Attitudes to Language and Culture in the EFL Classroom: British versus American English?

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this article is to report on the results of an empirical study carried out among the students of English Philology at Las Palmas de Gran Canaria University in order to elicit data about their attitudes toward the British and the American varieties of English. In view of the outcome, we try to suggest ways in which we can cope with students' tendency to put too high a value on British English and to judge the other varieties as inferior. Specifically, we argue that when teaching English in the 21st century, it makes little sense to restrict the limits of the language and the culture to the British sphere. In fact, the evolution of English into an international language requires that all of its speakers, learners, and teachers recognise and reaffirm the diversity of cultures English represents throughout the world today.

Key words: ELT, attitudes, language and culture, varieties of English.

RESUMEN

Este artículo recoge los resultados de un estudio realizado entre el alumnado de Filología Inglesa de la Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria para reca-bar datos acerca de sus actitudes hacia las variedades de inglés británico y ame-

ricano. Los resultados obtenidos nos llevan a plantear algunas sugerencias para intentar evitar que nuestros estudiantes continúen con la tendencia a valorar demasiado la variedad británica y a pensar que las otras son inferiores. En concreto, defendemos la idea de que en la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa en el siglo XXI debemos evitar limitarnos al círculo de la lengua y la cultura británicas, reconociendo así la diversidad lingüística y sobre todo cultural que el inglés como lengua internacional representa en la actualidad.

Palabras clave: enseñanza del inglés, actitudes, lengua y cultura, variedades del inglés.

1. Introduction

This article reports on the results of an empirical study carried out among our students of English Philology at Las Palmas de Gran Canaria University (henceforth, ULPGC) to elicit data about their attitudes toward the British and the American varieties of English. We were keenly interested in analyzing the kind of evaluations they make of them, as well as discovering the ideologies they perceive these speech varieties and cultures to have. Our initial hypothesis was that a comparative analysis of the attitudes these university students of English Philology have towards the British and the American varieties will reveal feelings which are more strongly positive towards British English than towards American English. The basis for this hypothesis lies on the fact that it has been a long-standing trend for English teachers in the Canary Islands to speak and teach a British variety of English to their students. Among the reasons for this choice we can mention the tradition for would-be teachers to be taught in this pronunciation style of English in Spanish universities, the relative closeness of Great Britain to this archipelago, the presence of British tourists since the 19th century or even the business and cultural relationships that have existed between the Canary Islands and the United Kingdom for many centuries.[1]

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[1] For the study of these relationships cf. Morales Lezcano (1970); Quintana Navarro (1992) and González Cruz (1995).

In fact, in the context of the ULPGC at least, the current textbooks (until the academic course 2006-07) for the university subjects *English Language I* and *English Language II* [2] use the British variety of English. However, nowadays, the increasing presence and influence of the USA is recognized worldwide, and the Canaries are not an exception. Moreover, not only should this American influence be taken into account, but also the widespread change of attitude among many English teachers and specialists towards the necessity of including other varieties of the English language rather than the British one alone in the English language class. Contrary to this assumption, the textbooks for first and second graders only include a very few passages to illustrate American English pronunciation and vocabulary. Besides, at the time of answering the survey, some students had already been instructed in the issues of language variation and language attitudes,[3] but this does not seem to have had a strong influence on their answers.

In view of the results obtained, in this article we suggest ways in which we can cope with students' tendency to put too high a value on British English and to judge the other varieties as inferior. Specifically, we argue that the label "the English language" refers now to a complex of many different varieties of language in use in all kinds of situations in many parts of the world. Therefore, when teaching English in the 21st century, it makes little sense to restrict the limits of the language and the culture to the British sphere. In fact, the evolution of English into an international language requires that all of its speakers, learners, and teachers recognise and reaffirm the diversity of cultures English represents throughout the world today.

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[2] The books are the following: Clive Oxenden, Christina Latham-Koenig, (with Jane Hudson for the workbook). 2001. *English File. Upper Intermediate.* Oxford University Press. (for *English Language I*). For the next academic course, 2007-08, this book will be replaced by the one titled *Across Cultures* (2004) by Elizabeth Sharman (Longman).

  Liz and John Soars. 2003. *New Headway. Advanced Student's book.* Oxford (for *English Language II*).

[3] The subject which deals with these sociolinguistic issues is taught in the third course, but in practice, as there are no official restrictions, students can register before they have completed all the subjects of the previous courses.

2. Attitudes in EFL teaching and learning

Attitudes have generally been defined as something that is closely «linked to a person's values and beliefs, and promotes or discourages the choices made in all realms of activity, whether academic or informal» (McGroarty, 1996: 5). Language planning, bilingual education and, particularly, second or foreign language learning are examples of some of the fields that require research on language attitudes. In the last decades many studies (cf. Agheyisi and Fishman 1970; Allport Brown 1973; Cooper and Fishman 1974, 1977; Gardner and Lambert 1972; Gardner and Smythe 1977, 1979, 1982; Gardner 1985; McGroarty 1996; Schmid 1992; Titone 1982, among others) have proved the crucial role that the affective factors play on the process of second or foreign language learning. One case in point is B. Spolsky (1969: 281), who almost 40 years ago strongly underlined

> ...the importance of attitude as one of the factors explaining degree of proficiency a student achieves in learning a second language. His attitude to speakers of the language will have a great effect on how well he learns. A person learns a language better when he wants to be a member of the group speaking that language.

