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The Intelligibility of Intelligibility

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One student, who had been educated at a Turkish Islamic school in Phnom Penh, stated that communicating in English with others within Cambodia was very difficult for him during his primary and high school years because he was taught English by only Turkish teachers who were non-native English speakers. He had problems communicating not only with the expat and tourist populations, but with other Cambodian English language learners because his accent was much different than everyone else's and he laughingly said that he never had the chance to speak nor meet any Turkish people outside of his school environment. Although he showed amusement by his predicament, he immediately stated afterwards that it was actually not that funny. He was often judged by his peer Cambodians for his accent. He was a victim of perceived intelligibility.

If one has ever asked, "What did you just say?" during a conversation, there has clearly been a breakdown in communication at some point throughout the exchange; the factors that can cause this query to arise range from being in a loud environment to a mumble from the speaker, from mishearing to merely not paying enough attention by the listener. Communication breakdowns have caused an assortment of problems that can turn into hilarious jokes, awkward pauses, hurt feelings, and offended mores. As the gap between cultures widen, cross-cultural communication can lead to confusion; as more languages and language varieties become more readily available and accessible throughout the world, it is inevitable that these cultures and languages will meet and countless conflicts will occur. Even within one language, historical, societal, and individual diversities will still create minor miscommunications at best.

One language, in particular, has continued sprawling and reaching through almost all of the diversities that the world has to offer. English has already undergone centuries of changes, diversities, and varieties. Native English speaking people throughout all time periods have held strong interests and opinions about how their mother tongue was being used and abused in new places. In the introduction of Nelson's (2008) exploration into the history of English's intelligibility, he provided amusing anecdotes from people throughout the 1900s about the transformations and horrors of the American English varieties that they had encountered (p. 297-299). These humorous narratives are much more than entertainment; they demonstrate how easily it is for people to pass judgements on entire populations of a region based on the words and utterances heard in that area. Even though all of the people in these stories were hearing native English speakers, prestige was only attached to their own varieties of English. When people started finally actively observing and researching the many varieties of English and fully grasping the fact that there were million upon millions of non-native English speakers, the concept of cross-cultural communication was not far behind (Smith & Rafiqzad, 1979; Kachru, 1985). The question of how were all the different varieties going to be able to speak with each other became a hot topic.

Intelligibility within the linguistics world seems to be a constantly evolving word. Its definition has changed throughout out time as the English language has reached far

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beyond native speakers and into the mouths of billions. As the world becomes smaller through technological advances, English language communication needs and wants continually increase and change (Kaur, 2008). As English communication increases between communities and countries, being able to understand and be understood is essential. This critical point of communication is where researchers probe to identify exactly what makes communication work or fail and what people can do to communicate more effectively.

Intelligibility was at the core of the argument over the need for Standard English or acceptance and equality for all varieties. The very idea of Standard English stems from what certain people believe that a specific English variety should be spoken by all. If everyone spoke the same way, there would be no further need for determining intelligibility; quite simply if a person was easy to understand and could easily understand Standard English then they spoke correctly and were intelligible, if there were problems with the person understanding or being misunderstood, the person spoke incorrectly and were unintelligible. However, intelligibility, like Standard English, was never so clear and straightforward.

Defining Standard English is nearly as troublesome and problematic as providing the precise meaning of intelligibility. First of all, there are many definitions of Standard English, and like intelligibility, those definitions have changed as time and English progressed. Before the start of the twentieth century, British English was considered the Standard English, but as the century advanced, American English became an acceptable variety of Standard English and the two varieties were the undisputed Standard English (Bolton, 2006). Even at more and more varieties popped up and very few actually spoke Standard English, the two were able to share the title through prestige (Crystal,1994). Although Standard English was used by a rather small minority even within the US and Great Britain, it was heard and seen everywhere - on television shows, movies, advertisements, radio, textbooks, newspapers, etc. It depicted the best and highest education, success, and power (Crystal, 1994; Moore & Bounchan, 2010). Pronunciation, accent, dialect, variety were all ways to separate the “them” from the “us.”

Due to the obsessions and strong opinions about pronunciation, this is where the research about intelligibility first began. Native English speakers were often considered, as some still believe, to be if not the owners of English, then at least the decision makers about what is correct. Despite squabbling and potshots with each other over who spoke the ‘real’ English, native English speakers were very much in agreement that they were the most understandable, especially in comparison to non-native speakers and native speakers also tended to believe that they held a prestigious position within English, where they were allowed to determine right and wrong when it came to *their* language.

