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The utility and cultural framing of global English: Perspectives from a group of Korean English users

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Abstract: Increased global mobility, online and offline, can foreground more nuanced interpretations of Global English and its cultural cycles. Adopting a Cosmopolitan Perspective and utilising semi-structured interviews, this study investigated seven Korean English users' views on English's global utility and cultural affiliations. Overall, English was highly regarded for its ability to offer global connectivity, opportunity, and access to knowledge. However, while framed as a global asset, it was described merely as a tool among many when engaging with the world. Widespread internet usage leading to increased visibility of many other languages was an implicating factor for English being described as "not the only way". English's Western affiliations were affirmed while it was also expressed that English is a vehicle for many global voices encapsulating an ever-evolving international culture. Within the scope of increased global interconnectedness, such perspectives demonstrate that these polarities are not mutually exclusive and are insights not necessarily encumbered by imperialistic undertones. The findings suggest that heightened global mobility is leading to enhanced global sensitivities which can eventuate more critical dispositions towards English usage. This can lead to renewed insights into the characterisation of Global English within ELT practice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

We live in a global society where we are increasingly mobile. This can lead to greater opportunity to learn about issues further afield, and allows us to confidently form multiple interpretations of the world. English as the global language is now embedded within a more visible multilingual environment. The participants in this study captured a perspective that frames English as not the only way to be informed about the world, but at the same time they positively drew from its Anglo associations. It was expressed that use of technology is a strong medium in which we can diversify our global interactions. These views indicate that current globalising trends afford greater opportunity to form critical perspectives on how we integrate with the world, and how we interpret English as the global lingua franca. It would be in the interests of educational institutes to construct programmes that give recognition to this reality.

Subjects: Popular Culture;; Bilingualism & Multilingualism; Language & Power; Language Policy & Planning; WorldEnglishes; General Language Reference; English

Keywords: Global English; cosmopolitanism; ELF; language ideologies; linguistic imperialism

1. Background

Research carried out on the spread of English worldwide shows several differing ideological positions, highlighting a degree of contention with how it is globally conceived. Oft cited are the World Englishes (WE) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) perspectives which seek to demonstrate that English learners garner a sense of ownership over English by way of integrating aspects of their cultural background into their linguistic usage (e.g., Bhatia, 2008; Canagarajah, 1999; Jenkins, 2009; Saraceni, 2008; Seidlhofer, 2009). Yet, in spite of this ascribed sense of appropriation, a number of studies that have examined learner attitudes reveal a preference towards native forms (e.g., Baker & Hüttner, 2017; Cavanagh, 2020; He & Miller, 2011; Phan, 2018; Ranta, 2010; Sasayama, 2013; Zhang, 2013). Such revelations can signal Global English to maintain Western cultural affiliations and align with the contention that the world is homogenising through convergence, with some influencers being more culturally conspicuous than others (Mufwene, 2010; Phillipson, 2004, 2009), i.e., McDonaldisation. However, critics highlight that this reductive perspective side-lines individual agency. It discounts how learners can transform English for their own purposes through increasingly varied global experiences and construct a sense of ownership around its usage (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999; Kubota, 2012; Nonaka, 2018; Phan, 2017; Rhoads & Szelenyi, 2011).

Increases in online activity and ease of travel to the wider world provide new avenues for the expansion of one's cultural horizons (Ros i Solé, 2013; Schattle, 2007). In this space English learners can reconcile local-global experiences in light of how they engage with the contemporary world, which can aid in the emergence of a self-mediated agency in their English usage. In other words, unpredictable global encounters through increases in global mobility provide fertile ground for English learners to become more culturally informed and sophisticated, drawing out more critical perspectives on the conceptualisation of English in the world (Risager, 2007; Ros i Solé, 2013). Matsuda (2018) expresses that increased opportunity to engage with many global voices allows learners to reinterpret standardised conceptions of culture and re-envision the ways in which they relate to each other through their use of English. In this view, learners can be less encumbered by inferred imperialistic ideologies, and can be leading agents in the way that English is ideological shaped (Phan, 2009). Their use of English within a multicultural perspective can be seen to align more with representations of themselves and their unique global experiences rather than notions related to stereotypical second language learner characteristics (Guilherme, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2017; Sung, 2020a, 2020b).

Therefore, when taking today's globalised milieu into consideration, a more nuanced approach to investigating contemporary learners' engagement with English becomes not only relevant to understanding ideologies of Global English but also to advancing new understandings of global cultural flows. Following this, the present study argues that increasing use of digital networks and ability to move globally leads to more informed perspectives, which in turn act as a catalyst for continuing critical analysis of English's position in the world. The focus of the present study, therefore, was to explore the utility and cultural framing of Global English in light of globalisation flows through insights garnered from a group of South Korean university students (henceforth Korea and Korean). The choice of Korean citizens was strategic as this is a demographic from a young age vigorously involved in the study of English, and a demographic from a country with a fervour to establish itself as a strong global player, both culturally and economically. This cultural context lends itself as a prime setting to probe the meaning of English from a cohort technological, culturally, and socially engaged in contemporary global affairs.

The following section outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the present study which are based on Beck's (2002) cosmopolitan perspective. This is a view that frames individuals and their local communities as uniquely involved in the formation of a global community.

2. Cosmopolitan perspective—situating attitudes towards global english

While research into language ideologies has indicated that certain organisational structures of society can normalise views about language, which can lead to a propagation of language hierarchies (Blommaert, 1999; Cooke & Simpson, 2012), the environment and context in which one engages has a significant impact on language attitudes. Weekly (2019) comments that individualised items, such as a phonetic feature or even a language as a whole itself, cannot be separated from the complex social context in which language exists. In other words, attitudes towards language and related cultural loadings do not exist in a vacuum, but are situated within continuously evolving and influential social contexts. Such conceptions bring to the fore the globalising social environment that surrounds and continually interpenetrates contemporary society and is an essential social context to consider with reference to English as a global language.

