Making the link: International English in monolingual contexts
- the case of the Greek primary classroom

NICOS C. SIFAKIS
Hellenic Open University

ARETI-MARIA SOUGARI
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

ABSTRACT
The purpose of this paper is twofold: (a) to differentiate between norm-biased and culture-biased ELT situations, and (b) to unravel the status of English within the Greek primary educational context. It concentrates on identifying elements that can shed some light on the norm/culture orientation laid out above. We attempt to offer some evidence on the extent to which ELT situations in Greece lend themselves to the 'cultural authentication of the foreign language' and the elevation of the 'ethnic culture' of individual classroom members (i.e., learners and teacher) to the level of 'classroom culture' - steps that have to be taken if we want the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) to be transformed into a genuine English as an international language (EIL) pedagogy in the Greek educational context.

1. INTRODUCTION
The last couple of decades have seen an enormous spread in the use of English around the world, in terms of both professional, as well as ordinary face-to-face communication. The many reasons usually cited for this vary from an ever-increasing demand of competence in the use of English by professional organisations around the world and the extensive use of the Internet (originally established in the United States and spread out, with enormous speed, in the 90s), to reasons related to the implicit structural simplicity and lexical flexibility and adaptability of the language itself (Crystal 1997; Graddol 1997; for a different perspective, see Phillipson 2000: 89). For some (for a review see Sifakis and Sougari 2000; 2001; paper in print), this phenomenon is just another facet of globalisation, posing linguistic and cultural threats to smaller languages and nations and a plague that has to be eliminated (also see Phillipson 1992). On the other hand, it has also been claimed that, while the rapidly increasing number of non-native users of English will soon outnumber the native speakers of the language (Crystal 1999), English is a popular medium for communication between non-native speakers (Jenkins 2000). This raises important implications for the teaching of English as an international language that distinguish it from its present status as a 'second' or 'foreign' language (Pennycook 1996;
Crystal 1997; Jenkins 2000). It also goes without saying that such an approach would further imply reviewing the teaching and learning specifications laid out in the English language teaching curricula around the world vis-a-vis this new reality and making suggestions for necessary improvements.

In response to these considerations, this article draws on the specifics of the teaching of English in Greece, concentrating on the curricular and textbook specifications prevalent in the primary sector of Greek state schools. It aims at presenting a set of issues to be considered when reviewing an EIL situation and reviews the extent to which these considerations are met in this context. We first review the EIL framework itself and introduce some key aspects to be considered when dealing with a particular teaching situation. We then move on to posit a number of criteria (set in the form of questions) to be applied in the EIL classroom. Finally, these questions are addressed in the context of Greek state primary schools and suggestions for improvement bring the article to a close.

2. THE EIL CONTEXT
The study of the widespread use of English internationally has engaged an increasing number of researchers who attempt to make sense of the many different aspects involved (for a recent review, see Burns and Coffin 2001). Thus, research seems to concentrate on the use of English in certain multinational contexts (cf. the debate on 'Euro-English', reviewed in Wright 2000: chapter 4; also cf. the case-study of Foley et al. 1999 regarding the use of English in Singapore; finally, cf. Barbour and Carmichael 2000). Another interesting research strand concentrates on issues related to the rapid disappearing of certain languages and dialects (endangered languages phenomenon, cf. Nettle and Romaine 2000) and the creation of frameworks created especially to reverse this process (cf. Fishman 1991 and 2001). Further related research raises crucial questions regarding the role of the native speaker (NS) of English (Paikeday 1985) and the 'rightful ownership' of English (Kachru and Ayers 1992).

However, fewer are those researchers who have actually carried the argument further and have considered implications for the foreign language (FL) classroom – the most recent examples of such research are found in Jenkins (2000), which concentrates on the teaching of EIL pronunciation, and in Seidlhofer (forthcoming monograph), which concentrates on the teaching of EIL syntax (for a more accessible summary and examples, cf. Jenkins and Seidlhofer 2001). Even so, it should also be stressed that these viewpoints are almost entirely theoretical and prescriptive. It is evident that
the demand for a more hands-on analysis of individual teaching/learning contexts is enormous.