Smith’s and Rafiqzad’s (1979) research launched immense changes of perspectives and beliefs on intelligibility. They began with the popular concept that claimed educated native English speakers were more intelligible than educated non-native English speakers as well as theorized that non-native English speakers from the same country would be as intelligible as native English speakers to a non-native English speaker (Smith & Rafiqzad, 1979). Smith and Rafiqzad (1979) stated their “operational definition for intelligibility is capacity for understanding a word or words when spoken/read in the context of a sentence being spoken/read at natural speed” (p. 371). They discerned that

intelligibility and comprehension were not synonymous with each other, which marked a notable distinction that would be explored later by other researchers including Smith who would eventually collaborate with Nelson to elaborate about intelligibility with a well-received three-part definition (Smith & Rafiqzad, 1979; Nelson, 2008; Berns, 2008; Pickering, 2006). This study led to more than just a better definition of intelligibility, its findings defied the common belief that native English speakers were the most intelligible. In fact, it showed that native English speakers were continuously within the ranks of the least intelligible speakers and that the non-native English speakers who were ranked highly intelligible were consistently found highly intelligible by listeners from one country to another (Smith & Rafiqzad, 1979). This study was important to showing the world that being a native speaker, or using native speaker pronunciation, was not necessary for cross-cultural/international communication.

Although Smith's and Rafiqzad's study offered new perspectives to English pronunciation and communication across the globe, Smith knew there was still much to be learned about cross-cultural communication (Berns, 2008). Smith dove back into researching more about intelligibility in order to further address the gap between linguistics and non-linguistics, the technical and non-technical, where pronunciation alone cannot provide a full understanding of what a person is communicating (Nelson, 2008; Weber, 2007). Although scholars had previously addressed the concept of intelligibility and had attempted to explain what exactly understanding means in regards to language usage, there were no explicit definitions of commonly used terms such as 'intelligibility' and 'understanding.' These words were often interchanged with each other by scholars, including Smith in his 1985 study, as well as using varying explanations for those two and other related terms (Nelson, 2011). Determined to get a better concept and establish terminology that would help to describe and classify what specifically was necessary for language comprehension, the Smith paradigm for intelligibility was created. Smith decided to use 'understanding' as more of an umbrella term to which three terms were applied to represent the layers. In The Handbook of World Englishes (2006), Smith and Nelson provided a clear and concise version of the original 1985 classifications of intelligibility:

> 1 intelligibility: word/utterance;
> 2 comprehensibility: word/utterance meaning (locutionary force);
> 3 interpretability: meaning behind word/utterance (illocutionary force) (p. 429).

In another of Smith's studies, he showed how each layer increased in variables and possible complications when different varieties and cultures come into contact with each other and the levels can succeed and fail independent of each other (Smith, 1992). Through these steps, the listener and speaker must act together instead of placing the burden of understanding on only one, each is responsible for not only recognizing and understanding the phonetical sounds of a language, but also must know the semantic vocabulary as well as the correct interpretation of the intended purpose of the word/phrase (Nelson, 2008).

It is at this point where it becomes very clear that pragmatic language usages, cultures, and attitudes played crucial roles and a lack of knowledge in any of these areas could easily result in a myriad of possible miscommunications. The potential for

miscommunications between varieties to occur often tempts people back to thoughts of standardization echoing Quirk's concerns and more vocalized attitudes towards varieties. Although the levels are well outlined and researchers have provided terrific examples of success and failure of each step, they are also notoriously difficult for researchers to accurately measure (Pickering, 2006). A nagging question reappears, who is deciding what is and is not intelligible? Rajagopalan (2010) provides a sly response, "…no variety is intelligible or otherwise in and of itself. Rather, it all depends on who is making the remark and about what language or variety" (p. 469).

Unfortunately, the whole idea of what is and is not intelligible can be based on mere beliefs and opinions rather than proved data (Kachru & Nelson, 2006). As Nelson states in his book, Intelligibility in World Englishes: Theory and Application (2011):

> The linguistic parameters within which we operate are set by our speech communities and fellowships, by our neighbors and acquaintances, by those whom we wish to imitate, and also by those whom we wish to avoid being identified with (p. 30).