In *The Spread of English*, Fishman (cited by Flaitz, 1988: 10) asserted that "languages are not liked or disliked in a vacuum, but rather liked or disliked as symbolic of values of peoples, of ideologies, of behaviors. It is the symbolic nature of English and affect with respect to its associations that we must seek to explore more widely". However, according to Flaitz (1988: 10), thus far "Fishman appears to be suggesting that English as a language of wider communication may be culturally and ideologically void despite the strength of American political, economic, and cultural hegemony." In fact, since English is now recognized as an international lingua franca, the relationship between language, ideology and culture has to be examined much more carefully, and this desire of being a member of the group speaking a certain language is not so clear.

On the other hand, from the perspective of ESL teachers, the studies on attitudes towards British and American English will help us make certain decisions in the classroom. As L. Thomas (Thomas & Wareing, 1999: 188) has stated, "awareness of how attitudes might be formed or manipulated may not make us immune to them, but it may help us to evaluate their influence on our own practices."

It was with these ideas in mind that we decided to carry out this research among our ULPGC students of English Philology. Apart from our interest in learning about our students' attitudes and evaluations of the two varieties in question, another important aim that we had in mind was to search for practical ways to help expanding students' perception of the English language and cultural varieties.

3. Some local antecedents

Concern for the existence of certain attitudes and their role in the process of foreign language learning has long been felt in Spain. In fact, as González Cruz and Luján García (1997: 205) put forward, the recognition of the existence of a certain incongruity between the efforts made by the Spanish educational system and the results achieved by students, as regards their learning of English, implies that we should try to learn more about their attitudes so that we can find an explanation for the low level of proficiency that a majority of Spaniards seem to have. Some previous studies (cf. Palacios Martínez, 1994) have attempted to analyse the situation of the teaching of English in Spain and thus discover the reasons why in our country we tend to find it so difficult to speak a foreign language, particularly in the case of English. Palacios Martínez (1994) analyzed in depth all the aspects involved in the process of teaching/learning English (such as motivation, attitudes, opinions related to textbooks and materials, tasks to promote the four skills, the new curriculum for foreign languages, etc.) in the Spanish educational system, and offered some meaningful figures.

In turn, Castro Calvín (1991: 20-21) also studied some of the difficulties that hamper the English language learning process and suggested "the quick turnover of teachers as one of the thorny problems that pervades Spanish education". In his own words, "the continuous rotation of teachers makes students feel like passengers on a ship crossing a stormy sea." As González Cruz and Luján García (1997: 205) stated, "Perhaps, teachers are not motivated because of job conditions, but what is obvious is that teachers have to be motivated for them to motivate their learners". Another possible explanation that these two authors give for the bad results is related to the traditionally "proud" attitude of Spaniards, "whose language was once the language of an empire in which the sun never set. Maybe,

unconsciously our minds refuse to accept that Spanish is not the world language, and since we cannot accept this fact, we cannot teach/learn another language successfully". In addition to this, the fact that there is no oral exam at the PAU, the official set of exams students must pass at the end of the High School period, has without question contributed to these poor results. Teachers and students alike tend to feel compelled to work the skills of reading and writing in order to pass the exam and set aside the skills of listening and speaking as they are no part of the test.

At the local level of the Canaries we might also mention some other works that have attempted to analyse the role of attitudes. Thus, in a 1997 survey on the reasons for studying English and the attitudes towards that language among ULPGC students both at the Philology Faculty and at the School of Economics, M. I. González Cruz and S. Henríquez Jiménez (1997: 134) found that although students recognize the present importance and necessity of having a certain proficiency of the English language, not only for its outstanding role in social and working issues, but also as an essential tool for international communication, there is a slight resentment, a certain reluctance to what is seen as a cultural and linguistic invasion in our society. According to the authors of the survey, by no means, this reluctant attitude in favour of the students' own cultural and linguistic values could be criticized, and they suggest this attitude could have an influence on the development of the second language learning process.