Research into globalisation views it as synonymous with global integration while at times also framing it within salient perspectives of Westernisation or Americanisation (Ricento, 2010). It is also prudent to note that many discussions on globalisation focus on aspects of global cosmopolitanism or a cosmopolitanism reality (Beck, 2002, 2004), which pinpoints a perspective more in terms of a cultural and critical sophistication. Such a view gives voice to the inner social aspects of globalisation flows and redirects assumptions to interpret globalisation from within the individual, their experiences, and/or their local context (Beck, 2004).

Beck (2004) characterises a cosmopolitan perspective as a more nuanced emphasis on “increased interdependence of social actors across national boundaries as an unforeseen side-effect of actions that have no normative cosmopolitan intent” (p. 132). In other words, many everyday actions, or the ways in which individuals engage with society, have become unconscious activities resulting from an entanglement of local and international exposures—without knowing it, we are actively part of and contributing to the global environment around us. A social banalness or banal cosmopolitanism is a way to define these unforeseen links of familiarity. This describes how the global populace is invisibly entangled within familiar cycles of consumerism and relatable social actions. Aspects of banalness appear in every day cultural activities, such as in the variety of foods in supermarkets and restaurants, or the mixing of cultural elements in popular media—all of which can add to a recognisable global community or cultural normalcy, which can implicitly shape one's world view. Ryan (2006) comments that issues of global concern and popularism have become part of everyday local experiences, and, as Santos (2006) similarly notes, are at a level where much of the global populace is implicitly connected to some aspect of globalisation. Cultural exposure of this nature can support a broader understanding of the world which can lead to a heightened critical perspective when engaging with global issues (Beck, 2004; Jacobsen, 2015; Marlina, 2013).

Internet exploration and digital technology that leads to intensified social media usage has expanded the walls of modern society. Block (2010) notes that “cultural knowledge of cosmopolitan capital is about technological skills with reference to the internet” (pp. 298–299). As such, Web 2.0 and ever-present mobile technology has allowed the digital space to become an easily accessible avenue for education, multilingualism, and casual connection with local and distant others (e.g., Chik, 2018, 2020; Hafner et al., 2015). Such pervasive and influential digital interconnection along with increased global mobility can lead to immediate gains in cultural competence, which can instil a more centred rather than peripheral global disposition (Beatty, 2013; Marlina, 2013; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008; Pence, 2007). Fundamentally, through contemporary social media, disparate individuals can interact on a level that draws out distinctiveness, which can gradually support a sense of cohesion based around a familiarity of differences (Beck, 2004).

This global familiarity of differences can beget a social reimagining. Jacobsen (2015) proposes that through a cosmopolitan lens the traditional sense of dualities or opposites is challenged. This focuses on what Beck (2002) describes, in his framing of a cosmopolitan reality, as a rejection of an either-or perspective. This means that viewing social relations within a cosmopolitan perspective signifies “inclusive oppositions” [rather than] “exclusive oppositions” (Beck, 2002, p. 19). In other words, there is a strong emphasis on the recognition of difference as the core unit of social cohesion, rather than it being used as one of demarcation or segregation. A core value of this inclusiveness is based on a “reflexive globality”, which as Beck (2004) describes, positions individuals as being both “inside and outside” (p. 143) in terms of a local and global perspective. Through this balanced engagement, “otherness”, as Beck contends is elevated as the core value and cohesive aspect of our global network. Jacobsen (2015) proposes that this type of social arrangement can support the development of critical dispositions, the emergence of a global perspective that is more individually nuanced, and the formation of multiple loyalties that transverse transnational online and offline lifestyles—society in this case is a constant reassortment of cultural symbols and dispositions.

In this cosmopolitan milieu, although some scholars might disagree with regard to how English manifests itself, numerous studies show respondents describing English as a means of self-development, personal and economic mobility, and a tool to extend social connections (e.g., Gao et al., 2007; Lamb, 2004; Phan, 2017; Sung, 2018). These descriptions point to Bourdieu’s notion of “capital” as a useful concept to interpret the role of English in career development and personal achievement—individuals with good English skills in the world can achieve elevation in economic and social status (Bauman, 1998; Cho, 2017; Niño-Murcia, 2003). Yet, while Guilherme (2007) agrees that Global English is a loaded language in terms of providing access to social and economic means, he also poignantly describes it as a “powerful vehicle for the exercise of a global citizenship” (p. 87), which he further advances, can shape hidden cosmopolitan alliances and an intercultural freedom. Development of this kind of social and cultural capital not only entails the ability to move, to speak, and to understand cross-culturally, but involves the control of fear, and the promotion of a critical more equalised global outlook (Beck, 2004; Guilherme, 2007; Jacobsen, 2015). Through a cosmopolitan lens, English can be viewed as a common language or the contact language of choice (Jenkins, 2015) that inculcates responsibility in its learners without it being transformed into a culturally disengaged global medium (Guilherme, 2007).

When actively taking responsibility and agency in English use, non-native English speakers (NNEs) can be leading agents in the way that English is globally supported and ideologically shaped (Phan, 2009). As such, so-called hegemonic threats can be viewed as basic cultural complements to the make-up of Global English that do not encroach upon a locally derived global sensibility. Through resistance and negotiation (ibid), English’s cultural properties can provide a foundation for a sense of appropriation and self-described meaning to emerge. When ascribing L2 learners the sensibility of personally being in control and involved in their learning experience, English can be refashioned in a creative way without an imperialistic burden, and can be casually used at a local and global level (Leppänen, 2007; Martin, 2007; Seargeant, 2009).

The contemporary global flow of networks, both online and offline, has brought about a reimagining of context when conceptualising global cultural and social relations. It is prudent, therefore, to view how individuals engage with Global English through a cosmopolitan lens, especially learners who use English on an everyday basis. This can give insight into the potential of ever-increasing global networks to aid construction of self-mediated global sensibilities with regard to the use of English within these networks. In order to investigate this perspective, and with respect to the cohort of South Korean participants chosen for this investigation, two research questions (RQs) were formulated to guide this study:

- (1) In what ways do the participants characterise the role of English in consideration of contemporary globalisation flows?