Intelligibility in English Language Teaching

Within the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT) there are numerous theories and ideologies about intelligibility and improving ELT and learners' outcomes, and there are three ideologies that are crucial and influential to the progress and futures of English varieties throughout Southeast Asia, including Cambodian English. These three extremely popular ideologies, Standard English (SE), world Englishes (WE), and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), are found throughout the world, including Southeast Asia, and all three are very much concerned with the intelligibility within and between varieties. Although these ideologies are quite different from each other, the opinions and attitudes that English language users and learners have about them can have dire consequences.

The first belief of having a standard language is one of the older concepts in ELT and additional language learning in general. Intelligibility has been at the core of arguments over the calls for Standard English. The very basic idea of Standard English stems from when people believe that a specific English variety should be spoken by all, usually stipulating that the variety chosen as the standard is superior to all other varieties. If everyone spoke the same way, there would be no further need for determining intelligibility; quite simply if a person was easy to understand and could easily understand Standard English then they spoke correctly and were intelligible, if there were problems with the person understanding or being misunderstood, the person spoke incorrectly and thus unintelligible.

There are many definitions and concepts of Standard English and they have changed as time and English progressed. Before the start of the twentieth century, British English was considered the Standard English, but as the century advanced, American English became an acceptable variety of Standard English and the two varieties were the undisputed Standard English (Bolton, 2006). Even as more and more varieties popped up and very few actually spoke Standard English, the two were able to share the title through prestige (Crystal, 1994). Although Standard English was used by a rather small minority even within the US and Great Britain, it was heard and seen everywhere - on television

shows, movies, advertisements, radio, textbooks, newspapers, etc. where it depicted the best and highest education, success, and power (Crystal, 1994; Moore & Bounchan, 2010).

During the time when everyone was realizing that English varieties were more plentiful than ever and non-native speakers were vastly outnumbering native speakers nearly three to one, one of the more famous concepts of Standard English was released (Crystal, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2003). The idea was that English should have a standard that all English language learners around the world should aspire to speak and any varieties different from the standard are considered as mistakes (Quirk, 1988). Due to the ever increasing usage of English throughout the world, the idea of having a SE variety is viewed by supporters as a way to unify all English speakers (Kingsley Report, 1988). It is believed that if there was a Standard English, intelligibility would no longer be a problem because varieties would not be recognized and there would be a clear distinction of what is right and wrong. Interestingly though, miscommunications on any of the levels of Smith's intelligibility paradigm can easily occur between those who speak the same variety (Smith & Nelson, 2006).

The idea that a standardizing English can fix intelligibility problems has been made popular by scholars, such as Prator and Quirk, as well as by common attitudes and opinions held by people around the world about native and non-native English varieties along with their speakers and their cultures, what is considered "normal", and historical usage and teaching methods. There are varying ideas and definitions of what Standard English actually is, but the most common belief is that there are right and wrong ways to speak English and that the standard is actually just being able to speak like a native speaker (Jenkins, 2006) Even though this theory is rather old-fashioned in comparison to most ideas in the field of modern language learning, it still maintains strong support globally by teachers, learners, and governments despite research that has frequently shown standardizing English into only one variety is deeply flawed.

The second ideology, world Englishes actually developed from the ever growing global presence of English varieties and new users. Instead of suppressing the varieties, world Englishes embraced them and supported the users, cultures, and varieties spoken (Bolton, 2006). Despite the fact that there were many terms being used to try to explain this unprecedented event, world Englishes became the all-encompassing term for these varieties (Crystal, 2001). In brief, world Englishes is based on the principle that all varieties of English are equal; no variety is considered better or preferable to any other variety (Bolton, 2006; Kachru, 1985). World Englishes began to take shape and gain popularity due to Braj Kachru's intense and unwavering opposition to Quirk's version of Standard English, proclaiming that English is pluralistic (Kachru, 1976; Kachru, 1991). Support and recognition of world Englishes grew when Kachru (1985) developed and began widely publishing his now famous three concentric circles model that provided visual representation of the historical spread of English and how English was being used in countries throughout the world; the Inner Circle showed countries where English was used as a native speakers language (ENL), the Outer Circle showed countries where English was being used as a second language (ESL) due mostly to colonialism, and the Expanding Circle showed countries where English was being used as a foreign language (EFL). Widdowson (1994) also showed how world Englishes were able to pragmatically

serve the communicative and functional needs of their communities in ways that SE could never thus English could never be owned by any one particular group because it belongs to everyone who uses it. This indicated that socioculturalism was actually important to language development and usage.