In 1999, C. I. Luján García carried out a wider research on the attitudes and uses of the English language in the Canary Islands, both in Tenerife and Gran Canaria, which are the most populated islands. Later published as *La lengua inglesa en Canarias: Usos y actitudes,* in this research she (Luján García 2003: 195) highlights the students' wish to travel to any English-speaking country, especially to the United Kingdom as "they consider British English to be more pure than American". Further on, Luján García (2003: 211-2) states that:

> ...podemos observar cómo existe cierta actitud negativa hacia la variedad americana, ya que en la mayoría de las parejas, el adjetivo que define una cualidad negativa obtuvo un porcentaje mayor que el que designa una cualidad positiva. Además, debemos señalar que dicha actitud negativa es más destacada entre los informantes de Las Palmas, pues la asociación de adjetivos negativos con la variedad americana es más clara. Entre los informantes de Santa Cruz observamos también una actitud nega-

tiva, aunque no tan notable, pues las cifras más importantes son neutrales, es decir, no se definen claramente por la aceptación o el rechazo de dicha variedad.

All these previous works seem to confirm the role of attitudes, which are varied and which prove that people in the Canaries are not indifferent to the realities of English in today's world. In turn, this justifies the interest and the need to carry out this research among our students.

4. Our questionnaire

For our research, a total of 105 subjects responded to the questionnaire, and all of them were students of English Philology at the ULPGC. We took into consideration their gender and their university grade, with the following distribution: 26 males and 79 females; 39 students of first grade, 27 second-graders, 23 third-graders and 16 fourth-graders.

The instrument was a written questionnaire that we have reproduced in section A of our appendix below, and which was passed between March and April 2007. This questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first and second sections focussed on evaluations of American and British English. Two identical sets of bi-polar adjectives commonly used by the Spaniards to describe both varieties of English were presented as semantic-differential scales (Fasold, 1984). After listening to two short dialogues with the same meaning but different accents and vocabulary, the subjects were asked to select a number for each scale, the one which best reflected their evaluation of British English first, and then American English. To select those adjectives, we followed those chosen for the 1999 research by C. I. Luján García on the English language in the Canary Islands.

The third section consisted of a succession of statements which were believed to reflect possibly common attitudes held by Canarians toward American and British people, American and British culture, and American and British ideology. This section included a measure of attitudes toward some aspect of the British realm to serve as a point of comparison with the American realm. The factors for analysis over these ideology items were: positive orientation toward British ideology, culture and people; positive orientation towards American ideology, culture and people; negative orientation towards American ideology, culture and

people; and preference for Americans over British. Respondents were asked to select a number on a five-point scale, ranging from *(1) agree completely* to *(5) do not agree at all,* which most closely corresponded to their own personal feeling about each statement. Again, these statements were based on Flaitz's 1988 study on *French Perceptions of English as a World Language* and Luján García's 1999 research, later published in 2003, as already mentioned.

5. The results

The data obtained in our survey are presented in section B of our Appendix below. Broadly speaking, the subjects in the study perceived American English as an informal and fast language, while British English was believed to be more pleasant and rich, but fast too. This seems to indicate that the British model is superior to other forms of the language, an idea that the British themselves have always promoted.

In the first section of the questionnaire on the students' attitudes towards British English, the results were not conclusive. Although, in general, when choosing between the sets of bi-polar adjectives, ULPGC students associated British English with the positive adjectives rather than with the negative ones, students did not make a clear decision on their preferences. As regards their grades, fourth graders were the least in favour of British English, although their attitude towards it was positive all in all.

In the second section of the questionnaire on the students' attitudes towards American English, the results were again not conclusive. Although students believe American English to be informal and especially fast, they also think, mostly fourth graders, that it is pleasant.

The results of the third section with the succession of statements on British and American ideology, culture and people were clearer and more conclusive. As regards the statements about the English language, students agree with the following:

1. British English has all the qualities of an international language.
2. Canarian children should all study British English.
3. I like everything that is British.

They also agree with the statement "If I had to leave the Canary Islands and spoke English perfectly, I would rather go to Great Britain than to the United States of America", even though they do not believe the British to be friendly and open. Except in the case of fourth graders, female students, and especially first graders, agree with this idea of going to the United Kingdom more than their male classmates. The reason for this preference could rely not only on their preference for the British variety but on an extra linguistic factor: distance. It is hard for islanders to leave their islands, but it is especially so for younger women.

In general, students did not give a clear answer to the statements about American people and culture. Most of them prefer to answer that they did not agree or disagree with the statements, and they felt more inclined to disagree with the following statements:

1. United States of America is the greatest symbol of progress
2. I feel a great respect for American people
3. Americans are poorly-educated and rude
4. If Canarians began speaking English, we would adopt American values.

When describing the British and American varieties of English, our students do not seem to be as categorical as Lujan's respondents were in 2003; still, they link American English with the negative adjectives informal, fast and unclear; but also with positive adjectives such as pleasant and nice. In contrast, they judge British English to be pleasant, rich but fast. Regarding the other sets of adjectives, students believe British English to be closer to the positive rather than the negative adjectives, but not in a very conclusive way. This means they have a clear preference for British English, which "appears to reflect the traditional European notion that the British variety of the English language is a superior model for students to follow," as already stated by Flaitz (1988: 190).

