ABSTRACT

Forty-four years since the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, English has been widely used within the bloc’s summits, conferences, meetings, publications, and reports among others. And yet with the full integration of ASEAN in 2015, the bloc’s recognition of an official language to serve ASEAN and her citizens in the years to come hasn’t been put on the table. The diversities that exist in the internal makeup of member states as well as bilateral and multilateral issues between and among member nations are revealed. This paper aims to (1) contextualize Englishes within ASEAN in the framework of the global spread of English, and (2) provide an overview of the ongoing research on the Comprehensibility of Englishes within ASEAN wherein comprehension of the Expanding Circle nations’ citizens such as Burmese, Cambodians, Indonesians, Laotians, Thais and Vietnamese towards the Outer Circle Englishes, namely Bruneian English, Malaysian English, Philippine English and Singaporean English is measured.

Key words: ASEAN, comprehensibility, diversity, English as a Foreign Language, English as an International Language, Englishes, English as a Second Language, Expanding and Outer Circles, languages
The Ten Southeast Asian Nations


Newspaper articles, TV discussions, and online forums explicitly pointed out numerous issues in 2015’s ASEAN Single Community directing at each country’s diverse foundations: different government ideologies and structures, distinct cultural backgrounds and origins, educational system disparities, demographic data, and human rights issues; internal bloc conflicts on territorial disputes, mistrust, and consensus approach in decision making; and external factors such as globalization, regional imbalances and lack of engagement mechanism (Arshad, 2011; Beng, 2003; Business World, 2011; Deboonme, 2011; Feng, et al., 2008; Guangsheng, 2006; Hidekata, 2006; Ramos, 2000).

The official languages enshrined in each member country’s constitution and laws (De Leon, 1997; Harding, 1996; Suwannathat-Pian, 2003; Tan, 2005) differ from one another not to mention the existence of multiple indigenous communities (Clarke, 2001; Pakir, 2010). Thus, politically, economically, and socially, ASEAN is becoming a single community blended with so many indifferences in various issues within internal affairs of a member nation as well as between and among member states.

With the demographic spread of ethnicities within the ten member nations, ASEAN is shifting to multilingual education policy (Kirpatrick, 2010). Thus, the adoption of English as the lingua franca among ASEAN citizens (Jenkins, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2010; McArthur, 1998) was unquestionable and undeniably suitable. Inscribed in ASEAN Charter (2008: Article 34), “the working language of ASEAN shall be English.” The approval of English as a ‘working language’ practically alienates ASEAN from further conundrum with respect to language issues.

In the use of English language within ASEAN, peoples will be bombarded with their own various phonological upbringings, notably stress, rhythm, pitch, tone, assimilation and intonation (Jenkins, 2000; Kenworthy, 1987; Munro et al., 2006; Pennington, 1996). Numerous accents are inevitable as a by-product of historical development, nationalism and cultural baggage of each nation in the ten-member regional bloc.
In relation to the complexities bracing ASEAN these days brought about by diversity of her foundation, the need for continuing researches on many different areas, most especially English as an ASEAN’s lingua franca must be boosted. As Pakir (2010) described “Southeast Asia can be likened to a vast laboratory…huge platform for understanding how languages are learnt, taught and used in communication” (p. 330). The ongoing research focusing on the comprehensibility of English varieties spoken by the four Outer Circle nations to the six Expanding Circle countries will fill in the gap in the current researches on people’s interaction within the regional bloc. Thus, the ongoing research on the ‘Comprehensibility of Englishes within ASEAN’ is timely and suitable.

The global spread of English and the Birth of Englishes within ASEAN Context

To understand English language development within ASEAN, this section’s succeeding paragraphs deal with the historical spread of English globally, the birth of Englishes within ASEAN, and the proposition of a new communication model that captivates the prevalent interaction between and among ASEAN member nations.

