

# A response to Cem Alptekin

*I-Chun (Vicky) Kuo*

I welcome this opportunity to elaborate on some of my arguments for a NS model in second language pedagogy. The focus of my interest is a NS model, not a 'NS pedagogy' as Alptekin seems wrongly to assume. Pedagogy is not my main concern and the linguistic or ethnic origin of the teacher, for example, NS or NNS, is actually irrelevant in the whole dispute. What I have talked about is a language model and standard which the teacher, the learner, and the curriculum chooses to use as a point of reference, particularly with regard to grammar, lexis, and pronunciation. Alptekin gives a lengthy discussion of top-down vs. bottom-up approaches and linguistic redundancies, with which I do not disagree. He has however failed to see the very point I try to make out of such references. Let us thus consider the following two examples:

- 1 Hi, I'm Tarzan. You must be Jane. Nice to meet you.
- 2 Me Tarzan. You Jane. Hi.

A degree of intelligibility is maintained in both (1) and (2) but only the former qualifies as a proper language model. The omission of linguistic redundancies or in fact any form of linguistic inaccuracy should only come as an *end product* and should not become a *starting point* in second language learning and teaching. The ELF approach has thus appeared to contradict and misinterpret the nature of second language acquisition in its attempt to make some *end product* the *starting point* on the basis that a degree of intelligibility is maintained. Alptekin suggests that no essential information was lost between 'two boys' and 'two boy' and that teachers should not insist on accuracy at all times. While I accept that the role or place of accuracy is an important area of debate, it bears little relevance to my ultimate concern for a proper model in second language pedagogy.

Alptekin defends the validity of an ELF corpus and an ELF description, arguing that NSs and their Englishes are irrelevant in this context, and questions the extent to which my research participants' contribution was valid. An ELF description as I have argued, apart from being somewhat reduced and incomplete alongside NS varieties, also needs to determine its 'internal' validity by addressing, for example, what constitutes a reliable source of data to inform the description. These enquiries concerning validity have incidentally highlighted some real ambiguities in the ELF movement, such as the use of NS English as a point of reference to identify ELF usage against the claim that NS English is irrelevant in the ELF context,

and the confusion as to whether an ELF scenario is determined by *who* is talking or *where* the talking takes place.

Although attending an English course in the UK, my research participants were interacting with other NNSs during the classroom practice of student–student interaction. While some of them did intend to continue their academic studies in the UK, others only meant to stay for a relatively short period of time. A relatively short stay in their entire lifetime in an English-speaking country was far too *insignificant* to result in their preference for a NS model, not to mention collectively they had experienced a severe lack of contact with NSs outside the classroom. Alptekin is thus incorrect in saying that my research participants only opted for a NS model because they attended an English course in the UK and were inevitably interacting with NSs.

As for the issue of ‘context’, I cannot disagree with the claim that any English teaching programme should be related to its context in some way and that a NS model is not an automatic first choice. I do, however, find it problematic to associate rather intuitively a particular variety of English with a particular context of use, such as an ELF description and international communication. Any NNS who is to take part in *real* international communication would inevitably encounter people from the inner, the outer, and the expanding circle countries with all their different accents and English varieties and proficiency. It is thus misleading and unhelpful to attempt to associate ‘international communication’ with ‘NNSs only’ using English as a lingua franca. What is important in my view is not the variety or the context *per se*—it is the ability of the speaker to adapt his/her English capacity to any given context, international or otherwise. Thus even a NS model can well equip the NNS to function in international and intercultural contexts.

I feel it needs to be made clear that I am *not* trying to impose a NS model on the NNS worldwide but I am defending instead the right of all NNSs, including myself. Despite my claim that a NS model could be more appropriate and appealing in second language pedagogy than an ELF description, what really alarms me in the ELF movement is the way that those who opt for a NS variety have been subtly negated and downgraded within the discourse. The fronting of undisputed facts such as NNSs of English greatly outnumber its NSs and that most NNSs will need English in order to communicate with other NNSs immediately puts those who opt for a NS model into the trap of political *incorrectness*. The delivery of examples in which people resort to extreme measures to achieve NS performance, for example, children sent for tongue surgery to achieve NS-like pronunciation, then sends shock waves across the profession to arouse sympathy for the NNS and hostility towards a NS variety. Collectively, the undisputed facts and a couple of extreme examples have successfully highlighted and promoted the appeal of codifying and teaching English as an international language. It has however been operated in ways that appear to have exploited the construction of a ‘problematic’ NS model and people who pursue that model so as to downplay substantially its significance and legitimacy.

My ultimate concern within the context of teaching English as a lingua franca is the extent to which the NNS worldwide can decide independently which variety of English, NS or otherwise, to aim towards. The NNS should be reassured that it is *their English* (in a non-ownership sense) and that they have the absolute right to decide or at least to take part in the decision regarding which variety of English to learn. More importantly, applied linguists need to be more aware not simply of what their arguments are, but of *how* they present their arguments, so that learners and classroom teachers can be more objectively informed and become more critically aware of the issues and interests involved in any dispute.

#### **The author**

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**I-Chun (Vicky) Kuo** is currently a lecturer at National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan, and is in the

process of completing her PhD at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK.

**Email: ick1@cant.ac.uk**