Interestingly, Smith was fostering his philosophy about intelligibility at the same time Kachru was developing world Englishes and it was at a conference where they discussed their ideas with each other which helped cultivate their future oeuvres (Kachru, 2008). Smith's views on intelligibility entwine well with the world Englishes paradigm, and mutual intelligibility, increased cross-cultural awareness, and more exposure to different varieties are essential for achieving intelligibility as a whole, Smith's intelligibility paradigm (Smith, 1992, Smith 2006; Nelson, 2011).

Although varieties throughout the world were now widely celebrated and scholarly research was always increasing, the term world Englishes had become multifaceted and many terms were created or borrowed from other areas to further explain all of the different approaches to and perspectives on world Englishes; some of these labels being attached to varieties were not accurate and showed bias (Jenkins, 2006). Also, there was growing concern by some that world Englishes was not as attentive to certain English users as it should be considering it was this theory that categorized the Englishes, such as those in the Expanding Circle, and that Kachru's concentric circles model was becoming less reliable in categorizing the varieties, for example there were now native English speaker populations in the outer circle. (Seidlhofer, 2009; Jenkins, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 2007) This has led to some scholars reexamining an old yet familiar concept, lingua francas, and cultivating a new ideology around it.

Lingua francas have functioned for thousands of years and are defined as any "language that is widely used as a means of communication among speakers of other langauges" (lingua-franca, 2015). English as a Lingua Franca (ELF is merely when English is the language that is used as the chosen language for communication. However, just like world Englishes and intelligibility, English as a Lingua Franca is also a term that has been rather elusive throughout the years and sometimes used synonymously with terms like EIL (English as an International Language) and global English(es), which are also frequently used when speaking of WEs and intelligibility (Jenkins, 2006). To help clarify the term for the new paradigm of ELF, many scholars quote Firth's definition of ELF as "a 'contact language' between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication" (Firth, 1996, p. 240; in Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339; Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 213). Jenkins (2009) used a similar explanation of ELF with a little extra precision, where ELF is a language picked to be used by speakers from different linguistic, cultural, and geographical backgrounds and is not from any specific location.

The new concept of ELF drew both well received recognition but also criticism based on how or if EFL fits into the world Englishes paradigm (Berns, 2008). There has been a lot of research into ELF within the past decade which is mostly focused on intelligibility and the Expanding Circle, including building corpora which include the often left out Expanding Circle and focus solely on regional areas (Seidlhofer & Berns, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2010). This has left some scholars wondering if ELF supporters are not committing the same transgression that they once accused the world Englishes paradigm

of – excluding English language users that do not fit within their ELF paradigm (Nelson, 2011).

The goal most researchers have for ELF is to put emphasis on certain English characteristics that have been identified as the best for international intelligibility as well as to provide a variety that all users can claim as their own and not feel pressured to imitate native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2005). However, some ELF researchers concentrate purely on Englishes used by non-native speakers; perform intelligibility studies that help identify the most common phonetic features of these Englishes which they believe will develop into regional ELFs (Jenkins, 2000; Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Jenkins, one of the initial scholars who was very vocal and enthusiastic in the creation of a new ELF paradigm, has developed a phonological features based concept called the Lingua Franca Core for non-native English speakers to gain international intelligibility (Seidlhofer, 2004; Jenkins, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 2010).

Intelligibility within ASEAN

Southeast Asia has always been a breeding ground for languages. Although languages have born and died in that region, languages have been existing and influencing each other for thousands of years. Multilingualism and multiculturalism are not foreign concepts to Southeast Asia. All of the countries in this area have a multitude of languages from many language families spoken by various populations within each's borders and every language has an interesting historical and sociocultural significance. Due to the vast linguistic diversity, many of these countries have more than one official language. English is not exactly an unknown stranger to Southeast Asia; it too has its own history and significance to this area.