It should also be stressed that the theoretical context in which such an analysis can be carried out is also under investigation. One viewpoint recommends looking at the FL (or EIL) classroom politically and interpreting the prevalent ideologies in terms of the neo-colonialist policies of English-speaking countries (Phillipson 1992). Another viewpoint perceives the FL classroom as reflecting the English language as a site of constant and dynamic struggles of people in world-society (Fairclough 1997). Yet another viewpoint concentrates on raising learners' critical awareness of the connection between language and the social context (Pennycook 1996 and 2001). Other theorists focus on more specific aspects of the FL classroom, such as the use of mother tongue (Kramsch 1993), the cultural interrelationships among learners (cf. the 'classroom' culture and 'ethnic' culture distinction of Widdowson 1996 and Prodromou 2000) or the role of the native speaker model as seen from the teacher's point of view (Medgyes 1994).

While all these theories shed light on different aspects of the FL classroom, especially in terms of the EIL phenomenon, our attempt, in this article, to present a comprehensive list of criteria for the EIL classroom in the Greek context makes it necessary to posit the following preliminary precepts:

(a) That situation-specific cases, such as the one we are focusing on, presuppose a teaching methodology appropriate, on the one hand, to those EIL specifications shared by all such classrooms around the world, as well as, on the other hand, the social and cultural characteristics of each individual situation (Hollday 1994). In this way, each EIL situation is considered not just globally (i.e. from the curricular, or prescriptive, point of view – what Jenkins and Seidlhofer seem to concentrate on with respect to pronunciation and syntax) but also locally (i.e. from the point of view of the communicative and linguistic needs of individual learners – cf. Hollday 1995). Thus, each EIL situation is also viewed as a specific needs situation (Widdowson 1996).

(b) That each EIL situation can be gauged with respect to the extent to which its curricular, textbook and methodological specifications focus on a set norm to be taught or on a certain culture to be communicated ('norm-bias' vs. culture-bias', cf. Sifakis 2001). Also, to the extent to which the primary focus of this methodology is on the accuracy/fluency distinction as opposed to the raising of learners' awareness of cultural/communicative issues of non-native speakers (NNSs) of English.
(c) That, from the pedagogic point of view, it is important to distinguish between monolingual and multilingual classes (Brumfit 2001: chapter 6; Coffey 2001), since the extent to which learners in the same classroom share the same first language can be decisive in their direct exposure to authentic cultural characteristics of other NNSs of English.

(d) Finally, that, methodologically, cultural awareness can be achieved through two mediums: inputs and tasks. By 'inputs' we refer to the reading and/or listening texts provided to learners for further 'processing'; by tasks we refer to the activities that learners have to carry out during such processing. Both inputs and tasks can be introduced by either the coursebook or the teacher, or both. The teacher's choices regarding supplementary materials are of particular importance with regard to the EIL context, since there appears to be a shortage of relevant textbooks (cf. Jenkins 2000: 234). Of relevance here are criteria related to the authenticity status of inputs and tasks (Breen 1985).

In the following section, we will attempt to present individual criteria for the EIL classroom on the basis of these four general precepts.

3. ZOOMING IN ON PRACTICE (A): SETTING CRITERIA FOR THE EIL CLASSROOM

We will first set questions that can be raised with regard to the teaching situation. Then, we will posit questions that can be raised with regard to the coursebook. Since the target situation, the Greek primary classroom, is a predominantly monolingual one, questions will be related to a monolingual situation.