(2) In what ways do the participants conceptualise and associate culture to Global English?

The present study is built on the premise that through intensified global interactions, learners may be compelled to critique or even reject certain standard forms of culture. Such insights can shed light on how evolving global interactions reshape the ways in which learners use and adapt English for their own purposes. A more informed perspective in this area—one which recognises the fast-changing landscape in which English is used—can aid in the formation of better adapted approaches to English language teaching. Fostering a deeper understanding for how English is consumed at a local and personal level can also inform better language policy decisions at the institutional level.

3. Methodology

This paper details part of a larger multiple case study investigation that took place across a 10-month period from August 2016 to June 2017. All participants were South Korean citizens, engaged in university study, under the age of 30, all female, and in pursuit of English related careers (see Table 1).

3.1. Participant selection approach

The choice of a specific Korean cohort was purposeful. Studies by Cho (2017), Cho (2015) and Park (2009) discuss a unique permanency of the English language within the psyche of Koreans with foundations linking a fervour for English learning to global prosperity. Their studies outline a perpetual struggle that persists in Korean society to acquire English skills in view of seeking economic prowess and global recognition. Such ideological intricacies frame an interesting site of investigation, especially for those who have placed the language as a focus in their lives against the backdrop of an increasingly mobile global lifestyle—which, may be at odds with the local context in terms of language learning (Park 2009). Cho (2017) states that a cohort of similar background and purposefully engaged in the English language provides a rich site to explore English ideologies. It provides a strong platform to understand the meaningfulness of the language from the perspective of a homogenous yet a diverse group in terms of their unique experiences with the language in view of the global opportunities on offer by contemporary society. As such, choosing a cohort who have purposefully chosen English as a way to seek out a professional career enables a close examination of English in action and how its intimate study in conjunction with global prospects can shape a unique globally minded user. Selecting a cohort

Table 1. Participant information

Name	Gender	Age	Residing	Course	Time abroad
Ji	F	28	Sydney	Translation & Interpreting*	Approx. 2.5 yrs ***
Jen	F	28	Sydney	Translation & Interpreting*	Approx. 3 yrs ***
Rachel	F	29	Sydney	Applied Linguistics*	Approx. 1.5 yrs ***
Bin	F	28	Seoul	Translation & Interpreting*	Approx. 1.5 yrs
Sienna	F	23	Seoul	English Language and TESL**	Approx. 2 yrs
Yeon	F	29	Seoul	Translation & Interpreting*	Approx. 1.5 yrs
Caroline	F	23	Seoul	English Language & Literature**	Approx. 1.5 yrs

All names are pseudonyms. *Masters. **Undergraduate. ***Includes time studying in Sydney.

under the age of 30 captures this potential as it would be reasonable to assume that participants under this age would be active internet users and would recognise what would be considered to be globally oriented, or would have informed insights as to what this notion entails. It is also of note that the seven participants were all female. Although male and female participants were sought, as this may provide a broader perspective on the issues discussed, only females responded to the call for participation. While gender can form the backdrop of studies on language attitudes (e.g., Cho, 2017), such issues were beyond the scope of the present study, which had its focus on ideological perspectives of the utility and cultural framing of Global English. An all-female cohort can only be noted as a consequence of the participant selection process and did not form a frame in which the data was analysed.

Participants were recruited from universities across Sydney, Australia, and Seoul, South Korea. Dual sites were chosen to reflect that social relations within different contexts can give a deeper analysis of a phenomenon's characteristics (Gobo, 2008). Participants were informed that participation would be anonymous and were given the choice to conduct interviews in either Korean or English—all chose English. All participants consented to take part in the study. All participants had spent time abroad, either travelling or studying. Bin, who was recruited in Sydney, returned to Seoul halfway through her study.

The participant selection characteristics described above present a defined frame in which diverse perspectives on English in the world can be explored. It was the participants' unique relationship with English constructed through varied avenues to use it that was of interest. Specifically, how can these experiences provide insight to evolving perspectives on English in light of our evolving global environment. It is therefore not the purpose to generalise the outcomes of this study to a larger audience, but rather to use the insights from this small cohort to capture a perspective on English that can lead to broader understandings of its usage with respect to cosmopolitan social gains.

All names are pseudonyms. *Masters. **Undergraduate. ***Includes time studying in Sydney.

3.2. Data collection approach

This study took a multiple case study approach (Silverman, 2013). Embedded within this approach was a symbolic interactionist stance. This perspective has emphasis on human agency when seeking to understand social phenomena (Berg & Lune, 2012). Actions, events, and self-concepts can only be understood in terms of their interaction with each other and are a reflection of the social milieu that an individual is embedded in (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Emergence is a key aspect within the symbolic interactionist approach and has a focus on the non-habituated side of social life. It stresses the possibility of transformation under new forms of social interaction, especially within existing forms of social organisation (Herman-Kinney & Reynolds, 2003). This is noteworthy in terms of what has been coined as “new media”, which encompasses all that is related to the internet and the interplay between technology and social life (Konieczny, 2009).

Data were primarily gathered through semi-structured interviews and post-interview reflections (Dörnyei, 2007). According to Richards (2009), interviews “can provide insights into people's experiences, perceptions, and motivations at a depth that is not possible with questionnaires” [and] “hold out the possibility of understanding the lived world from the perspectives of the participants involved” (p. 187). This emphasis on participants' lived experiences fits closely with the study's research focus. Five interviews were conducted with each participant which were either face-to-face or via Skype. They were audio recorded and lasted approximately one hour. Issues discussed included the participants' views on globalisation, global cultures, the English language, its varieties and other associations, global identities, and motivations. This paper is focused on the participants' insights into the utility of English in the world and how they framed its cultural associations in light of contemporary globalisation flows. The aforementioned topics were

discussed in a recursive fashion throughout the interviewing period, allowing for a richer and fuller account to be achieved (Dörnyei, 2007).