After examining the third section of the questionnaire, which provides different statements about British and American ideology, culture and people, we find that Great Britain is the country most of our students will choose to live, rather than the States, though in general we can see that they did not agree with the idea that British people were friendly neither with the suggestion that Americans are poorly-educated and rude.

Although students did not justify their preference for Britain (actually, no section in our questionnaire inquired on this aspect) we assume that the reasons must be the same as the ones mentioned by Luján García (2003: 205), following her informants' ideas. The first one had to do with the smaller distance; the second idea was that they thought British men and women tend to be more polite and conservative than Americans; others claimed the long relationship between the islands and Great Britain, while some stated that we actually receive more British than American tourists and we have more contact with the British.

Our students seem to agree with the statement: "Without the American influence, English will not be such an important language". This indirectly contradicts the opinion that English was already an international language before the U.S.A. became a world power, an idea that was suggested by some of Luján's respondants, and which Flaitz (1988: 193) also records when she writes:

> ...references were often made during the ethnographic interviewing to the role played by England in earlier times with respect to the source of American English as well as to the spread of English during the colonial period.

Our informants do not seem to be worried about the American influence on Canarian culture, and they say they do not feel a great respect for American people as they do not believe the United States of America to be the greatest symbol of progress. However, our university students disagree with the idea that Americans are poorly-educated and rude. Neither do they believe that "If Canarians began speaking English, we would adopt American values". This seems to suggest that, in accordance with Luján García's (2003: 206) respondents, our subjects also consider that language and values are separate and that speaking a foreign language does not mean adopting their cultural values. In a certain way, this is an idea that coincides with Fox's (2004: 14) view that despite the economic power of the United States and the recognised instrumental role of the English language all over the world, it is not that easy for people to abandon their cultural identities. In her own words:

> Just because people everywhere want to wear Nike trainers and drink Coke does not necessarily mean that they are any less fiercely concerned about their cultural identity – indeed many are prepared to fight and die for their nation, religion, terri-

tory, culture or whatever aspect of 'tribal' identity is perceived to be at stake. The economic influence of American corporate giants may indeed be overwhelming, and even pernicious, but their cultural impact is perhaps less significant than either they or their enemies would like to believe. Given our deeply ingrained tribal instincts, and increasing evidence of fragmentation of nations into smaller and smaller cultural units, it does not make sense to talk of a world of six billion people becoming a vast monoculture. The spread of globalization is undoubtedly bringing changes to the cultures it reaches, but these cultures were not static in the first place, and change does not necessarily mean the abolition of traditional values.

6. The cultures of English

In view of the results commented above, there are some reflections that we feel we should make. As Chew (1997: 89) has suggested, we believe that "the globalization of English holds many implications for the language teacher and the classroom". Perhaps the most important notion that not only our ULPGC students, but people in general, need to learn is that just because a language or language variety is dominant, it is not superior to other linguistic options that by a different set of historical chances might have been dominant. Furthermore, when considering the reality of English as a world language today, we cannot ignore the importance of many other types of varieties which have greatly con-tributed to shape the "big family" that nowadays constitutes what we call "the English language", giving it the special status that this unique language has. The members of this big family include, as Kachru (1985) has suggested, (a) *Colonial Standards,* a term that refers to the educated speech used in the mass media throughout the Anglosaxon world, i.e., England, USA, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and the Caribbean, where the users of the American vari-ety are a majority. (b) *Social dialects,* which have to do with speakers' social class or ethnic group, e.g. Black English in USA or Cockney in England. (c) *Pidgin Englishes,* which are reduced forms resulting from contact situations between English and other aboriginal languages, and which are not spoken natively, e.g. *West African Pidgin English* and *Tok Pisin,* used in Papua New Guinea (cf. Todd, 1984). (d) *Creole Englishes,* which have become native languages and have remark-ably expanded in the process; it is the case of *Jamaican Creole English* and a creole variety that developed in Australia, called *Australian Creole English* (cf. Sandefur, 1983). (e) Varieties of *Second-language English* which emerge as a result of the contact

of these speakers with either native speakers or merely through the educational system. (f) *Foreign Englishes,* used in those countries where English is merely an international language and does not perform any intranational role. (g) *Immigrant Englishes,* like Chicano English in USA or Panjabi English in the UK, i.e., they are second-language varieties that tend to develop in immigrant contexts in the English speaking countries. (h) *Language-shift Englishes,* which refers to those varieties that emerge when English replaces the language of a particular community like in the case of *Hiberno-English* or the *Amerindian English.*

The recognition of this complex entity that we label "English" makes us agree with Kachru (1985: 29) when he pointed out:

> I do not believe that the traditional notions of codification, standardization, models and methods apply to English anymore. The dichotomy of its native and non-native users seems to have become irrelevant. We may talk of standards for our linguistic satisfaction, but we seem to be at a loss to explain what we mean by them, and equally important, how to apply them. I do not think that in discussing standards for English, the sociolinguistic reality of each English-using speech fellowship can be ignored.