Currently Southeast Asian countries fall into the Outer and Expanding circles, generally the separation of countries into these two circles is based on whether or not they were a part of the third diaspora of English, which is associated with the era of British and American colonization in Southeast Asia (Bautista & Gonzalez, 2006). As previously mentioned in an earlier section, English as a Second Language usage occurs in the Outer Circle, while English as a Foreign Language is how English is used the Expanding Circle; however, Kachru is the one of the first to acknowledge that ESL and EFL can easily change based on individual country's policies towards English and that it will occur more frequently in the future (Kachru, B., Kachru, Y., & Nelson, 2009). In Kachru's own words, quoted by Bolton in The Handbook of World Englishes, "…what is an ESL region at one time may become an EFL region at another time or vice versa."(Kachru, 1985, p. 13; Bolton, 2006, p. 292). This seemingly uncomplicated explanation plainly shows the fluidity of the English language throughout the world. It can easily take whatever form that is being demanded at the time.

Southeast Asia has been embracing the fluidity of English and people from these countries are using English wherever and however they see fit. Southeast Asia has many varieties that fall into the Outer and Expanding circles. Many countries in Southeast Asia have fallen victim to instability from both internal and external influences. Some varieties seem to drift in between those two circles, while others appear to be knocking on the door

to the Inner Circle. For example, Myanmar was colonized at one point, where there was strong a English language presence and it was used by the government which put them solidly in the Outer Circle; however, Myanmar went through decades of internal and external political upheaval where English is now only used sparsely by groups such as NGOs, thus it is now considered a part of the Expanding Circle (Kirkpatrick, 2010). In contrast, Singapore, where English has been ruled as one of their official languages, is reporting more and more L1 native English speakers daily, which has many wondering when or if Singapore will enter the Inner Circle (Alsagof, 2012).

The past few decades have witnessed an increased interest in intelligibility and English in Southeast Asia due to the fluidity of these many varieties that have developed and the extremely quick growth of people who have functional use of English (Bolton, 2008). Countries that were once closed off to the world due to political problems are now open to not only their neighboring countries but also to the rest of the world. In fact, it was the shaky and chilling past of many parts of Southeast Asia that led to the development of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) whose initial purposes was to promote peace and stability in the region as well as to develop and increase Southeast cultural awareness, when the official charter was created there was more focus on increasing economic growth and social progress as well as building a more stable regional infrastructure (Bhattacharyay, 2010; Wilang & Teo, 2012a). There are currently ten member states of ASEAN (listed alphabetically): Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam (ASEAN, 2014). These countries are part of the Outer and Expanding Circles, an important fact that will be further explored later within this paper. Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore are located in the Outer Circle, while Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam are considered part of the Expanding Circle (Kirkpatrick, 2010).

ASEAN has made it incredibly clear that English is to be their lingua franca. The ASEAN charter, Article 34, stated “the working language of ASEAN shall be English” (ASEAN, 2008). No other language was considered at the time and no other language has been adopted by ASEAN since the charter’s decision on English. At the same conference at which English was declared ASEAN’s one and only language, there was also a major decision made for unifying the economies of all member states into one; although integration was initially scheduled to begin in 2015, the economic unification plans have been pushed back (Bhattacharyay, 2010). Considering the fact that there are hundreds of languages as well as numerous English varieties spoken within the ASEAN member states, it is clear that being able to understand different varieties of English is crucial to the success of all ASEAN’s future plans (Wilang & Teo, 2012a).

Due to the fact that the ASEAN member states are split between the Outer Circle and Expanding Circle, there is a considerable difference between English’s statuses and usages in these countries which can easily cause intelligibility issues. The countries in the Outer Circle all commonly recognize English as a second language and use it as such while Singapore has gone a step further and designated English, by law, as one of their official languages whereas none of the Expanding Circle countries have given English any official status and it is generally accepted that these countries use English as a foreign language (Wilang & Teo, 2012d). The differences between each country’s English usage

means that English education also varies greatly from country to country which impacts intelligibility as a whole as well.

To attempt to determine what will be the best courses of action for present and future ASEAN communications, there have been extensive interest, discussions, research, and studies that focus on increasing intelligibility between ASEAN members. The scholars within the field of English as a Lingua Franca have jumped at this opportunity because ASEAN has essentially created a situation where English must be used as a lingua franca. Traditionally these researchers have focused only on one of the levels of Smith's intelligibility paradigm: intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability.

Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006) performed a study to measure intelligibility between the English varieties found in ASEAN by identifying pronunciation features that ASEAN English varieties had in common as well as any pronunciation features that caused miscommunication. Their findings were that pronunciation from these varieties caused few misunderstandings and that many of these pronunciation features, both shared and different features were known characteristics of many of the varieties, and that the five pronunciation features that caused miscommunication were also identified as features that cause miscommunications in Jenkin's LFC (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Unfortunately, this study did not remain wholly true to Smith's full definition of intelligibility and chose to concentrate only on the pronunciation portion of the term stating that "the concept of intelligibility is somewhat elusive," which was probably the correct choice for them because they provided inaccurate descriptions of Smith's levels (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 392). However, the indications about pronunciation are significant to Cambodian English and other ASEAN countries' varieties because it provided some proof that the pronunciations from all the varieties were not at all close to being problematic in cross-cultural communication as some researchers have stated in the past and many English teachers and learners have been led to believe. Also, the Cambodian English speakers in the study did not have anyone not understand them due to their pronunciation which upon learning can greatly ease the anxiety and apprehension that many Cambodians have about speaking due to what they believe is poor pronunciation that they have attributed to the distinctive pronunciation features of their variety.

Another study performed by Wilang and Teo in 2012[1] investigated the comprehensibility levels of English speakers of varieties from the Outer Circle countries by English users from the Expanding Circle countries. Unfortunately in their study they did not test the comprehensibility of English varieties from the Expanding Circle which is rather bias towards the Expanding Circle countries of ASEAN because it may be perceived as promoting some varieties over others and that can possibly influence people's mindsets and feelings towards their own and other varieties. In fact, this study's findings provided more than results about comprehensibility; it also showed how people's beliefs and attitudes affect communication. When it came to comprehensibility results, the vast

[1] In order to ensure they accurately examined comprehensibility according to Smith's definition of comprehensibility, the researchers actually presented their findings and explanations in five separate papers: a) 2015 Timeline: Birth of Englishes and varieties within ASEAN, b) Measuring the comprehensibility of Englishes within ASEAN among Aseans, c) Enhancing comprehensibility among ELF users, d) Exploring the relationship between intelligibility and education, and e) Comprehensibility of Englishes within ASEAN: A synopsis of results. In order to differentiate between each paper the authors codified their citations by providing a letter after the year in each citation, this essay will follow their codification system to maintain continuity.

majority of all Outer Circle speakers were found to have moderate comprehensibility as opposed to the other two available results, low and high, of which there were very few in either of those categories (Wilang & Teo, 2012b). Singaporean English was found to be the least comprehensible of all Outer Circle varieties to Cambodians, Indonesians, and Vietnamese while Malaysian English was the most comprehensible to Cambodians, Thais, and Vietnamese (Wilang & Teo, 2012e). It was in exit interviews where the researchers were confronted with the information that Expanding Circle participants' attitudes and beliefs towards certain varieties and speakers affected the comprehensibility results; "The territorial disputes between Malaysia and Indonesia hampered some Indonesian subjects to purposely leave some Malaysian variety test questions unanswered. Some Indonesians studying in Thailand explicitly expressed their disinterest to the Malaysian speakers during the data collection" (Wilang & Teo, 2012b, p 37). Although the comprehensibility of the varieties from the Expanding Circle were not examined in this study, there are still implications that affect them. Firstly, the fact that a huge majority of Outer Circle speakers had moderate comprehensibility and that there were very little low comprehensibility speakers means that the Expanding Circle varieties had similar vocabularies and identifying meaning was not incredibly difficult. The locutionary meanings that were not caught by Expanding Circle participants could very easily be due to colloquialisms in Outer Circle varieties that Outer Circle participants were not aware of being variety specific; the research does not provide written versions of all of the communication acts performed by participants. This is a reminder that both the speaker and the listener are responsible for achieving all levels of intelligibility (Smith & Nelson, 2006).

Cambodian English Intelligibility and Attitudes

Cambodia has had quite a distinctive and tumultuous history with non-native languages, including the English language. For thousands of years the region now known as the Kingdom of Cambodia has been a home to numerous language families, all the different languages that came with people to Cambodia brought new ideas, beliefs, religions, values, knowledge, cultures, sounds, meanings, etc. While this list could no doubt continue for pages due to the immense impact that languages have had on Cambodia, it is impossible to truly know all of the influences that languages have had on this ancient kingdom. However, it is very clear that languages and history are well entwined with each other in Cambodia. The language history from the past century has left a jarringly undeniable scar on Cambodia and left its citizens with a laborious undertaking to reclaim its status as the "Pearl of Asia" as well as catch up to the progress of other ASEAN member states.