3.3. Data analysis approach

The data set, which consisted of transcribed interviews and written reflections, was analysed with procedures in line with latent content analysis (Dörnyei, 2007), with the aid of NVivo 11 software. Content analysis follows the generalised sequence of coding, making interpretations, and seeking thematic patterns to inform specified research aims (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). It is important to note that texts are not beholden to a singular meaning—they are open to interpretation, with meaning dependent on the focus of the study and the context in which the data is situated (Krippendorff, 2013). This allows the researcher to discover trends and patterns in line with his/her research interests.

Common with similar qualitative studies, analysis was an iterative and evolving process. Upon familiarising myself with the data by reading it multiple times, I began generating initial codes that organised the data into meaningful groups. While a number of a priori codes were used in the initial stages of coding in order to broadly categorise responses into issues concerning globalisation, English variety attitudes, global culture, etc, an open inductive process was primarily engaged to draw out the nuances of the participants' responses. Patterns and trends were gradually categorised, with redundant themes re-analysed, which eventually led to the development of standalone categories that aligned with the core objectives of the RQs. This led to the most interesting parts of the data being linked and the most salient codes being raised to develop themes (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Following the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998), themes that emerged from one participant were compared and contrasted with another in order to determine similarities and differences.

4. Findings

The focus of this paper was to open a dialogue on the ways in which the role of English can be interpreted in an increasingly mobile global society through the eyes of users directly engaged with it. Therefore, in what follows, the main themes relating to the participants' perceptions regarding the utility of English in the world and their insights into its perceived affiliated culture are presented. Where appropriate, representative quotes taken from the participants' interviews are used to explicate the points and themes under discussion.

4.1. Utility of english

With respect to RQ1, the participants typically framed English as an ingrained and functional global tool that is integrated into the systems of a global community, yet not wholly unique in being the only way to navigate the global world.

4.1.1. English as an integral part of the global system

One of the more prominent themes in relation to the benefits ascribed to English was with how it offers global access, especially in terms of professional advancement and worldwide communication. The participants' responses when characterising these attributes hit on the notion of power—however, this was framed more in terms of a linguistic utility or tool rather than a language of dominance. Caroline, in the following comment, describes English with reference to access to the job market and gaining a sense of closeness to other people through ease of interaction.

There are a lot of opportunities ... you can get different kinds of global jobs, and you can meet people and then just naturally use English. So, I feel, when I'm using English, it can bring me closer to the world, and I can think about working in many places. It's like, has a power like that, useful (Caroline).

Commenting on how she can just “naturally” use English in interactions emphasises the embeddedness of English as the global lingua franca. Individuals in inter-cultural communications may by-

pass negotiation for how they communicate and “naturally” default to English. With the majority of English language communications occurring between NNEs (Seidlhofer, 2011), unconsciously defaulting to English may also lighten particular cultural connotations, embedding it more organically within a global mind-set as the de-facto communication tool. However, while multilingual exchanges would undoubtedly occur, and with increasing occurrence in today’s globalising world, English as a natural option, or tool as Caroline alludes to, also links to a turn within recent ELF literature that views English as “a Multilingua Lingua” (Jenkins, 2015, p. 73). Here, ELF is redefined as “multilingual communication in which English is available as a contact language of choice” (ibid, p. 73). In this view, there is an appreciation of an increasingly multilingual environment but with English as the recognised de-facto albeit neutral communication tool.

The perspective that English is not just a language for native speaker engagement was also prominent in the participants’ responses. It was conveyed that its common use can be a catalyst for open-mindedness thereby creating a sense of empowerment. Specifically, NNEs can use it to interpret the world by way of learning about its diverse users with increasing instances of connecting and interacting with each other through English. It has, as Ji described “a power of connectivity between all people to make you grow”, and similarly for Yeon, its use “makes your view broader [and] helps to learn and understand more.” Sienna, in capturing a sense of cosmopolitan relatedness, emphasises English’s power to cross native/non-native boundaries:

If they (NNEs) feel English is familiar, it can connect them to all people and create a sense of being together. I can communicate with native speakers and non-native speakers or anybody and this happens through many normal ways now ... travelling and studying abroad and using SNS, right. I think people have a desire to talk to anybody these days and English helps (Sienna).

Sienna captures a perspective representative of contemporary times, in that, intensified digital and physical global mobility can afford higher instances of intercultural interaction. She alludes to the fact that as an outcome of increased means to interact globally, individuals can have a desire to engage and participate in communications, be it with native or non-native speakers. Use of English intensified by modern lifestyles has become a banal tool to connect to fellow globally involved individuals.

Jen, as another example, described a similar perspective. She reflects on how she once held the erroneous perception that English was for use with native speakers. She pinpoints that through common international engagement, she sees a shift in focus from native English speakers (NESs) to all speakers of English as the target group for Global English usage.

When I was young, I didn’t know. I just thought that I’d use English with native speakers. But when I went abroad, I felt a little bit of an idiot haha I became a lot more realistic ... because the world is changing so fast, people just use it normally with anybody ... people just collectively use it (Jen).

What we can take from Jen’s comment is that the fast pace of change with how individuals engage with society can facilitate evolving perceptions of language engagement. This evolving engagement can further underlie a developing sense of overarching global relatedness or cosmopolitanism. English’s general ubiquity across native/non-native speaker lines can undergird a global familiarity rather than foregrounding direct differences between speakers. This global familiarity was also strongly represented in Bin’s responses. She sees contemporary language learners’ motivations for English to be more globally oriented. In her view, English is a connective tool for that context rather than for the traditional contexts, i.e. British and/or American.

I think people generally want to integrate into the world and so the motivation to do that is to learn English. So, the reason why we learn English is to communicate with that context. The

tool and connection between us is English. So the motivation to be connected to the world is English (Bin).