Kachru’s (1985) three concentric circles as shown in Figure 1 is the most influential model of the spread of English categorizing it into Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle. It represents the historical and sociolinguistic bases of how English diaspora occurred. The first diaspora of English resulted in the creation of the Inner Circle where English is the mother tongue or the native language therein. Notable countries are the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Australia and Canada. According to estimates, there are approximately 380 million English speakers in the Inner Circle.

![Figure 1: The three ‘circles’ of English (Crystal, 2003)](image-url)
The second diaspora of English was brought by the colonization of Great Britain and the US in Asia and Africa. Notably, English serves as a useful lingua franca between ethnic and language groups and is not used as their mother tongue. To date, English is used in many commercial transactions, higher institutions of learning, the judiciary and legislative assemblies. Countries widely identified are India, the Philippines, Pakistan, Malaysia, Tanzania, Kenya and so on. The total number of English speakers in the Outer Circle is estimated to range from 300 – 500 million.

Finally, countries where English plays no historical or governmental role are categorized as Expanding Circle. China, Russia, Japan, Korea, Egypt, Indonesia are a few examples. English may be employed for specific and limited purposes, usually in business English. The estimates of these users are above 500 million peoples and in this circle the non-native speakers are most likely the majority.

Kachruvian model suggested that the Inner Circle is 'norm-providing', the Outer Circle is 'norm-developing', and the Expanding Circle is 'norm-dependent' (Jenkins, 2003). Likened to the above description, the British Council, AUA among others set the conventions of English-language standards in the world. It assumes that TOEFL (American) and IELTS (British and Australian) are the most appropriate if not ‘correct’ standardized English-language tests. In the Outer Circle, English is institutionalized, localized, indigenized and/or nativised, becoming the New Englishes. And within the Expanding Circle, citizens of these countries are dependent with the criterion set forth by the native speakers.

However, the native speaker model is continuously questioned in World Englishes research (Mesthrie, R. & Bhatt, R., 2008) as to what precise definition shall conform a native speaker and non-native speaker in today’s era of multilingualism.

Patil (2008) noted some drawbacks of Kachru’s model such as: (1) it fails to differentiate varieties within each circle; (2) it assumes that three circles represent linguistic reality perfectly; (3) it implies that the Outer Circle cannot merge into the Inner Circle; (4) it bases the classification on national identity; and, (5) it assumes that the Inner Circle varieties are somehow superior to other varieties (p. 1). Jenkins (2003) and Crystal (2007) are among other authors who pointed out the problems arising from Kachruvian model.

As McKay & Bokhorst-Heng (2008) observed, the hierarchical model becomes ‘permeable’ these days due to movement of peoples from their own country to another for travel, study, immigration, settlement, among others and thus the increase of English usage as
an international language is indisputably obvious.

Nevertheless, since the Kachruvian model despite the above-mentioned drawbacks is widely recognized in the literature of world Englishes, this paper uses it as a starting point to conceptualize the status of English and the birth of Englishes within ASEAN.

**ESL and EFL within ASEAN Context**

Based on Kachru’s (1985) model, the use of English is clearly differentiated into three categories. Within ASEAN, Outer Circle nations are Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore (former British colonies) and the Philippines (former American colony) while Expanding Circle countries are Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Presumably, the Inner Circle uses English as their native language, the Outer Circle uses English as a second language, and the Expanding Circle uses English as a foreign language. Thus, within ASEAN, Table 1 presented below shows Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore currently use English as a second language while the rest of the countries use English as a foreign language.

