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## International English in Its Sociolinguistic Contexts: Towards a Socially Sensitive EIL Pedagogy by Sandra Lee McKay and Wendy D. Bokhorst-Heng

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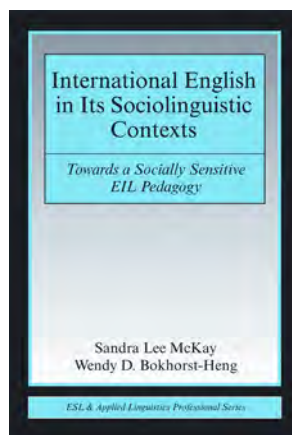
*International English in Its  
Sociolinguistic Contexts: Towards a  
Socially Sensitive EIL Pedagogy*

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Bokhorst-Heng

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*International English in Its Sociolinguistics Contexts: Towards a Socially Sensitive EIL Pedagogy* is a highly readable account of the sociolinguistic contexts of language learning and teaching pedagogy. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng have provided an illustrative examination of macro socio-historical factors with micro aspects of language use and learning in different contexts. The authors further conducted close analysis of different studies concerning how English is used internationally, incorporating examples from many countries

Chapter one, “English in an Era of Globalization,” offers a discussion of globalization as “an intensification of social relations across distant localities” and points out that it “necessitates a shared language, which presently is English” (25). The authors explain how English has evolved to become an international language, examine the danger of overtly promoting English learning, and trace the formation of world Englishes. Although these issues have been discussed in many previous works, the authors incorporate additional contemporary research to support their arguments of the dominance of English in different contexts. For example, McKay and Bokhorst-Heng include examples of English use in electronic communication, particularly focusing on how English is the primary language used on many important servers and websites. They have found that computer-mediated communication (CMC) occurs in a rich context that engages in complex issues concerning language use, identity, and literacy practices. Therefore, it is important to remind readers to use broad and critical perspectives regarding access, language transformation, and literacy practices on the Internet.

Chapter two, “Social Contexts for EIL Learning,” goes on to outline several issues in English teaching using Kachru’s 1985 seminal model of

linguistic circles. The authors are concerned with issues of language shifts, monolingualism, and the economic divide in English learning, all of which are imbued in the politics of access, power, and a belief in monolingualism or bilingualism. Kachru discusses three concentric circles: the inner circle wherein English is the primary language, the outer circle wherein English is a second language, and the expanding circle wherein English is viewed as a foreign language. Kachru's original work explores the ownership of language to try to establish a relationship between language and its functions. In fact, he tends to qualify the countries in the outer and expanding circles of his concentric circle by defining the "range" in English-speaking cultures and the "depth" or how far English has penetrated into a society. Traditional inner circle countries often view English as their own language and often feel hesitant to relinquish ownership to the outer and expanding circle countries. For example, many individuals are using English in a variety of domains. In addition, education also pays little attention to the development of students' first languages, and the authors borrow here from Kachru to discuss teaching and learning methodologies in different circles. The authors argue that countries in the expanding and outer circle should not embrace teaching methodology because they are "Western" and "modern." Teaching and learning in different local contexts should consider the appropriateness of those contexts and adapt accordingly.

In chapter three, "Multilingual Societies," McKay and Bokhorst-Heng discuss language use in multilingual countries from the perspective of diglossia, mother tongue maintenance, power, and prestige, focusing on the status of English in India and South Africa. Specifically, McKay and Bokhorst-Heng draw on Fishman's notion of domain, a concept that stresses the idea that each language has its own function and value; therefore, the work also discusses the importance of supporting mother tongue maintenance. Diglossia refers to the coexistence of two varieties of the same language throughout a speech community. Usually, one language is the literary or prestige dialect, and the other is the common dialect spoken by most of the population. Both dialects are imbricated in power, which maintains high or low varieties and affects the status of the mother tongue. Although both India and South Africa promote multilingualism, schools still adopt English-only instruction as a response to incentives created via citizenship, social integration, and economic power. The authors summarize the findings of a study about the importance of mother tongue maintenance, concluding that "children in bilingual programs outperform their counterparts in all English programs on tests of academic achievement in English" (86). For readers, this book would provoke thinking about how to promote and maintain students' first language (L1). Through maintaining L1 and learning a second language, the process will educate our next generation to value their culture and language. To be biliterate is also a valuable asset.