Motivations for English learning going beyond integration into the traditional communities are issues that have been widely discussed in the literature (e.g., Lamb, 2004; Sung, 2013; Yashima, 2002). What is interesting about Bin's comment is that, other than herself, she holds the presumption that her views are akin to the wider community—one in which she is tacitly engaged with on a daily basis through modern media and technological means. For her the global community is the global context, a proverbial or archetypal space rather than a target group of people. This leads one to speculate on the normalisation or implicit deferral of English use to a broader global context in its contemporary use, thus rendering discussions about specific target audiences as outdated going forward in the literature.

4.1.2. *English is not the only way*

Acute awareness of the capricious nature of globalisation flows was a discernible component with how the participants dissected English's position in the world. A recurrent premise in their responses was that while an integral part of the globalising process, English is not the sole factor in constituting what globalisation represents or how one would invariably engage with its social processes. Rather, there are other elements to consider when unravelling the complexity of the global space, especially with how disparate individuals engage with each other, and how such various means of social engagement can underlie a truer sense of globalism.

One way this was conveyed is the increasing prevalence of technology in people's lives and as a result how communication norms are evolving. Conversation on this point mostly revolved around travel and the proliferation of smartphone use. Of significance, it was expressed that language apps can benefit one's ability to move around globally:

English is important but there are translators now and technology so you don't have to be competent in speaking English to move around, so it's not critical if you cannot speak English fluently to travel (Jen).

Keeping in mind the high occurrence of English in the global tourism industry, Jen's comment indicates how the increase in use of electronic translation can diminish the explicit need of competent English skills to travel the world. In general, the participants leant towards the opinion that a modicum of English ability in conjunction with ever-evolving communication apps can provide similar traction towards an enriching global experience to fluency in English pre the smart phone era. Such views give insight to how our technology-mediated lives lend fodder to the development of more nuanced and critical dispositions towards the placement of English in contemporary society.

Conversation on technology also encompassed the ubiquitous use of the internet and how it facilitates global engagement and information proliferation. It was conveyed that its pervasiveness supports increased visibility of the collective human experience and also the use of many other languages across its platform. This allows for the world's information to be digested without the specific need for English:

Well the internet right ... the world's information is now increasingly available in more languages so that can provide alternative perspectives. We don't always have to use English (Rachel).

If I want to know about other countries, I can just read about that information in articles in Korean too. It's more available now ... and I think that's better because why just rely on one way (Yeon).

Interacting with the world through one's own language can empower local participation in a global community, and create a more visible holistic global language ecology (Crystal, 2012). The visibility of more languages performs the function of not only supporting diversification and interpretation of

knowledge, but can also enact a strong sense of global engagement from within a local perspective. One's perceived local context becomes an already global point of departure (Beck, 2002). Engaging in global affairs through an integrated local perspective can also give recognition to diverse linguistic repertoires and identify the importance of multilingualism in contemporary ELF contexts (Jenkins, 2015).

Although English language penetration on the internet still ranks highest among all languages (Internet Work Stats, 2020), the participants described an overall profile of the digital space as one that displays growing diversity and cultural variety. Increasing digital interaction between various cultural perspectives is also conducive to the development of more informed mind-sets. This according to Caroline is what progresses and quantifies true concepts of globalisation, rather than use of English performing this function.

The internet or technology allows us to connect in many ways. I think these days that kind of access gives people an open mind, and that is the key thing for globalisation. We can choose this or that. While English is definitely significant, it's not the only thing. Developing your mind through information is better (Caroline).

Sienna furthers the notion of globalisation being better represented in terms of individual participation when referring to the Korean context. According to her, Korean students are now in a position to enact more autonomy when engaging with the world and should refrain from identifying English as the primary globalisation agent:

I'm not sure how Korean students think in relation to English and globalisation, but they should have the ability to go out and discover the world themselves and not feel forced just to use English. They might get the wrong concept about English and globalisation. I mean they can just sit at home and connect straight away or when they just walk outside with their phone (Sienna).

For Caroline and Sienna global trends propped up by digital interactions are a catalyst for choice to be the leading component with how individuals enact themselves in the world. English holds its place; however, the global context is better represented with respect to individual participation and choice. As more people of various backgrounds interact with each other, value in these differences increase, which can then support more agency with how people interface with the world. This comradery based on difference can facilitate a social discourse that offers a reinterpretation of perceived hierarchies in terms of communication norms. Drawing from a cultural freedom found for example, in the digital space, the reality of this social discourse does not diminish but ultimately redefines the relationship between English and its global user base.

4.2. Cultural associations of english

Prominent in the participants' responses to how they associate English with culture was awareness of the tacit undercurrents of a culturally diverse global community. This for them can support many viewpoints on how one would characterise a Global English culture. They were consistent as a group to describe two main perspectives: English is a language rooted in its original cultural base; and, English is a global language with abstract cultural associations and a purveyor of all cultures.

4.2.1. Keeping with tradition

Western connections were quick to be highlighted, especially American affiliations. A point of interest was the Korean context and how historical American influence has grounded English within a perpetual American frame of reference for many Korean people. It was emphasised that from the Korean War (1950–1953) onwards, the US has had a significant impact on Korea, most notably in terms of economic, military, and cultural contributions, making an association between English and the US an uncomplicated issue for Korean people. The participants' views on this point underline the significance of context when exploring how one might perceive the cultural loading of a language.

However, a noteworthy point raised, which invariably ties English to a traditional native speakerdom, is the manifestation and use of language in popular media. The availability and convenience of media content related to the US, such as movies and TV shows, aids in reinforcing this cultural association:

It's easy to adapt to native things especially American TV dramas and movies. They are just easy to watch and when we want to learn English in Korea, we usually just pick the American stuff, and of course the Hollywood movies, so those cultural things are just there (Jen).

