

1. Using English

Transcript

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One of the key components of our engagement with the English language is, of course, using it. So, in this introductory presentation, we will present the key aspects of using English. Perhaps this will make you think about your own use of the language. It will make you think about your learners' use, both inside and outside the classroom. And, most importantly, this presentation is intended to prompt you to concentrate, for a little while, on your own perceptions and convictions about the wonderful world of using English and what it means for you as a teacher of English.

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When we talk about communicating in a language, any language, be it our own or any other one, we are essentially talking about 3 things, 3 essential ingredients. In this Course, it is important that we are fully aware of these ingredients, because we will be referring to them many times.

The first component is, of course, the **user** of the language. In order to understand the use we have to first and foremost be able to describe the user. What does that mean? We need to have information about who the user is, what they know about this specific interaction and what they want to communicate. It is also useful to have information about the user's broader linguistic and psychological profile, how they typically communicate under different circumstances, possible problems they may be facing with language, with communication, and so on.

The second component is the **interaction** itself. We have collected information about the different users, but we also need to know where this specific interaction takes place, under what circumstances—for example, an interaction in a bar is very different from an interaction in a courthouse. Different contexts will always prompt different types of interaction, for example, in terms of the level of formality or politeness—in this way, a courthouse context is very different from a bar context.

Finally, and this is particularly important in interactions where English is involved, we need to have information about the **shared knowledge** between the interlocutors. As we will see in other sections of this Course, we may be using

English when we communicate with speakers whose native language is unknown to us, but we may also use any other linguistic or semiotic tool that is helpful to us: signs, faces, movements, gestures, touches, smiles, grunts, and so on. And of course, we may (and we will) use words or phrases from languages other than English and our own that we happen to share, e.g., we may use a bit of French, or a word from German or Arabic, and so on, sometimes, all of these in the same utterance.

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All this is OK, but how do we define “**use of English**”? First of all, “use” implies the actual, not imaginary or hypothetical, employment of any aspect of English.

But **where** does this employment or use take place? It typically takes place either inside the language classroom or outside of it.

To characterise a linguistic interaction as “use of English”, it must involve *the generation of meaningful, spoken/written discourse produced for a specific communicative purpose and is comprehensible (or understandable) to our audience*, i.e. the other interlocutors can make some sense of it.

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As we mentioned earlier, not all interactions are the same, far from it! Context is crucial: where we produce language and why (or to what effect) we produce it will determine the extent to which an interaction has been successful.

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This brings us to the first Activity of this introductory section.

Think about **your own experience** as a user of English. Forget about being a teacher for the time being. Think about that and also consider the **global spread** of English – and think about the following two questions:

- First of all, have you ever had to produce **different** language depending on **where** and **why** you were using it? In **what ways** was that language different? Think of different contexts, in other words, where you had to use English.
- Then, apart from the context, what **other aspects or other parameters** do you think make the language that we produce **different**? Think about that.

Don't forget to click the **link** under the video and share your views. Please stop the video now and consider these questions.

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So, to recap. The parameters that make English different are: the *what*, the *where*, the *why* and the *who*. The *what* refers to the actual discourse produced, that is quite simple, you can just observe it and make a note of it – but, the *where*, is a very complicated distinction because it will generate different types of discourse, for example, spoken or written. This is a very complicated distinction, especially if you think about the level of formality. For example, imagine making a formal speech at an event – this is a speech, but it's a formal speech – where you would produce spoken discourse but essentially you'd be reading from a written text you had prepared earlier: the language, in other words, that is produced is spoken, but its features, if you think about them, are closer to those of written discourse – everything is prepared in advance, you speak slowly, the language is more formal and carefully selected and so on and so forth. The levels of formality are really important and this is something that makes the use of English different from context to context.

Also, there is the question of **intelligibility** and **comprehensibility**. Intelligibility is the ability to recognize words and phrases when you hear them –you may not know the meaning of these words but you may be able to write them down. That's when comprehensibility comes in, the ability to understand the meaning of words and phrases.

Another parameter that makes the use of English different from context to context is the use of **accommodation strategies**. These are the ways that we use in order to make our speech intelligible and comprehensible, all these “extra-linguistic” gestures and signs that we mentioned above, but also the “linguistic” tools that we use, such as repeating what we just said, or rephrasing it.

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What is the **motivation** for producing discourse? This is really important. Why is it important? Because in order to produce discourse and really engage in an interaction, we have to want to communicate, really, genuinely.

We all know that this wanting to communicate happens automatically in “real” life (i.e. in interactions outside the classroom).

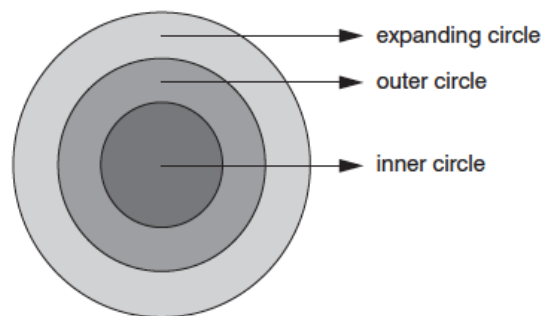
We also know that discourse can be produced inside the classroom, but here wanting to produce it is not at all taken for granted. We as teachers, have to engage our learners in tasks that prompt them, motivate them, to produce discourse, to make them want to communicate. In doing so, we replicate real-life communication by developing activities and tasks that are authentic, i.e. they mimic real-life communicative situations.