In contrast to this idea, our students' preference for British English does not come as a surprise; their familiarity with this variety contributes to their liking and their holding more positive feelings for what they subjectively consider to be the original language model. In fact, a quick glance at their textbooks reveals that the presence of any other variety of English in them is minimal. Even when they include an interview with an American star like Liza Minelli, as is the case with Soars's book, it turns out that she imitates the British pronunciation, with the excuse that she lived for long and went to school in England.

On the other hand, it's only in the syllabus for *English Language II* that we find, among the aims of this subject, one that directly deals with the culture and language variation issues. Specifically, we read: "To be able to appreciate the British and American culture through the language learning". All this leads us to put forward a number of suggestions that have to do with our daily work in the language classroom.

As we all know, language and culture are very closely intertwined in such a way that they are generally recognised as being inseparable. This idea is closely

linked to the duality of "language as expression of an individual's thoughts and intentions, and language as expression of a speech community's knowledge and expectations" (Kramsch, 1993: 10). Culture has been defined as "shared knowledge, i.e., what people must know in order to act as they do, make the things they make, and interpret their experience in the distinctive way they do" (Holland and Quinn 1987, cited by Yamuna Kachru 1992: 340-41). Many sociolinguists have expressed their interest in "the nature of the relationship between language acquisition and /or linguistic competence and socialization on the one hand, and grammar of language and 'grammar of culture' on the other" (Y. Kachru, 1992: 341). In connection with this, Yamuna Kachru (1992: 341) also highlights "the role of language in shaping, storage, retrieval, and communication of knowledge".

In addition to this, when reflecting on the teaching of culture, Claire Kramsch (1993: 8) wrote:

> One often reads in teachers' guide-lines that language teaching consists of teaching the four skills 'plus culture'. This dichotomy of language and culture is an entrenched feature of language teaching around the world. It is part of the lin-guistic heritage of the profession. Whether it is called (Fr.) *civilisation*, (G.) *Landeskunde*, or (Eng.) *culture*, culture is often seen as mere information conveyed by the language, not as a feature of language itself; cultural awareness becomes an educational objective in itself, separate from language. If, however, language is seen as social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching. Cultural awareness must then be viewed both as enabling language proficiency and as being the outcome of reflection on language proficiency.

In fact, as Byram, Nichols and Stevens (2001: 1) admit, "it is not very difficult to persuade language teachers that it is important to teach language-and-culture as an integrated whole, probably because the cultural dimension [...] has long been part of the thinking of the language teaching profession even if it has not been part of its practice". For this reason, it seems inevitable for our language syllabus to include the cultural component, as long as language use is considered to be indissociable from «the creation and transmission of culture» (Kramsch, 1993: 9). In this sense, we must take into account that culture, as stated by González Cruz and González de la Rosa (1998: 44-45),

> may be viewed either in terms of its components, which include the language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, works of art, rituals and ceremonies of a community, or in terms of the institutional structure and functions of a society, that is, its social organization, its economic and educational systems, religion, custom and law.

All these items can be used to complement our teaching, or even as a basis for it, in the form of oral or written texts that deal with each of these topics, appropriately adapted to the various contexts of English, while they can also be linguistically exploited. As Berns (1992: 12) put it, "It is essential that teachers understand the nature of the language they are teaching, its functions, its forms, and its role in the context in which it is learned and used". This means that when trying to describe the dialectic relationship of language and culture, we find that, as language teachers, we must further our thinking about this relation of language and culture in our English language teaching. In the current global world, we have to bear in mind that we need to suggest ways of developing not only the linguistically and culturally competent learner but also, as Kramsch (1993: 9) put it, «the cross-cultural personality».

After analysing the present situation of English as a world language, several authors (cf. Kachru 1992), like Smith (1987: 3) have pointed out that «English already represents many cultures and it can be used by anyone as a means to express any cultural heritage and any value system». Likewise, Nakayama (1982: 67) agrees that «language and culture may be inseparably bound together, but English cannot be bound only to the cultures of native English speaking nations». The extraordinary spread of English justifies the fact that English is now seen both as an international and an intercultural language. Some scholars (Modiano 1996; Crystal 1990) have also brought forward the idea of the emergence of a new Mid-Atlantic English,[4] or rather, a number of European Englishes. Admittedly, the adoption of English as the language used *par excellence* for communication within the European Union crucially contributes to unify this multicultural and multilingual area. However, it is a fact that English is adapting to the gene-

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4   This is a new variety in which "British pronunciations have been neutralized" and whose vocabulary includes "both American and British items" (Modiano, 1996: 207).

ral characteristics of each of the European languages, not only at the level of pronunciation but also at the gramatical and even at the discourse levels. At the same time, this differentiation seems to play a role in maintaining the feeling of cultural and linguistic diversity among Europeans, who recognise themselves as Italians, French, Spaniards or Germans when using their own varieties of Italian English, French English, Spanish English, or German English. This idea can be used as a strategy to persuade our students of the important role of English as a means of consolidating our identity as Europeans. As Berns (1992: 13) put it:

> language needs to be recognized as more than a means of interpersonal communication. Its use as a marker of personal relationships, a symbol of identity with a group, and social values and goals is a legitimate concern. Understanding these uses is particularly critical [...] in the unique cultural and social context of Europe, where English has a long history, where users have divergent opinions about this language and its use.