3.1 Criteria related to the teaching situation

In light of the above, EIL-oriented criteria related to the teaching situation can be distinguished into those related to the curriculum, the learners' profile and the teacher's profile, along the following lines:

- **Curriculum-related**: What is the predominant position of the curriculum regarding EIL? To what extent is there an explicit reference to the need to train learners within the EIL framework? Exactly how is such a framework delineated in terms of appropriate methodology? If the situation is a monolingual one, to what extent is the use of the learners' mother tongue in the classroom anticipated (as, for example, in Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo 2001)?

- **Learner-profile**: To what extent is the teaching situation monolingual/multilingual? Are learners sensitised with respect to the international/lingua franca status of English today? What profile(s) of
different NSs and NNSs of the target language do learners have? To what extent are they 'ready' to integrate a variety of NNS cultural specifications? To what extent do learners feel that English used in the EIL context is 'their own'? If the teaching situation is predominantly monolingual, what is the learners' view of their mother tongue as a carrier of important cultural information to other NNS cultures?

- **Teacher-profile:** Is the teacher a NS or a NNS? What is his/her role in the EIL framework? What are his/her views regarding such a role? Does s/he consider himself/herself as being predominantly representative of a set norm or as mediators for the transmission of different NNS cultural background?

### 3.2 Criteria related to the coursebook

Further EIL-oriented criteria related to the coursebook can be distinguished into input-related and task-related ones, along the following lines:

- **Input-related:** Are there instances of NNS-NNS communication? How is such communication organised in terms of written and spoken discourse? To what extent is English utilised as a medium for acquainting learners with other NNS cultures? To what extent are other languages also used? To what extent are learners sensitised with respect to different NNS varieties of English? Is there any exposure to authentic and/or simulated video and/or audio inputs? To what extent is NNSs' spoken and written discourse 'authentic'? Are there errors? If so, how 'serious' are they (i.e. to what extent do these errors hinder intelligibility)? How 'genuine' are they?

- **Task-related:** To what extent are tasks/activities appropriate ('authentic') for the EIL context – i.e., what can we say concerning the role-playing / simulation activities? Are there problems with learners sharing the same L1 during these activities? How are such problems overcome (e.g., this could be tackled through in-class activities, such as drama-performing, or out-of-class activities, such as urging learners to access the internet, or correspond with other NNS via e-mail, or actively participate in programmes such as Comenius, etc – cf. Thornbury 2001). Are learners given any real, genuine and authentic tasks to perform? To what extent, and how, are these tasks related with the discovery of similarities and/or differences with other people's culture?
4. ZOOMING IN ON PRACTICE (B) - SMALL CASE STUDY: THE GREEK 1997 CURRICULUM AND THE FUN WAY ENGLISH SERIES – APPLYING THE ABOVE QUESTIONS TO THIS SERIES.

As outlined above, it seems that there are two aspects that we need to draw our attention to in order to formulate our perspective about the centrality of teaching EIL in the Greek language classroom. Therefore, we need to focus on the criteria prescribed for the teaching situation, looking methodically into curriculum-related issues and the profiles of the learner and the teacher. In addition, as far as the criteria related to the coursebook are concerned, a detailed approach to the input-related and task-related concerns could enlighten the teaching situation as it unfolds in the EIL teaching context.

4.1 Focusing on the teaching situation

Curriculum-related:
The Greek curriculum, as published in 1997, prescribes a comprehensive 6-year curriculum for the teaching of English which runs in two cycles: (a) the primary state language classroom (grades 4-6) and (b) the gymnasium (grades 7-9). Throughout the six-year language instruction, certain objectives are expected to be fulfilled, catering at the same time for the needs and interests of the respective age groups. Taking into account, children's linguistic, emotional and cognitive state, the curriculum aims at raising their awareness in a number of issues, such as culture, technology, mathematics, environmental matters, etc., in order to enrich their knowledge, on the one hand, and to create opportunities of language use, on the other, in a way that reflects the use of English as another means of communication.