**Table 1: Language profiles of nations within ASEAN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Official Languages</th>
<th>Status of English</th>
<th>Kachru’s circle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darrusalam</td>
<td>Melayu Brunei</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>Outer Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Bahasa Melayu</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>Outer Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of the Philippines</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>Outer Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Singapore</td>
<td>English, Chinese Malay, Tamil</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>Outer Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom of Cambodia</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>Expanding Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom of Thailand</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>Expanding Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao People’s Democratic Republic</td>
<td>Lao</td>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>Expanding Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Republic of Vietnam</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>Expanding Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union of Myanmar</td>
<td>Burmese</td>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>Expanding Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Indonesia</td>
<td>Bahasa Indonesia</td>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>Expanding Circle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The categorization however is problematic due to the following: (1) Singapore’s adoption of English as one of her official language leads to the question as to which circle the country fits. (2) Myanmar, a former British colony, due to political transformation of the government from a democratic to a military junta in the 1980s, loses her ESL status to EFL and eventually ‘demoted’ in the Expanding Circle. Now that there is ‘slow’ democratic transition happening with the introduction of parliamentary elections, will Myanmar then be reinstated in the Outer Circle in the future? (3) The birth of Thai English becomes a ‘norm developing’ English language prestige and it is only given to those countries in the Outer Circle. Should Thailand be moved up to the Outer Circle even without a colonial past? (4) The shift to bilingualism and multilingualism in the educational setting among ASEAN
member states is also occurring. Examples are bilingual education and now a proposal to adopt a Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MLE) in the Philippines, Balanced Pluralism in Malaysia, English + 1 policy in Singapore, Bilingual and Multilingual Education in the National Language Policy in Thailand (Gunigundo, 2010; Omar, 1985; Praphorn, 2007). In today’s era of multilingualism introduced in the educational language policies of ASEAN member nations, questions arise as to how these countries and their respective citizens are appropriately fitted in the Kachruvian’s model. Thus, labeling ASEAN member countries and her citizens into what circle they belong is becoming impossible.

Indeed, ASEAN citizens are becoming bilingual and/or multilingual, and their usage of English acquired in the classroom has so much cultural baggage imitated from their educators, their respective communities and countries of origins (Kirkpatrick, 2007).

Although categorizing ASEAN member countries and her citizens remains an issue, it is widely observed that New Englishes are thriving within ASEAN. This leads to the next section in which diverse linguistics features embedded in the localized and/or nativised Englishes within ASEAN will be looked at.

**New Englishes within ASEAN**

The need to label the Englishes found in each ASEAN member nation according to Kachru’s model and to introduce the syntactic and morphological characteristics of Englishes found within the bloc are necessary. Table 2: ASEAN member nations’ Englishes briefly illustrate the rightful category of each member nation to claim the existence of Englishes within the regional bloc. Englishes that exist due to the colonial past are Bruneian English, Malaysian English / Manglish, Philippine English / Taglish, and Singapore English / Singlish.

**Table 2: ASEAN member nations’ Englishes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Englishes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darrusalam</td>
<td>Brunei English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Malaysian English, Manglish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of the Philippines</td>
<td>Philippine English, Taglish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Singapore</td>
<td>Singapore English, Singlish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom of Thailand</td>
<td>Thai English, Thailish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom of Cambodia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao People’s Democratic Republic</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Republic of Vietnam</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union of Myanmar</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Indonesia</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the exception of Thailand as one of ASEAN the countries that fall under the Expanding Circle, researchers claim the existence of Thai English / Thailish. Although it is at
its early developmental stage (Buripakdi, 2008; Chutisilp, 1984), features of it will be included.

In this section, it deals generally with the diversity of new Englishes by providing examples rather than singly pointing out the features of Englishes in a given phrase or sentence. In the end, this section summarizes the general features of New Englishes.

Studying Bruneians, Ho’s (2009) research highlighted the language complexities of modal verbs ‘will’ and ‘can’, noting that Bruneians may not distinguish between the past and non-past forms of ‘will’ in a pragmatic sense. Also, Bruneians can mean differently in spoken English language. Examples are:

‘She’s my spare part’ to mean the other girlfriend

‘Keep up the handsome face’ to maintain his good looks

‘Happy Smashing Birthday’ to emphasize the greeting

Ramly, Othman and McLellan (2002) noted the following: semantic shifts/collocations; transferred syntactic structures; transcreation of similes, metaphors, proverbs from other languages, and hybrid lexical constructions. Instances noted are:

‘You make my blood go upstairs’ (You make me angry.)

‘Turtle-turtle in the boat’ (Pretending not to know)

‘You drop my waterface’ (You humiliated me.)