In this sense, when discussing the realities of English as a cultural universe, Wierzbicka (2006: 4) recognizes the difficulties that emerge if we try to link this language "with any particular culture or way of living, thinking or feeling" due to its widespread use and its all-embracing role in the modern world. Besides, she notes how recent books on the huge literature dealing with English do not seem to dwell on the issue of language and culture, and, what's more, "discussions of the links between English and Anglo culture may also seem to be best avoided", perhaps because they are considered to be "offensive or at least insensitive". This author emphasizes the cultural neutrality Quirk et al. (1985: 16) give to the English language, while they "do not deny any cultural underpinning altogether" (Wierzbicka, 2006: 4). The point is, as noted by Crystal in his *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (2003: 106), that "English is now the dominant or official language in over 75 territories". Thus, as posed by Wierzbicka (2006: 5), it is understandable that so many "cultural histories can't be all discussed at length in a one-volume encyclopedia. But the question still suggests itself: what about the 'shared culture'?"

In our opinion, the situation can then be summarised neatly if we acknowledge the crucial fact that the English language today has to be seen as having a dual nature, one as the language closely associated as much to the British or American

culture, as to the culture of any other native community; and the other, as a neutral international language for wider communication. An extreme case of this last side is that of the so-called controlled languages, i.e. an artificially defined subset of a natural language (usually of English), in which terminology, syntax, and/or semantics are constrained.[5] An example of such a language is AECMA, Simplified Technical English, the form used by pilots and air traffic controllers, and, in general, by the industries related to the aerospace.[6]

In sum, it is on the basis of these two views of English that we can establish the kind of qualification that we expect those students specializing in English Philology should have. While accepting the fact that the English language is

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[5] These controlled languages are achieved through terminological consistency and standardization, elimination of ambiguous and nonnecessary terminology (a typical controlled language vocabulary contains approximately 1,500 core words). They have been defined as "subsets of natural languages whose grammars and dictionaries have been restricted in order to reduce or eliminate both ambiguity and complexity" (Cf. http://www.ics.mq.edu.au/~rolfs/controlled-natural-languages/).Traditionally, controlled languages fall into two major categories: those that improve readability for human readers, particularly non-native speakers, and those that improve computational processing of the text. However, the issue of Controlled Languages (CL) is, undoubtedly, very controversial for linguists, editors and readers alike, but also for firms, since marketing and sales figures are at stake. As we can read at http://www.namahn.com/resources/documents/note-CL.pdf they have many key benefits but also several serious drawbacks, so they must be applied sensibly and pragmatically.

[6] In the late 1970s, the Association of European Airlines (AEA) asked the European Association of Aerospace Industries (AECMA) to investigate the readability of maintenance documentation in the civilian aircraft industry. AECMA asked the Aerospace Industries Association (AIA) of America to assist in this project. The resulting project groups from AECMA and AIA researched the procedural texts in maintenance manuals. The product of this effort was the AECMA Simplified English Guide. AECMA Simplified English was developed to help the users of English-language documentation in the aerospace sector understand what they read, particularly in multinational programs. Since the first publication of the AECMA Simplified English Guide, other non-aerospace industries have adopted the principles of AECMA Simplified English for their own documentation. AECMA Simplified English is now the Specification ASD Simplified Technical English. It is not only for those who do not have English as their native language, but also for those who do. (Cf. the official web site of the ASD Simplified Technical English Maintenance Group (STEMG): http://www.simplifiedenglish-aecma.org/Simplified_English.htm).

closely bound to the cultures of all the countries in the Anglosaxon world in which it is spoken natively or even as a second or official language, it must also be borne in mind that an equally salient use of English is that of a lingua franca, a neutral means of international communication. Both sides or perspectives should be the concern of the teachers and students of English Philology.

7. Concluding remarks

Several conclusions can be drawn from what has been said so far. First of all, it seems obvious that, due to the fact that they do not have enough opportunities of getting into contact with other varieties of English, our university students still consider British English as the model to follow. Although there is no negative attitude towards American culture and people —something that could have been expected, especially after the events in the last few years and more particularly among these young people— they say that they prefer to live in the United Kingdom. We ascribe this sort of attitude to the fact that this is the only variety they have had access to in the English language classroom. On the other hand, students are divided about the idea of American culture invading the islands but they do not seem to be very worried about American influence on our culture. Moreover, it is obvious that the fact that the United States is "the" world power lies behind the popularity of English as an international lingua franca. However, in the Canary Islands there is still a strong preference for British English, an idea that is based on the belief that this variety is more prestigious and educated.