Being a member of ASEAN and the push for integration is putting more pressure on Cambodia to reexamine its English and education policies. English language teachers throughout the country are starting to feel the weight and pressure of ensuring Cambodians are ready for participation in the ASEAN integration. A big part of this preparation is strengthening Cambodia's grasp and perception of the English language, making sure that its English speakers are able to succeed on both the speaking and

listening sides of intelligibility. In order to proceed with English language teaching in regards to intelligibility, research is necessary.

Cambodia currently has relatively limited academic research in relation to the English language for numerous reasons. One main justification is that Cambodia is regarded as part of the Expanding Circle where there is less research about varieties in general, partially due to the idea that some scholars have about Expanding Circle countries do not have fully formed varieties and are still in the process of developing. Also, English usage in the Expanding Circle is often categorized as English as a Foreign Language because the government has not provided any official status about its usage; correspondingly Cambodia does not have any rules or laws regarding the status of English. Other factors such as being a rather small country with an unstable and corrupt infrastructure, the brutal history with foreign languages, and an extremely hit-or-miss quality of the education system in general have all contributed to even less research than other countries from the Expanding Circle.

Although Cambodia is considered to be in the Expanding Circle, Cambodia is rather unique because of its historical and current usages of English as well as the opinions of speakers of Cambodian English. How Cambodians feel about English is crucial to its growth, possible policy changes, and the future of the variety itself. For example, one study showed that the opinion of English being a foreign language was not a very popular belief, instead 76% of the participants regarded English to be a second language or international language (Moore & Bounchan, 2010). This attitude was quite surprising to the researchers since the participants of that study were Cambodian university students who attended a school named Institute for Foreign Languages where English was always referred to and taught as a foreign language, which was the exact same way secondary schools approach English, and the term EFL was prominently used throughout their education at the university (Clayton, 2008; Moore & Bounchan, 2010). This demonstrates just how strong attitudes and opinions about English can be.

Ever since 1997, the internet became more readily available to the masses as well as cheap enough for people to afford it and with the addition of free Wi-Fi in nearly all public places throughout Phnom Penh as well as affordable technology, English usage exploded (Garella, 1997). Now that there was an easy and inexpensive connection to the rest of the world, Cambodians could see just how global English had become which helped create the ever increasing demand to learn English and English language schools for all ages popped up all over Cambodia's cities (Clayton S. , 2008). The current attitudes that citizens presently maintain towards English have already fueled a massive, highly profitable industry as well as shaped how and who teaches English even though it might not be what is best for English language learners.

In the late 2000s, researchers in Cambodia sought to find more answers about the state of English in Cambodia. Researchers wanted answers to whether or not Cambodia did indeed have a distinct variety, how was English being used, and what were the opinions of Cambodians about English. Two studies occurred relatively around the same time as each other, 2007 and 2008, and both studies transpired from the Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL) at the prestigious Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP). The IFL was one of the few places that provided bachelor programs for ELT and had provided

teaching degrees to thousands of Cambodians (Moore & Bounchan, 2010[2]). Although both studies acknowledged Cambodia's status within the Expanding Circle, none of the researchers agreed with the belief held by some that a variety did not exist simply because of being located in the Expanding Circle and they clearly had seen from their students and the general presence of English in Cambodia that there was a rapid evolution of English in Cambodia and it was necessary for it to be investigated. (Keuk, 2008; Moore & Bounchan, 2010). As has been previously mentioned in other sections, a recognized variety was important for ELT development as well as changing attitudes about what variety should be learned and intelligibility.

While Moore and Bounchan (2010) focused on questionnaires and speaking with students, Keuk (2008) focused on written materials/assignments submitted throughout a semester by the researcher's students. Unsurprisingly, both studies concluded that there indeed was a Cambodian English variety and the two studies were able to identify many of the same distinctive features of Cambodian English (Keuk, 2008; Moore & Bounchan, 2010). These studies also advised that some of these characteristics might affect the intelligibility of this variety to non-Cambodian English users which also could easily affect both Cambodians' and non-Cambodians' opinions of Cambodian English.