In Malaysia, noted are the following: emphasis of /r/ pronunciation such as in ‘world’ and ‘referring’; /a:/ instead of /ae/ such as in ‘bath’, ‘chance’, and so on; prominence of yod-dropping (elision of the sound /l/) after /n/, /t/, and /d/ for example, ‘new’, ‘tune’ and ‘dune’ are pronounced as /nju:/, /tju:n/, and /dju:n/; preference of American English form such as ‘chips’ instead of ‘crisps’, ‘fries’ instead of ‘chips’, ‘diaper’ instead of ‘nappy’ and so on; new coined phrases such as parking space, photocopier, low-cost apartment (flat in UK), medium-cost apartment (apartment in US), high-cost apartment (condominium in US), and many other phrases. New vocabularies also emerged such as MC (medical certificate), handphone (mobile phone), mee (noodles), Menteri Besar (Chief Minister) and so on. Syntactical features are contained in the following:

Can I come too? instead of ‘May I come too?’

Have you got any? instead of ‘Do you have any?’

It’s your shot. for ‘It’s your turn.’

Singaporean English comes into many forms: Standard Singaporean English, Singlish, and so on (Jenkins, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Grammatical distinction is observed by Hall...
(2004) that if you want a taxi to go to Orchard Road, you are better off asking ‘Orchard Road, can?’ than ‘Could you please take me to Orchard Road?’ When the researcher showed his ticket in the exit gate of Universal Studio during his visit in Singapore in 2011, the man asked ‘No comeback today?’ instead of ‘Are you coming back again today?’

Other unique features of Singlish are the following:
Usage of new vocabulary such as ‘habis’ (finished), ‘makan’ (to eat) and so on
Reduction of /ed/ sound in past forms of words such as stopped, aged, acted
Reduction of /t/ sound like in heart and port
Substitution of /d/ sound like that of leather and then
Pronunciation of ‘goes’ and ‘goose’ are examples of non-distinction between short and long vowels

Kirkpatrick (2007) noticed that despite the historical development differences in Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore after their respective independence, the Englishes of the three countries share many linguistic features in phonology, lexis, grammar and code mixing. The customary use of adding final particle lah among Malaysians and Singaporeans is just an example of similarity between the two nations.

In the Philippines, differences are noted in phonology, lexis and grammar such as features embodied in the following examples:
Substitution of /f/ into /p/ like ‘family’ into ‘pamili’
Pronunciation of ‘Victor’ into ‘bik’tor’, lover into ‘laber’, very into ‘beri’ are examples of non-distinction between /v/ and /b/
Pronunciation of ‘st’ like star into ‘istar/estar’, ‘istamped/estamped’, ‘istatue/estatue’, ‘istable/estable’ and so forth
Pronunciation of ‘cot’ and ‘caught’ are examples of non-distinction between short and long vowel
‘January one’ instead of ‘January first’
Adoption of brand names to refer to things in general such as ‘Colgate’ to toothpaste, ‘Biogesic’ to paracetamol, ‘Maggi’ to noodles, among others
Hybrids – Filipino and English words – is also common such as ‘mga locker’ (lockers), ‘balat carabao’ (carabao/buffalo skin) and so on

With respect to Thailish, notable features observed by the authors are the following:
Addition of Thai final particles such as na and kha / kap (female/male)
Addition of /ah/ sound between two consonants in ‘sahtay’ (stay), ‘sahtupid’
(stupid), ‘sahtat’ (start) and so on
Substitution of /v/ into /w/ sound, e.g. vow into ‘wow’, and van into ‘wan’
Omission of /r/ sound like in ‘boyfiend’ (boyfriend) and ‘egg tat’ (egg tart)
Replacement of /l/ into /n/ in the final sound of some words like in ‘footbon’ (football), ‘Brazin’ (Brazil), and ‘sakhoon’ (school)