In contrast to this, we still need both to admit ourselves and to make students realise that the cultural values of Great Britain and the United States become almost secondary in a world in which the English language has spread far beyond the territorial boundaries of the so called 'Inner Circle',[7] to become a language

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[7] As is well known, Kachru (1985; 1992) described the worldwide spread of English in terms of three concentric circles: the 'Inner Circle' refers to the territories where English is spoken as the first language, i.e. USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; the 'Outer Circle' contains the regions in Africa and Asia to which English was first transported in colonial contexts and where it has since existed alongside very different local languages, i.e. Bangladesh, Ghana,

of intranational use within the 'Outer Circle' and a lingua franca used by speakers of nearly all nations. In our opinion, however, there is not "an irreconcilable conflict between, on the one hand, the view that English is shared by people belonging to many different cultural traditions and, on the other, the notion that English itself —like any other language— is likely to have certain cultural assumptions and values embedded in it" (Wierzbicka, 2006: 5). The position that we take here, changing the direction of Wierzbicka's argument, is that while it is true that there is an 'Anglo' English —i.e., an English of the 'Inner Circle', including the traditional bases of English, where it is the primary language: the USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand— which obviously is not a cultural tabula rasa, we must admit that there are also many other "Englishes" around the world, all of them worthy of recognition, appreciation and study.

Following this line of thought, it becomes clear that although for some time now we have been hearing about world Englishes and the benefit of teaching different varieties of English to our students, we must say that in our country, and particularly in the Canary Islands, there is still a lot to be done. To start with, the new textbooks English teachers choose and use for all levels should be more open-minded and sensitive to the different varieties of English throughout the world. In this respect, at least we can congratulate ourselves on a very positive first step that has been given in the ULPGC context, since, as anticipated in foot-note 2 above, in the next academic course 2007-08, first graders of English Philology will begin to use the new textbook *Across Cultures,* by Elizabeth Sharman. This is presented as a "new, modular, flexible, user-friendly course" which provides "a wide variety of material on the English speaking world". The

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India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Phillipines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Zambia; and the 'Expanding Circle' includes the countries where English is spoken and taught more widely than other foreign languages, like China, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, the old USSR, Zimbabwe. This has been the most influential model of the spread of English, although, it is not without its problems (cf. Jenkins, 2003: 17). Among others, as Chacón Beltrán (2004: 176) explains, the fact that "this division is not clear cut as South Africa, for instance, is not included. Some authors would agree that it is part of the Inner Circle while others would say that it is part of the Outer Circle, since English in South Africa is not predominantly used by first-language speakers".

book gives particular focus to aspects of life in the UK and the USA, but "other English-speaking countries are regularly referred to", such as South Africa, Jamaica, Canada, Australia and Ireland. Unquestionably, this wider approach to the many faces of the English language and cultures will be very enriching for our students. It can even be plausibly expected that their attitudes are likely to change, though this idea, of course, raises an interesting point for further research.

Yet, for the moment, in this global planet, we can't but agree with Nelson (1992: 335-37) when he writes:

> Non-native Englishes exist as realities in the world, and native variety users, particularly those in language teaching, may find themselves having to do something about the fact, practically and attitudinally. While we may recognize the uses of, for example, Indian English, and may even praise the works of Indian English literature that strike our fancy, we continue to call them 'non-something,' therefore 'not-quite-right something'. If we recognize that there are differences between British and American English, yet we can avoid saying that one is 'right' and the other 'wrong', what allows us to continue to distinguish a native ('right') variety of English from a non-native ('wrong') variety? Will there come a time, for example, when my university will admit Nigerian students without making them take the English Placement Test, just as Canadian students are admitted now? After all, as we have seen, the native speaker is the outsider looking in when he approaches Indian and African texts. [...] Each English user must now say, "It is my language," and then adapt it variously to appropriate contexts, in 'my' culture or another's.

APPENDIX

a) The questionnaire

After listening to the voices first of an American English speaker, and then of a British English speaker, use the following scale to indicate your evaluation of each, as follows:

-2 if you **completely agree** with the adjective on the left

-1 if you **agree** with the adjective on the left

0 **neutral**

+1 if you agree with the adjective on the right

+2 if you **completely agree** with the adjective on the right

BRITISH ENGLISH IS

	-2	*-1*	*0*	*+1*	*+2*	
complex	__	__	__	__	__	*simple*
confusing	__	__	__	__	__	*clear*
pleasant	__	__	__	__	__	*upleasant*
ugly	__	__	__	__	__	*nice*
strong	__	__	__	__	__	*soft*
informal	__	__	__	__	__	*formal*
quick	__	__	__	__	__	*slow*
poor	__	__	__	__	__	*rich*