Especially for English learning, as Jen alludes to above, the popularity of US/British based media allows for easy deferral to this content, which helps maintain a consistent link between English and the traditional contexts. Ji also conveyed that the mass consumption of this content as learning material is beneficial, as it can create a sense of global relatedness among English learners. Her comment below is interesting as she seems to be unphased by the fact that the content is often US based and focuses more on it creating a sense of solidarity or comradery among learners. The content is not culturally imposing but rather facilitates an implicit bond of shared experiences in ELF exchanges:

Well I guess it's good to have that content because if it's common to our learning then maybe we can talk about it easily with anybody. I guess knowing it's from American doesn't really matter, to me anyway, it's just something to watch and practice English. I think we are little bit smarter these days (Ji).

Consistent display, albeit not overtly, of the traditional contexts in media led to the assumption from the participants that at a basic level a language is an obvious representation or link to a culture. The ubiquity of US/British popular media simply reaffirms these associations and is an essential element to be recognised that provides many advantages. It was noted by the participants that explicit recognition of the traditional cultural tenets of English offers a strong learning platform. Caroline in her view spoke of how an appreciation of English's cultural background is crucial for a deeper comprehension of the language:

Language holds the culture so English came from Britain and America; the root of the culture is very important so we can know and understand English more deeply (Caroline).

This deeper reflection on English reveals a wealth of cultural nuance for the participants that affords a stronger foundation in the language. It was voiced that embracing English's cultural undertones is important for clarity with the way it is naturally spoken and as Bin remarked, provides " ... insight into its pragmatics" (Bin). We see from Jen's comment below that the nuances within its speech, unique contextual usage, and pragmatic conventions are best learnt with English's traditional cultural affiliations in mind:

Many expressions and aspects of English originate from their culture of course. It's necessary to keep that in mind. So, it's important and unavoidable to recognise and use that. So, if you want to know expressions, you need to respect that English originates from that culture (Jen).

This sentiment was similarly expressed by Sienna. For her, correct usage of idioms and style, and understanding the cultural inflections with how English is used in natural conversation comes from reference to NESs. However, as with Ji, we do see in her comment that she is not necessarily burdened by a native English speakerdom as she appears confident in her NNEs identity. Rather, she veers on the side of appreciation of NESs as a default reference to mastering the English language:

Well I'm not a native speaker and that's fine, I kind of like that, I know who I am, but I'd also like to, you know, know exactly how to use English, you know the correct vocabulary in the correct situation, and the conversation style like that, idioms, right. So I can speak English

confidently but like I think listening to native or the people from those countries, I can learn all the use better. I think that makes sense to me, like, we have to do that. Like it would be quite vague to think that English culture or the Western things doesn't represent the language or how we can exactly speak it (Sienna).

For the participants as a whole, NESs are the most consistent and reliable reference to aid comprehension in the subtler variations of English's natural usage and cultural inflections. This is necessary to grasp a deeper meaning of the language. Although acknowledgment of this linguistic standard captures an overarching cultural identity of English that is tied to its traditional contexts, it is nonetheless a positive reality for the participants. They consider that a language is a unique manifestation of a particular way to interpret and relate to the world, and to learn English means to positively recognise this fact. It is an asset to the learning experience.

The participants' views depict a strong sense of responsibility with how they enact themselves as Global English speakers. Their own individuated experiences feed into an awareness of how this responsibility can promote a self-oriented English-speaking identity. This is an identity not encumbered by imperialistic undertones, but one that critically integrates a traditional viewpoint on the cultural loading of English and shifts the parameters for what an appropriation of English means to one of self-identification. The participants' views link to Pennycook's (2010) notion of performativity, which frames how identity is individually enacted and evolves through continual reassessment of oneself in light of global influences. Performativity lays criticism at Kachru's (1990) World Englishes (WEs) model, which is anchored in notions of nation and location. Brown (2017) highlights performativity as a post-WEs approach emphasising that it more aptly captures English learners' ability to reinterpret culture and power through more globally aware and idiosyncratic discursive practices. In essence, the participants' interpretation of English as being usefully bound to its traditional culture alludes to an appropriation that is implicitly afforded through better access to worldly information and increased ability to move in today's increasingly connected world. However, it is worth considering that economic privilege and means of access may better position an individual to espouse such perspectives. The participant group are all near-fluent speakers of English in part due to having spent time in foreign countries and using English to construct meaningful dialogue with international compatriots. Their fluency and access to the global community may be a point of advantage in the construction of their ideologies—however, conclusions here would have to be cautiously drawn as this may present a reductive perspective on how contemporary learners engage with and conceptualise English. Such attributes as determination, motivation, and an outward looking perspective can contribute to multifaceted and complex ideologies of English.

4.2.2. English as a vague “new culture”

Language ideologies are heteroglossic and interrelate in multiple ways (Jenks & Lee, 2016; Piller, 2015). For the participants, the description of English holding onto a native speaker ideology operated simultaneously with descriptions of it within a global lingua franca ideology. Meaning, they also conveyed more global perspectives with how it can be interpreted—in many ways, they framed English within these concurrent perspectives without viewing the two ideologies as necessarily mutually exclusive.

English was associated with the international community in which it performs a role aligned with its diverse worldly users. It was voiced that a certain vagueness can be attributed to it that reflects its situatedness within the global community, as Caroline muses:

It can exist within a Global English culture where its cultural links get broader and broader and a little more abstract (Caroline).

The numerous local connections that English makes elevates it into a global wide interpretation. Accordingly, it can be associated with its own international culture that signifies an entanglement

with the ebbs and flows of global cultural cycles. Yeon, for example, echoing Caroline, articulated that English's global capacity allows it to absorb and reflect influences from a worldwide audience. From this she ascribes it its own global culture:

It has its own global culture. There is a world connected to English, so I think then it has a different focus. It is the international language, so if you have interest in anything in the world then the focus is the world and not only a specific country (Yeon).

Similarly, Bin defines English within a "new culture". She interprets it as a medium of global cultural learning, and should therefore be characterised within a nomenclature that better befits this function:

Well when I think of Global English, it contains the English and American culture, but nowadays it contains many countries' culture, so if we learn English we can understand other countries culture so I think it is a new culture; it's not a normal language, it's different, because it's connected to so many people (Bin).