To show common features of New Englishes found in ASEAN, Jenkins (2003) sum up four level variations in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary/idiom, and discourse style. The following features in pronunciations are: (1) /θ/ into /t/, /ð/ into /dθ/ or /dð/, (2) /w/ into /v/, (3) /p/, /t/, /k/ into /b/, /d/, /g/, (4) word-final consonants are unreleased or replaced with glottal stops such as in cat into ca (t) or ca, (5) word -final voiced consonants becomes voiceless such as in feed, gave into feet, gafe, (6) lack of distinction between /t/ and /l/, (7) /ʃ/ into /s/, (8) none/minimal distinction between the short and long vowels like that of ‘sit’ into ‘seat’, (9) /a:/ is pronounced without its length, and (10) Diphthongs into monophthongs such as /eI/ to /e/ in ‘tek’, /əu/ to /o:/ or shorter in coat into cot.

Despite differential features of the New Englishes, Seidlofer (2001) observes that certain aspects of it do not hinder English as a lingua franca for communication. According to Seidlofer, typical errors are (1) dropping the third person present tense – s, (2) confusing the relative pronouns ‘who’ and ‘which’, (3) omitting articles where they are obligatory in native English language, and inserting them where they do not occur in English as a native language, (4) failing to use correct forms in tag questions, e.g., ‘isn’t it?’ or ‘no?’, instead of the ones used in standard British and American English, (5) inserting redundant prepositions, (6) overusing verbs such as ‘do’, ‘have’, ‘make’, ‘put’ and ‘take’, (7) replacing infinitive constructions with ‘that clause’ as in ‘I want that…’, and (8) overdoing explicitness, e.g. ‘black colour’, and ‘dead body’.

Knowing the existence of Englishes within ASEAN including disparities in the syntactic and morphological features of it, policymakers settling of the English language per se as the bloc’s ‘working language’ in the ASEAN Charter ratified in 2008 was only proper. The prevention of language policy squabbles among member nations was anticipated.

What appropriate language status would then be conferred to English within ASEAN? This question directs us to the next portion of the paper setting parameters on how English should be recognized within ASEAN.
ELF within ASEAN’s Context

English language has gained its international language status (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2000; Kachru, 1992; Jenkins, 2000; McKay, 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Phillipson, 2008; Widdowson, 2003) long before the era of today’s globalization. The imminent use of English language in international setting in the aftermath of World War II was well documented.

The studies of World Englishes discipline in linguistics and socio-linguistics fields are intensified that time. Thus, English become a global language (Crystal, 2003); ‘glocal’ language (Pakir, 2000); lingua franca (Jenkins, 2007); world language (Brutt-Grifler, 2002); and, lately an international language (Jenkins, 2000).

Due to the problematic definition of English usage within ASEAN, a search for a more acceptable terminology sprang. Seidlhofer (2004), Jenkins (2007) and Kirkpatrick (2007) strongly insinuate the usage of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) within ASEAN. Phillipson (1992) defines a lingua franca as “a language which is widely used, or taught in schools for use, between nationals of the same country, but which is not the mother tongue of all” (ch. 7).

Dissecting from Phillipson’s definition, it qualifies all ten-member nations within the association based on the nationwide implementation of English language in the curriculum of primary, secondary and tertiary levels of learning. Although, the educational level of implementation varies from one country to another, studying English language is not an option. Furthermore, the adoption of English as ASEAN’s ‘working language’ was never questioned. The proposals of Indonesia to adopt Bahasa Indonesia and Vietnamese’s colonial language, French, as official languages within the bloc were never realized.

Within ASEAN, the authors propose a representation on the use of English language. Figure 2: ASEAN Communication Model captivates the dynamic written and/or spoken communication happening between and among member states. Core in the model are the rods that connect all ten-member states within the bloc including that of members-in-waiting nations, Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea currently negotiating their membership in the future. Permanent member nations are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The usage of English as the ‘working language’ is evident.

The numerous rods represent the bilateral and multilateral interaction between and among ASEAN member nations. Bilateral communication is imminent when two nations
come together to negotiate on a certain treaty and/or agreement. Meanwhile, multilateral interaction usually happens annually during ASEAN Summit when all the government heads of member states gather together for a retreat.