A close look at the curriculum reveals its learner-centred and task-based nature. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that emphasis is cast on technology-related issues on a number of occasions. Thus there are instances in which there is mention of "technological, economic and cultural development..." and at the same time the learners are referred to as "citizens of a technologically advanced Europe" (Dendrinos et al. 1997: 65). In addition, the learning of English is seen as a means "to help the development of the skills required for the use of technological tools in order to achieve particular learning and utilitarian goals" (Dendrinos et al. 1997: 68). Through the development of fluency in the use of English, it is anticipated that the learners in their conversations with people of other languages will entice these people to learn Greek and to become interested in the Greek culture.
What is of more interest to the purpose of this paper is the early manifestation of teaching English within an EIL context, at least in principle. English is supposed to be taught and learned in such a way as to prepare learners to converse not necessarily with the native speakers of the English language but rather with NNSs in an attempt to make intelligible conversations and exchange information. More particularly, some points that are worth mentioning are those that highlight the direction towards incorporating culturally-induced behaviour and developing critical thinking (Dendrinos et al. 1997). In other words, what the curriculum attempts to do is: (a) to create course materials which offer a global and meaningful educational experience for the learners, (b) to develop learners' 'self-awareness as individuals and as members of a national community, as well as members of an extended, or world-wide community' (Dendrinos et al. 1997: 67-68), (c) to engage learners in "communication with native English speakers on the one hand, as well as with individuals of different nationalities who use English as ... a lingua franca ... it is desirable to highlight the international elements of the English language" (Dendrinos et al. 1997: 66), (d) to cultivate learners' acceptance towards individuals from different nationalities, religions, sexes, etc. rejecting stereotypical images of people and situations.

What becomes evident is the delineation towards any cultural elements that are directly related to the target culture, guiding the learners towards a more global understanding of various cultures and the acceptance of similarities and differences among people of various ethnicities. However, even though at one point the curriculum stresses the importance of the international element of the English language, at another point this very international element is negated when it is stated that "knowledge about cultural elements of other countries especially of the English speaking ones" (Dendrinos et al. 1997: 90) should be incorporated as part of language teaching. More importantly, the curriculum does not highlight what these international elements really are; matters are left unresolved and the coursebook authors are left to make their own interpretations of the whole issue. To sum up, the curriculum attempts to: a) introduce English as an international means of communication, b) encourage the engagement in intercultural communication, c) raise learners' awareness of lack of stereotypical images, d) cultivate learners' self awareness as individuals / members of a national community.

The teaching situation in Greece can be described basically as a monolingual one, with the exception of cases where immigrant children form part of the learner population. However, the curriculum does not cater
for such situations because when the curriculum reached its final version, the situation within the school system was very different from the current state. Thus the curriculum at the very early stages makes mention of parallel use of the target language and the mother tongue in order to facilitate understanding. However, what requests for some caution is the suggestion that what is uttered in Greek should be immediately translated into English; the reason why this is regarded as problematic is that learners may feel more confident listening to what is presented to them in their mother tongue, failing to listen to the English version. In addition, it becomes apparent that the flow of the lesson is slowed down and the learners are deprived of valuable input, which would have given them opportunities to use the language instead of finding out about the language.

Learner-profile:
Due to the pouring of immigrants into Greece, the composition of the classroom has changed dramatically over the last few years. Thus the monolingual classroom scene belongs to the past; instead, nowadays, we witness a more multicultural and multilingual one. The members of a particular classroom are no longer a composite of one culture who share the same mother tongue and the same culturally influenced beliefs. This diversity calls for greater adaptability on the part of the learners as well as on the part of the teacher. The learners have to overcome their xenophobia and their attitude towards children who come from a different altogether culture and country and learn to respect each other.