After their discussion concerning the spread of English, the authors turn their attention to the argument on linguistic variation and standard norms, explored fully in chapter four, “Language Planning and Policy.” In this chapter, the authors mainly focus on how the relationship of language and social class impacts language planning and policy. This chapter incorporates three different examples from Singapore, the United State and China to explore how different contexts affect decision in educational policy. There are positive and negative impacts when promoting a Standard English in their different contexts. One positive impact is that English can be used as a medium among different ethnic groups; however, a negative outcome is the concept of “othering.” For example, people who speak English varieties other than Standard English are marginalized.

In chapter five, “Linguistic Variations and Standards,” the authors focus on the concept of “socio-cultural embeddedness,” meaning that language variation needs to be seen within the context of its use, which can be achieved via a comparison between new varieties and standardized Englishes (146). English varieties cannot be recognized as legitimate because people judge it from an exonormative view, or from a native English bias. People often work from a Standard English ideology, and they usually apply the standard form as a model by which they examine other varieties. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng are careful to include the debate concerning intelligibility. There are two definitions of intelligibility: first, intelligibility is recognizing words and other sentence-level components of utterances; it is to understand meaning and to understand the intent, purpose, or “meaning” behind an utterance”; second, the authors tend to argue that the “intelligibility is on the interaction between speaker and listener, rather than on a particular speaker or listener” (142). This is all complicated by the fact that when languages come into contact with one another, they tend to blend and produce new varieties. Intelligibility as a model allows us as language teachers to approach this blending with sophistication and care. However, McKay and Bokhorst-Heng contend that knowing the varieties of English is significant in teaching pedagogy. They argue that instructors should understand actual language use and language norms as well as the logic of language formation in order to accept and respect pluralistic models of English.

After their discussion of English varieties in the previous chapters, the authors introduce interactional sociolinguistics as an important discourse analysis tool in analyzing conversations ethnographically and demographically in chapter six, “Interactional Sociolinguistics.” The authors point out the importance of using this tool because it will help us understand how English is used during interactions in different contexts. For example, analysis of data in this book facilitates the understanding of the role of English as lingua franca while offering strategies to clarify

misunderstandings. This discourse analysis tool also helps to analyze how power comes into play in language because data show that language users code switch for different purposes. Finally, McKay and Bokhorst-Heng discuss language attitudes, using Singapore as an example to show that this group tends to code switch depending on perception of social status, speakers of language, and group solidarity. This example also reinforces the aim of this book, showing social and sociolinguistic factors that affect language learning.

This book meticulously tackles many complex issues concerning the influence of social contexts on English learning and use. Kachru's metaphors help the authors to make sense of language policy, identity in language learning, bilingual education, learner's motivation, language attitude, and teaching's competency to teach English, all topics taken up in this book.

Particularly, the work provides a rich portrait of English language teaching and use in different social and cultural contexts. Moreover, the book extends its analysis to consider the implications to language education. By the end of this book, the authors provide a model for socially-sensitive English language pedagogy. Their pedagogy aims to minimize the tension between global and local language uses and politics. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng suggest incorporating examples of English varieties in use today, promoting L2-L2 interaction, and embedding learning in local cultures. While all good ideas to invigorate our teaching, there is a certain amount of ambivalence between these principles and the realities of the learning environments and instructor competencies. For example, instructors might lack L2 proficiency so that they are not able to provide a multi-lingual environment. Further, many English instructors in non-English speaking countries do not have opportunities to learn about target language cultures, or they might have a gap between what language will be taught and how language is used in daily lived life. Similarly, students might not be able to transfer language knowledge from the school curriculum to authentic interactions in English. Although in the last chapter, "Towards a Socially Sensitive EIL Pedagogy," the authors argue for the need to consider the social and sociolinguistic context of L2 classrooms in making pedagogical decisions, two case studies—Morocco (184) and Chile (185)—show that teachers who have not had the opportunity to study abroad do not have sufficient training to address some of the conflicts between learners' home countries and the target language countries.

Nevertheless, I highly recommended this book for language policy makers, language researchers, and language educators because it facilitates how we consider better policies, research designs, and teaching methodologies. Overall, the book provides an illustrative discussion on complex issues on language, language use, language teaching, language policy, and implications for pedagogy. I find the book well written, easy to

read and worth exploring. This book challenges traditional English teaching and learning methods and calls on educators and teachers to reconsider their approach to the teaching of English in light of the various ways in which it is used.