![ASEAN's Communication Model](image)

The above model embodies the concurrent ASEAN status quo in the following areas: (1) it reflects an equal footing among member nations of the bloc in all aspects of dealings within ASEAN as prescribed in the 2008 ratified ASEAN Charter, (2) it doesn’t discriminate nations according to their historical origins, economic wealth, political systems, and international prestige, (3) it mirrors the concurrent creation of numerous bilateral and or multilateral agreements between and among member nations such as the 1979 MOU between Malaysia and Thailand on the development of their claims in the Gulf of Thailand, the 1990 water agreement between Malaysia and Singapore, the creation of Mekong River Commission in 1995 (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam), the Treaty on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons in 2011 between the Philippines and Thailand, (4) it recognizes independence of each member country in dealing with their own internal affairs, (5) it endorses impartiality on language usage and not dominance of a member nation’s official language such as Thai, Malay, Filipino, among others, (6) it supports free flow of communication, (7) it supports ASEAN as a single community towards many aspects in dealing with regional issues and international matters.

Outside the web are instances where bilateral and/or multilateral communications occur. Within ASEAN, internal organizations were created in various themes: commerce,
culture, defense, health, human rights, law, social media, tourism, university network, youth development and so on.

ASEAN, as a single bargaining entity established external relations with Australia, Canada, China, European Union, India, Japan, Republic of Korea (ROK), New Zealand, Pakistan, Russia, United States, and to the UN. Other entities were created such as ASEAN +3, East Asia Summit (EAS), Ambassadors to ASEAN, and ASEAN Dialogue Coordinator.

With the cross-cultural communication happening within ASEAN, the next question revolves around the intelligibility of the speakers and listeners within the bloc.

**Intelligibility, Comprehensibility and Interpretability**

The internationalization of English via colonialism gave birth to varieties and sub-varieties of English within ASEAN like those that are found in Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore. The focus now shifts on speaker and listener’s intelligibility wherein its broadest sense mean “intelligible production and felicitous interpretation of English” (Nelson, 1995, p.274). Within the field of World Englishes, a commonly used is Smith and Nelson’s (1985) tripartite definition of intelligibility, the ability of the listener to recognize individual words or utterances; comprehensibility, the listener’s ability to understand the meaning of the word or utterance in its given context; and interpretability, the ability of the listener to understand the speaker’s intentions behind the word or utterance. As Matsuura (2007) stated, “research on intelligibility and / or comprehensibility of different varieties of English appears to become more important than ever” (p. 274). Thus, the need to study the intelligibility and/or comprehensibility between and among ASEAN citizens must be intensified.

**Comprehensibility of Englishes within ASEAN: An Ongoing Research**

The apprehension that ASEAN citizens may not comprehend each other due to their diverse phonetic and phonological systems open up more research opportunities in the field of World Englishes. Kachruvian’s model’s demarcation of ASEAN into two circles, Outer and Expanding Circles needs continuing researches. Thus, the ongoing study titled, “Comprehensibility of Englishes within ASEAN” sought to answer the following: (1) Are the Englishes in the Outer Circle comprehensible to the citizens of the Expanding Circle nations? (2) Which Outer Circle’s Englishes are the most and least comprehensible among the Expanding Circle’s citizens? (3) What are the factors related to the Expanding Circle’s citizens comprehension of Outer Circles’ Englishes?

In search of a contextualized testing for the comprehensibility of Englishes within ASEAN, eight video clip samples spoken by citizens of the Outer Circle within ASEAN is
presented to the citizens of the Expanding Circle citizens. With no standard testing methodology to measure comprehensibility of Englishes, this research charted the use of multiple-choice in the form of literal and inferential questions while maintaining the use of audio-visual clips as a more authentic communication sample against voice listening activity. Literal comprehension deals with the straightforward understanding of the text while inferential comprehension focus on meaning not explicitly stated in the text.