Keuk (2009) decided to further investigate the intelligibility of Cambodian English by surveying the perspectives of native and non-native English speaking foreigners in Cambodia. He found that 58% of his participants felt Cambodian English to be understandable over 70% of the time according to their personal experiences while only 12% believed that Cambodian English was intelligible less than 50% of the time, but 93% of the participants reported having misunderstood what was spoken to them (Keuk, 2009). However, the high percentage of those who stated they had experienced at least one misunderstanding seems to be a bit off-putting since it is highly improbable that a person is able to correctly identify every utterance with 100% accuracy[3]. Since researchers as well as many participants in the previous studies by Keuk (2008) and Moore & Bounchan (2010) all identified certain phonological characteristics as a key feature of Cambodian English, it was not shocking that the foreigner participants in Keuk's intelligibility study (2009) chose pronunciation as the most common cause for misunderstandings. Although this study showed that foreigners' conversations were mostly successful with Cambodian English speakers, Keuk recognized that more in-depth research is needed into the attitudes and behaviors of all Cambodian English conversation participants (Keuk, 2009).

Opinions are an adverse yet crucial part of intelligibility. As was discussed earlier in the ASEAN portion, opinions that English users have about other people and people's dialects/accents, cultures, and countries as well as perceptions about who a person is does significantly and unfairly affect intelligibility (Wilang & Teo, 2012c). In the past, Cambodians who used foreign languages were regarded by other Cambodians as wealthy, highly educated, and part of an elite social status; people sought to learn foreign languages as a way to improve their lives (Chandler, 2009). Sadly, this exact opinion about people who spoke foreign languages was what led to the death of millions during the horrifying Khmer Rouge regime; speaking any word that was not Khmer was often a death

[2] Moore's and Bounchan's was performed in 2007, but the results were not published until 2010.

[3] Anecdotally, I am absolutely positive that I am not intelligible to myself 100% of the time.

sentence (Chandler, 2009; Lonely Planet, 2015). Thankfully, people are no longer sentenced to death for using foreign languages. However, many Cambodians still maintain the pre-Khmer Rouge opinion about foreign languages, most specifically, believing that English is the key to a better life and prosperity and those who speak English have high social and economic statuses as well as lead better lifestyles than those who do not speak English (Igawa, 2008). After all, it was the affluent upper classes that were first able to send their children to schools that taught English (Clayton., 2008).

Conclusion

Intelligibility, and the emergence and analysis of the world Englishes continues to be an important subject. Especially in regions such as Cambodia along with other ASEAN member states where the emergences of some of the initial ASEAN policy agreements have given English de jure ELF status. It is interesting to note that Cambodia's unique history has placed it in a solid position to embrace ELF and leverage that adaption to help facilitate the logistics of trade and business with other ASEAN members. Cambodia, being unique, in having gone from being a nation where an utterance of English was illegal as recently as 1994 to a state where not only is the adoption of English viewed as a way for individuals to further their own prospects but also as a country where a unique Cambodian English varietal has emerged in just a few short decades. Cambodia is unique in part by already having an established base of domestic speakers and instructors originally trained in English not by foreign or L1 speakers but by other Cambodian speakers of Cambodian English; historically this is in part due to the works and teaching methodologies applied by early NGOs, along with lack of access to competent L1 English speaking instructors following the Khmer Rouge regime.

As current Cambodian English users go on to teach the next generation they will include, intentionally or not, many of the unique characteristics and features of Cambodian English as learned from their interactions with colleagues, teachers, and other domestic speakers. This instruction forms the basis of existing English skills that entering instructors in ELT will encounter among their students, thus it is important to understand the emergence, nature, and acceptability of this varietal in our instruction, and their impacts on the lives and goals of Cambodian English speakers in general. It is important that instructors understand the characteristics and tendencies of Cambodian English that may impact mutual intelligibility as they interact with their students and as their students enter the broader community and business world, and begin to interact more with speakers of other ASEAN English varieties where the successful negotiation of mutual intelligibility becomes increasingly important.

Intelligibility and attitudes towards intelligibility truly are vital for cross cultural communication and ELT. Thus shaping what is accepted as a valid form of speech and successful instance of communication versus what is viewed as a failure in communication impacting parties' ability to accept the validity of communication or assessment of progress and their own intelligibility. This researcher has found that attitudes about intelligibility and purpose of varieties are clearly improving around the world. Although more people are embracing their regional varieties as having equal value, there are still many negative

opinions about varieties being passed on to young language learners; both kinds of attitudes can readily be found amongst English users, schools, and teachers.

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