only correct forms, textbooks participate in linguistic imperialism [8]. This framework implies that certain regional varieties are intellectually and socially superior, while treating others as deficient [8]. In practice, this perspective encourages self-marginalization among non-native professionals and students, who often view their own natural speech patterns as invalid or broken [5].

Pedagogical Consequences: Deficit vs. Difference

When ELT textbooks treat language education through a monocentric lens, they frame natural regional variation as an error [5]. From a Global Englishes perspective, these variations represent legitimate linguistic evolution and localized identity rather than architectural failures [5]. By failing to expose students to varied accents, textbooks undermine their auditory adaptability. Research shows that learners trained under strict monocentric conditions struggle

significantly when interacting with real-world, non-native speech patterns, as they lack practice with pragmatic accommodation strategies [6].

Superficial vs. Deep Intercultural Competence

The data confirms that cultural content in standard textbooks remains superficial [7]. True Intercultural Communicative Competence requires moving beyond superficial observations to cultivate deeper cognitive and affective skills, such as empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, and the ability to evaluate one's native cultural biases [9]. When materials depict international communication solely as a tool for interacting with native tourists or business professionals, they miss the opportunity to develop complex, fluid global identities [7]. Consequently, students learn to view culture as a fixed, national entity rather than a dynamic, interactive process [9].

Conclusion

Deconstructing the native speaker ideology in contemporary ELT textbooks is an essential step toward aligning language instruction with global communication realities. This study demonstrates that while international publishers have made small strides in character diversity, the core structure of ELT textbooks remains anchored to an outdated, monocentric Inner Circle framework. This dependency marginalizes the vast majority of English users and leaves students unprepared for the demands of international lingua franca interactions.

To bridge this gap between pedagogical materials and real-world linguistic practices, a comprehensive shift toward a pluricentric approach is required. Curriculum developers and material designers should implement the following structural changes:

1. **Linguistic Diversification:** Integrate authentic, non-native listening inputs representing all three of Kachru's circles, ensuring students build tolerance for diverse accents and speech rates.
2. **Strategic Pragmatics:** Pivot conversational activities away from mimicry of native idiomatic expressions, focusing instead on mutual intelligibility, repair mechanisms, and communication strategies.
3. **Deep Cultural Engagement:** Replace superficial tourist overviews with comparative, reflective tasks that encourage students to navigate complex cultural interactions and develop authentic global citizenship.

By replacing the idealized native speaker standard with an inclusive Global Englishes paradigm, the modern classroom can transform into a space that values multilingual identity and cultivates true Intercultural Communicative Competence.

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