This "new culture" designation encompasses varied influences. As such, the participants' views gave the opinion that the diversity of contexts in which English operates can induce a sense of equality through its mixed-cultural-influences. Caroline encapsulates this view when expressing that within this cultural mix, English is the point of intersection and also the social glue between people:

English is like a good way to become one around the world; it could be this spot that everyone could meet and share; that's where the culture of it comes from, I think (Caroline).

At a broader level, the participants' responses framed English's cultural loading as a recognition of the Other, in which the Other is not just NNEs but all speakers of English. The vagueness attributed to its global culture can be viewed in terms of the vastness of cultural input and connectivity from global peoples. This in turn promotes an equality through awareness as individuals increasingly communicate across multiple cultural lines, native and non-native speaker alike:

The original is not weakening but I think equality among different cultures is being recognised more. Many cultures use English and people know that more because of globalisation. I think Global English has that idea; it is equality and there are many cultural connections, the original of course and many others (Sienna).

Continuously intertwining social practices have a strong role to play in firming up English as a purveyor of cultural awareness and equality. Exact alignment with American and/or British culture, although fundamental as shown in the previous section, lacks representation of its vast user base. Ji mentioned that as more people move around, "... they affect the global culture and this culture affects English; it's affecting each other." We can infer from this that as users move with the language and share in their interactions, there can be an emergent sense of a mutual implicating culture in which everybody partakes and simultaneously draws from. Accordingly, a natural sense of appropriation of English can then emerge through everyday intermingling when using English, as Rachel alluded to:

Well if we are using English together and for the same purposes then maybe we can kind of indulge in it together, like, widespread online activity creates a sense of shared knowledge too (Rachel).

In many ways, appropriation of English can be an appropriation by osmosis, especially in consideration of online activity. As global users of English become increasingly accustomed to using the language with each other, both online and offline, and with speakers of all backgrounds, the notion of Global English being a platform of all cultures can steadily become one of normalcy or

banalness. Increased awareness of the global milieu through digital means and greater opportunity to be globally mobile, as professed by the participants, are the underlying elements to constructing beliefs of a cohesive Global English culture:

I think social awareness really matters and technology because it helps us to get closer. We travel more and communicate easier and that can affect or influence awareness of everybody. So rather than focusing on the Western thing of English, the balance and influence is everywhere for Global English (Jen).

People's usage of English through acts aligned with modern globalising practices can reveal characteristics of users' cultural background and experiences that steadily seep into a common social fabric and aid in the construction of a collective global culture narrative. A narrative that sets its point of departure within one's local or national perspective.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a more nuanced interpretation of the place and function of Global English from the perspective of seven Korean everyday users of English within a cosmopolitan frame of reference. Results suggest that the perceived role and cultural loading of English is evolving to accommodate an increasingly globally mobile user base, i.e., online and offline. Growing visibility of multi-culturalism can lead to increased sensitivities and awareness of one's position in the English-sphere, allowing for greater implicit ownership of one's English usage. Overall, the participants' perceptions appear to support the ELF view that rejects sharp distinctions between different kinds of English users (Baker, 2009). Their opinions build momentum towards a community-based English that incorporates old and new interpretations of its culture as complementary. This reflects how more informed lifestyles can establish hybrid rather than divergent dispositions in which English maintains importance but is built upon the diversity and evolving empowerment of its user base.

5.1. Access and interpretation

The participants' perspectives on English are in line with studies that show how its use as a global lingua franca signifies self-development, and personal and economic mobility (Cho, 2017; Gao et al., 2007; Lamb, 2004). In many respects, English was described in terms of a global tool—a tool for access, a tool for opportunity, and a tool for global connectivity, with emphasis on its role as a communicative tool between all speakers of English, be it NNEs or NNEs (Erling, 2005, 2007; McKay, 2002; Sharifian, 2009). Results extend the perspective that English can be the possession of whoever uses it, especially when conceptualised in terms of a global tool for access and for mobility, and as neutral medium of communication.

If we accept the vibrant global environments in which English users are engaged, we need to equally accept that these same evolving environments can effect change in perspectives of English usage. This is evidenced with how the participants identified English as not an overarching necessity for global engagement—an increasingly globally engaged society is not necessarily bound by the use of English when participating globally. It was pointed out that our increasingly technologically mediated lives bear significance with how we enact and relate ourselves with the world. These insights align with notions that advancements in communication technology are prominent implicating factors to account for when investigating evolving global mobility and how diverse peoples interact socially (Clyne & Sharifian, 2008; Rubdy, 2009).

Moreover, the pervasiveness of the internet in which information is progressively more available in many other languages was noted by the participants. These are issues identified in the literature which highlight how diversification of the world's knowledge through many languages can aid in the widening of social discourse and diverse perspectives on world affairs (Graddol, 2006; Ushioda, 2011). As a corollary, the expanded visibility of many languages in society can precipitate necessity in their learning for many occupational demands. While English currently remains the global lingua franca across business, academic, and international affairs, the growing presence of other languages within

a worldwide platform can raise demand for these languages in an occupational sense (Gollin-Kies et al., 2015). Thus, as globalisation continuously influences our lives, the recognition and acceptance, as shown by the participants, of a multilingual global society can nurture and legitimise the demand for multilingual education, business, and travel. This in turn can necessitate language instruction in these activities, whereby, as Lattford (2012) notes, such measures that encourage multiple language learning for professional purposes improve opportunities for international employment.

While English still dominates internet usage, insights from the participants show that the evolving internet space can change certain perceived hierarchical structures of language use and adds another level of complexity to global integration through language (Dörnyei, 2005; Ryan, 2006). As technology increasingly allows for ease of communication and the facilitation of worldly information through many more languages, research going forward ought to look at the shifting priorities and behaviours of language learners in light of these technological advances.