AMERICAN ENGLISH IS

	-2	*-1*	*0*	*+1*	*+2*	
complex	__	__	__	__	__	*simple*
confusing	__	__	__	__	__	*clear*
pleasant	__	__	__	__	__	*upleasant*
ugly	__	__	__	__	__	*nice*
strong	__	__	__	__	__	*soft*
informal	__	__	__	__	__	*formal*
quick	__	__	__	__	__	*slow*
poor	__	__	__	__	__	*rich*

For each of the following statements mark the number you believe best expresses your opinion. Use the following scale:

1 if you **completely agree**

2 if you **agree**

3 if you **don't know**

4 if you **disagree**

5 if you **completely disagree**

1. British English has all the qualities to be a world language.

1 2 3 4 5

2. American English has all the qualities to be a world language.

1 2 3 4 5

3. All Canarian children should learn British English.

1 2 3 4 5

4. All Canarian children should learn American English.

1 2 3 4 5

5. I like everything that is British English.

1 2 3 4 5

6. I like everything that is American English.

1 2 3 4 5

7. Without the American influence, English would not be such an important language.

1 2 3 4 5

8. I'm worried about the American influence on our culture.

    1 2 3 4 5

9. The United States is the greatest symbol of progress.

    1 2 3 4 5

10. I feel a high respect for American citizens.

    1 2 3 4 5

11. If I had to leave the Canary Islands and I spoke English perfectly, I'd rather live in England than in the United States.

    1 2 3 4 5

12. The Canaries have much more in common with England than with the United States.

    1 2 3 4 5

13. Americans are poorly educated and rude.

    1 2 3 4 5

14. I prefer the British to the Americans.

    1 2 3 4 5

15. If Canarian people started to speak English, we would adopt American cultural values.

    1 2 3 4 5

16. American culture is invading the Canary Islands.

    1 2 3 4 5

17. The British are very open-minded.

    1 2 3 4 5

18. Americans are very open-minded.

    1 2 3 4 5

b) The data

Table 1. Evaluation of British English according to students' grade

	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade	4th grade	Total
Complex-simple	2.74	3.14	2.13	3.31	2.80
Confusing-clear	2.38	2.77	1.86	2.56	2.4
Unpleasant-pleasant	2.05	2	1.95	2.75	2.12
Ugly-nice	2.43	2.22	1.91	2.5	2.84
Strong-soft	2.66	2.88	2	3.37	2.68
Informal-formal	2.10	1.81	2.13	2	2.48
Quick-slow	3.02	3.14	2.82	3	3.01
Poor-rich	2.15	2.07	2	2.37	2.13

Table 2. Evaluation of American English according to students' grade

	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade	4th grade	Total
Complex-simple	3	3.07	3	2.37	2.92
Confusing-clear	3.33	3.14	3.13	2.37	3.09
Unpleasant-pleasant	2.41	2.55	2.56	1.68	2.37
Ugly-nice	2.35	2.44	2.47	2.12	2.37
Strong-soft	3.05	2.85	3.43	2.31	2.97
Informal-formal	3.28	3.66	3.95	3.5	3.56
Quick-slow	3.38	3.96	4	3.62	3.70
Poor-rich	2.69	2.66	2.82	2.81	2.73

Table 3. Statements about British and American language varieties, culture and ideology according to students' grade and gender

	1st M	1st F	2nd M	2nd F	3rd M	3rd F	4th M	4th F	Total
1st statement	2.83	2.14	2.4	2.04	2	2.5	3	2.07	2.26
2nd statement	2.91	3.11	2.2	2.77	2.57	3.25	1.5	2.35	2.82
3rd statement	3.08	1.88	3	2.09	2.71	2.06	2.5	2.28	2.26
4th statement	3.25	2.92	3.4	2.86	3.57	2.93	2.5	2.21	2.91
5th statement	2.91	1.96	3.2	2.72	2.71	2.18	2.5	2.57	2.46
6th statement	2.66	3	2.2	2.68	3	3	2	2.07	2.71
7th statement	2.08	2.96	3.8	2.77	1.71	2.93	1	2.35	2.65
8th statement	2.41	2.81	3.6	2.63	1.71	3	2	2.57	2.67
9th statement	3.41	3	3	2.81	3.85	3.06	4.5	3.21	3.13
10th statement	3.08	3.14	3	3.04	3.85	2.75	2	3.64	3.14
11th statement	3	1.74	2.8	2.3	2.42	2.12	2	2.5	2.26
12th statement	3.16	2.44	3	3	2.28	2.68	2.5	3.07	2.78
13th statement	3.5	2.85	4	3.22	3.14	3.25	4	3.5	3.24
14th statement	3.08	2.62	2.6	3.18	3	3.18	2.5	3.42	3
15th statement	3.16	3.33	2.2	3.40	3.42	3.62	5	3.85	3.42
16th statement	3	3.22	3.6	2.95	2.71	2.75	2.5	2.64	2.96
17th statement	3.41	2.81	2	3.59	4.28	3.31	4	4.07	3.37
18th statement	3.16	2.81	2.8	2.68	2.71	2.93	4	2.78	2.85

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