The use of multiple-choice exam is to measure the comprehensibility of Englishes and not a language test to gauge students’ English proficiency and/or achievement test. The endorsement of such instrument in testing new Englishes helps in changing pedagogical assessment paradigms “away from a reliance on discrete-item tests on formal grammatical competence and instead develops instruments that are sensitive to performance and pragmatics” (Canagarajah, 2006: 1).

In the use of audio-visual instruments, although it is a one-way communication by the speaker to the listener, the visual clues expressed by the former may help the comprehension of the later visibly seen in an actual communication process. Canagarajah (2006) pointed out that assessment must emphasize on “the strategies of negotiation, situated performance, communicative repertoire, and language awareness” (p. 1).

The sample population of this study is composed of 180 university students randomly selected from six Expanding Circle’s nations namely, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. The sample population is currently enrolled in seven universities within Expanding Circle ASEAN nations such as Assumption University (Thailand), Chiangmai University (Thailand), Khon Kaen University (Thailand), Prince of Songkla University Hat Yai Campus (Thailand), Mahapanya Vidyalai University (Thailand), National University of Laos (Laos), and University of Riau (Indonesia).

Instruments being used are a questionnaire, audio-visual instruments and comprehension test. The questionnaire is administered before the comprehension test. It explores the various factors related to the comprehension level of the Expanding Circle’s citizens towards the Outer Circle Englishes. Sample population’s personal background, and exposures to languages, education, work, social media, socialization, and travel and stay abroad are looked at. Sample population’s perceived language proficiencies and exposures to various factors shall be correlated with their scores in the comprehension test.

The audio-visual instruments are authentic materials were selected and downloaded from www.youtube.com. Excerpts had to exhibit the following characteristics: not a
rehearsed speech, speaker’s fluency, topics spoken had to be very general in nature, not too long, and not too short. Variety of the topics but within the realm of everyday life was considered and the length of each spoken variety is within 54-64 seconds. All audio-visual instruments were checked for voice clarity and illumination. Native speakers of each variety and experts confirmed support and justification for the choice of audio-visual instruments as representatives of the mentioned Englishes by not selecting on too standard and extreme varieties of Englishes.

The Comprehension Test is administered right after each variety of English from the Outer Circle is played once. There are eight booklets each containing five multiple-choice questions based on each of the eight audio-visual excerpts. Each question contains four choices to limit the chance of guessing. In each booklet, three literal questions and two inferential questions were asked. The inclusion of literal questions tests the sample population’s ability to comprehend spoken text while the inferential questions aim to look at their ability to interpret the meaning beyond the spoken text.

Procedures

Table 3: The procedures of the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>The Procedures of the Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Profiling of sample population from various universities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Experts’ checked on the audio-visual instruments, questionnaire and comprehension test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>Pilot testing of the questionnaire and comprehension test.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Step 4 | Data collections are presently conducted at eight different universities in the Expanding Circle’s nations.  
          Part 1. Survey questionnaire administration (15 minutes).  
          Part 2. Comprehension test administration (23 minutes). |
| Step 5 | Analysis of questionnaire survey results |
| Step 6 | Analysis of comprehension test results |
| Step 7 | Statistical interpretations of gathered data |

Conclusion

The existence of diverse linguistic features embedded in the localized and/or nativised Englishes within ASEAN are detectible. It is clear that a shift from Kachru’s model is moving toward a direction where understanding the very nature of Englishes within the bloc is much needed. The denial of an ASEAN official language much more to the recognition of English as the bloc’s official language leaves ASEAN no clear-cut official language policy to be implemented across the ten member states. There is a compelling evidence established that NNS-NNS communication between and among ASEAN citizens composed of Bruneians, Burmese, Cambodians, Filipinos, Indonesians, Laotians, Malaysians, Singaporeans, Thais, and Vietnamese is looming upon the realization of “Ten Nations One Community” in 2015.
notwithstanding the presence of two circles, Outer and Expanding in the historical spread of English globally.

The ongoing research on the Comprehensibility of Englishes within ASEAN will definitely contribute to research gaps in World Englishes especially within the bloc’s established varieties and emerging sub-varieties in the Outer Circle.
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