5.2. Global culture associations

The participants primarily associated an evolving international culture to Global English. While they recognised American and British cultures as inevitable characteristics of the English language, their interpretations advocated that English's use within the world can take on characterisations befitting whoever uses it. For them it is an adaptive language that can reflect the many influences it comes in contact with, which is inclusive of Western affiliations and many other global voices. Their diversified outlook depicts recognition of the cultural ebbs and flows of the global space allowing English to be evaluated on its merit as a purveyor of cultural diversity while maintaining supportive traditional Anglo associations.

Previous studies (e.g., Lamb, 2004; Yashima, 2002; Zheng, 2014) have isolated a disposition that reflects a loosening of traditional Anglo associations, while others show evidence that this is not necessarily the case (e.g., Clyne & Sharifian, 2008; Garrett, 2009; Roger, 2010). Presenting the cultural perspectives as the participants did can be seen as an expression of globally conscious engaged individuals—although, as Cho (2017) notes, individuals who are purposefully engaged in the learning of English can be in a position to provide more nuanced insider critique. However, their views on the cultural loading of English demonstrate what Beck (2004) coins, upon examining one's situatedness in contemporary global affairs, as a reflexive disposition. This is a temperament that gives recognition to a global network that signifies inclusive oppositions and not exclusive oppositions, and is an outlook that veers away from uniformity and polarity and sees advantage in collective additions. At the core of this perspective is an appreciation of “the otherness of the other” (Beck, 2004, p. 143), which forms a sense of global internationalism that goes beyond a standard homogenisation, while also upholding a local perspective. Effectively, the participants described a cultural loading of English that resides in these evolving interrelated social mechanisms.

Furthermore, the participants' hybridised outlook brings forth what may be termed a “third place” cultural perspective (Lo Bianco et al., 1999; Rubdy, 2009). Global English simply does not produce a melting pot of cultural associations, but rather involves the creation of a third space in which many cultural elements meet and transform each other to produce new individuated cultural perspectives. Holliday (2005) describes this as a pivotal point around which to position oneself and where cultural realities connect and mingle to allow unique collaboration. Essentially, and what was alluded to by the participants is that Global English can be described within many individual perspectives. Indeed, as Rubdy (2009) further describes, as cultural flows can create certain cross-pollination of ideas, it is not difficult to imagine a new synthesis that celebrates hybridity of cultural associations within English usage.

Overall, the participants present a perspective in which English and the cultures associated with the large English-speaking dominant nations have not been imposed on them, as notions of linguistic imperialism may suggest. They show agency and responsibility when interpreting English's global position and place it within a perspective of their own experiences, which de-emphasises while also

giving compliments to a traditional perspective (Jenkins, 2007; Saraceni, 2010). Such insights from the participants bring to light the situatedness of modern English learners—in that, as an outcome of increased mobility in an online world, where images and representations of cultural diversity are more observable, learners can feel increasingly globally situated. Motivations, therefore, for the learning of English can be reflective of a stronger sense of integration into a global collective, with interests more in tune with international cultures more broadly and English being a tool for that access rather than the main instrument (Sung, 2013; Yashima, 2009).

In this view, an individual's local perspective can form a strong part of this vision—therefore, as Ryan (2006) suggests, the values associated with the language in providing this function can be of more prominence than notions of association with the values of an assumed target culture. This local-global situatedness can encompass a salient recognition of the traditional associations of English while also taking on board that many users are influencing the cultural frame of Global English. The participants show a deeper reflection on the place and use of English and its users in the world as an outcome of their everyday implicit globally centred living.

6. Conclusion

The foundations of the present study lay within the presumption that as a consequence of the rapid flow of information and people across the globe, the emergence of more complex social structures online and offline can give rise to renewed insights into how English is perceived and situated within the global context. In a world increasingly navigated through use of advancing technologies, which afford various ways in which to engage people and to absorb visible representations of diverse cultures, English can take on a de-centralised perspective in terms of its global utility. This is shown in the participants' perspective where English's cultural affiliations remain rooted in its traditional cultural base maintaining strong frames of reference in terms of practical language use, yet, simultaneously, it can draw from an abstract global community reflecting global inclusivity, richness in use, and salient recognition of the other.

However, a user's sense of integration may be proportional to the degree of means they have to engage with the world. Nonetheless, the findings here indicate that once analysed through a cosmopolitan lens, which focuses on personal experiences with English within an increasingly culturally vivid social environment, traditional views on English realised within a global context can be lauded without necessarily being overshadowed by imperialistic undertones. In other words, contemporary social practices of global engagement can lead to diverse global perspectives, which can eventuate new frames of reference in which to analyse issues related to linguistic hegemony and Western manipulation within the English language teaching (ELT) spheres. Once given the means to do so, contemporary English learners can traverse more integrated global networks with a view to diversifying their experiences.

Keeping in mind that learning and using an L2 involves adaptation to evolving social structures (Williams, 1994), gaining insight into how contemporary individuals envision engagement with the world can refocus perspectives on Global English within English language education systems. English promotion in line with contemporary globalisation social practices would not only have considerable effect on educational practices, but could also readjust power relations between state ELT policies and the individual learners, with a view to integrating how the individual learner uniquely experiences English in their everyday lives into respective teaching programmes. Doing so can promote English as multi-directional, with learners and institutions mutually reinforcing, and support the notion that learners are not merely passive recipients of Global English but are active contributors to its use, pervasion, and evolution. Therefore, future studies that investigate English and how learners adapt to its usage, with intent to align curricula with contemporary globalisation, ought to consider the ways in which learners traverse, conceive, and interpret the global world, especially with respect to their context of use and learning.

While the present study examined a specific cohort of South Korean English users, the purpose was not to generalise to a wider population and imply that all contemporary learners have access to similar means to explore the world, but rather, the present study sought to shine a spot light on how increasing familiarity with the global world can afford broader perspectives in which to construct a more nuanced ideology of Global English and how those perspectives can be integrated into ELT practice. Further research studies in this area can add depth to the discussion of how our increasingly cosmopolitan mediated lives can lead to new frames of reference with respect to characterising English as a global language.

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Ethics statement

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