The extent to which the learners will be able to cope with the multicultural and multilingual diversity of their classroom rests with the influence exercised by the parents, the teacher, the course materials and the media. However, the issue of whether learners are sensitised with respect to the current international status of English has yet to be explored. The role of the teacher and the tasks incorporated in language teaching will play a decisive part into how English will be perceived by the learners. The whole methodological approach implemented predisposes the learners to the conceptualisation of English as an international means of communication. The learners need to be trained with respect to their response to cultural artefacts and to the recognition of the status of English. Learner training in all facets of language teaching eradicates any misconceptions that may surround the use of the target language and the culturally-influenced behaviour.

Teacher-profile:
The majority of the state primary teachers of English are NNSs who are holders of a B.A. degree in English Language and Literature or equivalent. Some have pursued further postgraduate studies in an attempt to ameliorate their teaching practice. It is quite evident that that the main body of teachers of English consists of NNSs, a fact which seems to offer a number of advantages in the language classroom. A study conducted by Prodromou (1992) revealed that beginners favour the presence of a NNS teacher who shares the same mother tongue with the learners.

The teachers' perception of their role in the EIL context has to be explored in order to reach definitive conclusions. Their familiarity with the target norm may be more appealing to the teachers who may feel more at ease when they relate cultural aspects of communication and culturally-induced behaviour. The lack of adequate knowledge of other cultural backgrounds may militate against the presentation of such models. However, what becomes apparent is that the teachers could attempt their cultural enrichment and widen their knowledge and perspective so that they can become carriers of such cultural information. Furthermore, the teachers should combat their own misconceptions about people of other ethnicities. In other words, they should try to challenge their own beliefs so that they can instil positive attitudes in their learners.

4.2 Focusing on the coursebooks
The Fun Way English series consists of 3 volumes which offer a linear degree of difficulty, having been carefully graded and the materials are presented in a quite densely written form. As the series has been written with the Greek primary learners in mind, the authors make use of the children's every day reality and present issues of common interest in order to promote learners' motivation to learn English and to sustain their interest. The books basically follow the syllabus proposed by the curriculum developers, but only Fun Way English 1 has been recently revised following a number of years of trial and error. The other two volumes used are still the ones that were designed for the experimental stages of language instruction in state primary schools. In the three volumes, it becomes apparent that the teacher has to be highly selective and resourceful to make the teaching materials accessible to the learners. In addition, the teacher needs to be highly motivated to present issues that necessitate learners' awareness-raising, but the achievement of this rests with the teacher who has to be well-informed and inquisitive himself/herself to exploit the various issues in the most effective way and to make thought-provoking comments.

Fun Way English 1 (Triantafilou et al. 1999) is an introductory book which attempts to familiarise learners with the English language and to raise
their awareness of how widespread the use of English words is in their own mother tongue. This volume mainly concentrates on language use rather than exploiting cultural artifacts. Rather the portrayal of the target or any other culture is kept to the minimum. To be more precise, we have isolated the following cases as a means of raising learners' awareness of cultural factors: the celebration of Christmas, the writing of Christmas cards, the collection of stamps, and the introduction of Eurofriends who introduce themselves by talking about their likes and dislikes.

Even though the book attempts to engage learners in language use, no effort is made to expose learners to the EIL context. To a certain extent, the celebration of Christmas is related to the target culture; however, the teacher could offer a wider perspective by presenting out of his initiative the Christmas reality in other parts of the world to draw comparisons and lead to certain conclusions.

In terms of the input provided, there is complete lack of authentic receptive and productive input. The language used is concocted to serve the utilitarian purposes of the fourth grade course. Even though the issue of culture is not exploited as such, and learners are not offered opportunities to take part in activities oriented towards experiential learning, they are introduced to the European Union reality through the introduction of some Eurofriends who seem to have similar preferences and dislikes to Greek children of the same age. However, it seems that the input provided at all times is simple and impeccable, not offering an opportunity to witness real language use. No other variety than the standard is presented to the learners, an issue that makes the language highly accessible.