And, of course, how much of our own and our learners' talk is at that level? Because, as we all know, much – so much! – of classroom discourse is

management talk. That's the distinction between outside-the-classroom interactions and inside-the-classroom interactions.

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Let's try to look at how complex English is. As we will see in this Course, English is used everywhere in the world. A simple (and rather dated, but still used precisely because it is simple) description of the use of English globally comes from seeing the geographical orientation of this use.



We will revisit this model further down in the Course in a more analytical way so that you can understand it better. As you can see, we have three circles. The Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle.

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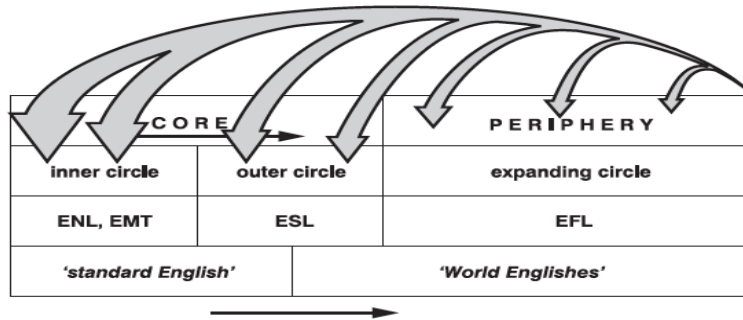
The **Inner Circle** refers to using English as a Native Language. This involves all the countries that have co-called native speakers of English, the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, South Africa.

The **Outer Circle** refers to the English as a Second Language countries, that is ex-British and American colonies, predominantly in Africa, for example, Nigeria, and Asia, for example, India.

The **Expanding Circle** involves every other context, because English is used everywhere else. So, for example, the European Union would be an Expanding Circle context.

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This Figure tries to put some order in the complexity of use – and try to get you to think about how use is linked with teaching.



The notion of Standard English is linked to the Core, that is, the Inner Circle, mainly the UK, where we use Standard English, or the USA, with General American. We have to think, and we know, the term 'Standard English', this is essential, this is important for us as teachers.

As you move away from the Core, the discourse produced is typically considered less and less Core and more and more Peripheral. In the **EFL classroom**, which belongs to the periphery, of course, the English taught is typically that of the Core, and almost always, that of the Inner Circle, where English is used as a Native Language (ENL) or as a mother tongue (EMT).

These descriptions raise issues regarding not only the use of English in different contexts, but also our own perceptions, attitudes and convictions about that use, what we consider to be appropriate in different interactions with different people, and how we view ourselves not as users only but as teachers as well.

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Let's have a look at the second Activity now. Think about **your own experience** in using English and think about the discursal characteristics that the following domains may have – what **discursal characteristics** from the ones we have referred to above can you identify in:

- *a newspaper article*
- *a conversation between friends in a bar*
- *a lecture delivered to an auditorium of students*
- *an SMS message to a relative*
- *an email to a colleague*

And think of the **similarities** and **differences** between **spoken** and **written** discourse. We have referred to these, of course, just a few moments ago, but try to link them with these particular examples.

Click the **link** under the video to share your views and please stop the video now to respond to this Activity.

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Thinking about the similarities and difference between speaking and writing is central to this Course. It is also central to our understanding of use. Because, when we talk about English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), we typically talk about discourse that is spoken, or, to put it more accurately, discourse that has the characteristics of spoken interaction.

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Let's add two more terms in the mix that are of relevance to this Course, as regards USE of English, these two terms will also be covered more extensively in other sections further down.

The notion of '**linguaging**' which relates to the cognitive process of negotiating and producing meaningful and comprehensible discourse – anything we do that involves language and interactions is a process of 'linguaging'.

And then, '**translanguaging**', which is a process where speakers who use more than one linguistic systems – they are multilingual – utilize their languages and their linguistic systems as a completed, integrated communication system – an extension of the concept of linguaging, in other words, the ability to take what we believe is relevant from our array of understanding or knowledge of different languages and use it in specific interactional settings.

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What does all this boil down to? It is essential to understand that talking about using English is not merely a scientific or linguistic endeavor. The job of the linguist and discourse analyst is, of course, to try to describe interactions and uses of English as analytically and in detail as possible, taking all these aspects into careful consideration – who we are as users, who we are communicating with and the interactional, communicational setting.

We should remember that we also need to be conscious of our own perceptions, our own beliefs and even convictions about using English in these contexts – and remember that the contexts are very diverse and very complicated, as we have seen in this presentation.

So, why is **awareness** important? We will see why in the following sections. For now, let us simply say that the notion of awareness is linked to **our understanding of our role as users and teachers**, our understanding of what we are doing in the classroom, to what extent what we are doing is relevant to the authentic uses of English in all its complexity in today's globalized world. Awareness means being in control of our classroom as teachers and gathering the means that will help us prepare our learners for these complicated and very diverse interactions and, in doing so, boost our learners' confidence as skillful participants in these interactions.

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In these Sections, we will talk about two aspects that we have already alluded to and are relevant to the use of English. The first is the notion of English as a Lingua Franca or ELF and in this Section you will find the definition of the term, key issues of ELF, what discourse is and how it works in ELF communication, the strategies that are employed with examples from ELF interactions and the notion of translanguageing, in particular.

And, in the other Section, we will talk about linguistic diversity, that is, the notion of multilingualism, migration contexts and, again, the notion of translanguageing, which is a notion that is shared between these two Sections.