As far as the tasks are concerned, they can hardly be called authentic. The tasks are geared towards a very structural and traditional teaching situation. The learners' limited knowledge of English could be the reason why the opportunities for real language use are minimal. The unifying concept that underlies all the activities is the promotion of all the skills but through inauthentic tasks, attempting to pinpoint the language that will be of most immediate interest to the learners.

Fun Way English 2 (Triantafilou et al. 1998) offers greater opportunities for cultural exploitation than the first volume in the series even though the principles guiding the main outlook of this volume are quite similar in both volumes. To be more specific, the reader comes across the following cultural points that could lead to enlightening discussions: nationalities, children's style of life around the world, the carnival celebration in different parts of the world, letter writing from children of different nationalities, the presentation of various monuments and historical
buildings in the United Kingdom that the United States of America such as Buckingham Palace and the Statue of Liberty respectively, and the collection of coins.

This volume could be more easily accessed, while having the EIL context in mind. However, it still remains true that there is no authentic input, even though the topics raised lend themselves to such exploitation. For example, in the case of nationalities, the topic could have been exploited through a listening activity in which the children could have been speaking in English but retaining their own personal accent and relating to their friends where they come from. Furthermore, in the case of letter-writing in an attempt to present a piece of authentic writing, the children could have made real language errors, as indicative of their cultural background. In terms of a task, the learners could have been asked to correct any apparent errors in the children's written product. In other words the purpose of this task is to raise children's awareness that children of a similar age group make errors similar to and/or different from their own.

It becomes apparent that even though Fun Way English 2 does not offer authentic input in the way it was prescribed in the previous section (i.e. receptive and productive), and does not engage learners in authentic tasks such as role-playing and writing real letters, it contains some essential features that could be further exploited by the experienced teacher or the authors in a future edition.

The third volume in the series, Fun Way English 3 (Triantafilou et al. 1997) tries to present the use of English as a means of conveying information to talk about environmental issues, to describe attractions in major cities, to present different eating habits around the world, and to form a portrayal of the Greek ancient civilisation, to mention but a few. In most cases, the input provided is presented in reading activities tailored made for the purposes of this volume. In other words, once again it is evident that the lack of authentic input is prevalent throughout the volume. The main issues raised in the previous volumes are quite evident in this volume as well. The artificiality of the tasks do not offer opportunities for real language use. What should be accounted for (which incidentally is true for all three volumes) is that creating genuine EIL inputs/tasks can be an expensive and time-consuming process.

In relation to ELT materials, a number of suggestions could be made that could be considered when designing materials that should suit the EIL context:

- to raise teachers' awareness about the intricacies of ELT
- to sensitise learners through various means (i.e. diversified input, and real tasks), foreseeing future misunderstandings and misapprehensions
• to adapt materials to new situations
• to be flexible and incorporate in-class and out-of-class activities
• to create ELT materials with an EIL-friendly focus, offering all the necessary help for the inexperienced and experienced teacher

5. CONCLUSION
In this study, we considered the status of English as an international language vis-a-vis the curriculum and textbook specifications for the Greek primary classroom. In doing so, we concentrated on those aspects of the curriculum that justify a sociocultural, as opposed to a purely norm-biased, approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language in this sector. It was suggested that, despite its partial EIL orientation, the curriculum largely remains a norm-biased one. This is also evident from the coursebook implemented, which focuses on language use rather than exploiting sociocultural situations. Whereas inputs and activities are geared towards an international setting for the use of English, learners are exposed to and required to produce the standard variety (or norm).

Although the EIL perspective is by no means a new one, it has not received proper attention in different monocultural teaching situations, such as the Greek one. Internationally, there is a shortage of teaching materials that are appropriated for particular teaching situations and could be characterised as EIL-oriented (for example, the area of business English is often considered as such Jones and Alexander 1999). It would be useful to concentrate on case studies of curricula and textbooks around the world, as well as learners' and teachers' attitudes towards the phenomenon of EIL and its teaching/learning.

REFERENCES


