Creativity in English by bending the norms: I am sorry or I mean what I use

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Abstract

The current status of English as an international language and the fact that English is the possession of no-one has laid way for the coinage of new lexical items, extensions or restrictions of lexical meaning of existing items emerge, or adaptations of sound patterns, morphology and syntax. However, there have been debates about whether non-native English users have to rigidly follow the native speaker norms and to what extent English users can twist and turn the language. Within the scope of this paper, I will discuss the linguistic creativity by ordinary English users from the linguistic and pedagogical perspectives. Given such task, the paper will commence with a brief discussion of the current status of English, posing the issue of the language ownership. It then provides definition of linguistic creativity as well as the criteria for innovations/creativity and the distinction between innovations and errors. From such background, I will argue whether English creativity by people from non-English speaking countries is legitimate or not. Finally, there will be pedagogical implications to unleash linguistic creativity for Vietnamese learners.

Key words: English as an international language, linguistic creativity, norms, language ownership.

Once strolling along a road in Melbourne, I came across this advertising board from an English centre which held me back for a couple of minutes. I wonder how uniquely and to some extent boldly, people have put the phrase DESIGN ENGLISH there. Prevailingly, advertisements boasting of “copycats” of native-like English training flood the streets, online, or in the newspapers. Therefore, this advertising concept stands out: mastering English to use it your own way or as the verb “design” implies, to use it creatively. It then has inevitably pushed me into relating this idea of English training to the English learning and teaching practices in reality. Nevertheless, a majority of English learners out there still hold the dream of acquiring native-like competence irrespective of their real linguistic demands and their capacity of language learning. Endless efforts have been invested to obtain the educated Ameri-
can/British pronunciation and the skillful mastery of idiomatic English use of native speakers. Instead of hopelessly compacting oneself into the “native-like” moulding, English learners should design the language to accommodate their specific communicating needs. It seems that a majority of English learners still rigidly follow the norms, let alone using it creatively. How can they dare to bend the norms for their desired communicating purposes? Together with the fact that an immense field of creativity in English by its users is not yet much researched, this paper aims to seek the answers to the above question.

English as an international language

Researchers have extensively agreed upon the international status of English (Crystal, 1997; McKay, 2002; Widdowson, 2003). Kachru (1985)’s Three Circle model of World Englishes describes English uses in three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle, also the norm provider, encompasses countries where English is spoken as a native language. For the Outer Circle, English is used as a second language. The countries in this circle are considered norm-developing. As for the Expanding Circle, English is used as a foreign language and is used for international communication. Countries such as Japan, Korea, Vietnam are considered norm-dependent as they are supposed to reply on the Inner Circle’s norms. From Kachru’s model, English is seen not to be used in the Inner Circle only but widely used and learned in the Outer and Expanding Circles. Also, in the current context of globalization, Prodromou (1997) confirms that 80% of communication in English takes place between non-native speakers. It is projected that by 2050, the number of native speakers will be 433 million while those who use English as a foreign language will be 668 million (Graddol, 1999). These numbers have marked the decline of the native speakers and proved that English has been localized in various settings. This phenomenon then raises the question of the ownership of English, emphasizing the fact that English is no longer the possession of a nation or a group of people as well as marking the transfer from the mono-possession of people from the Inner Circle to the ownership of anyone who uses the language (Sridhar, 1982; Widdowson, 2003). Within the paradigm of English as an international language, especially with an emphasis on the ownership of English, these questions are put forwards:

- Do non-native English users have to rigidly follow the native speaker norms?
- If English users are supposed to use proper English, the being “proper” here is for whom and to whom?
- Given the diversity of Englishes, will the order of norm-provider (the Inner Circle), norm developing (Outer Circle) and norm-dependent (the Expanding Circle) lose its balance?
- To what extent, can English users from the Expanding Circle twist and turn the language?

A look at the definition of linguistic creativity, the reasons why people want to use the language creatively, the legitimating of creative English use, and linguistic as well as pedagogical perspectives to such usage will provide answers to the above questions.

Linguistic creativity: What is it?

The concept of linguistic creativity is conventionally applied to aesthetic and literary use of language (Carter, 2004; Crystal, 2011). This observation is applied in the context of World Englishes as well, proven by the fact that research concerning English creativity of people from Outer and Expanding circles focuses more explicitly on creativity in institutionalized discourses such as literature and advertising (Kachru, 1986; Kingsley, 2010; Miyuki, 1984).

In general, Maybin and Swan (2006) denotes creativity as a property of all language use in that language users do not simply “reproduce but recreate, refashion and recontextualize” linguistic and cultural resources in the act of communicating (p.491). Within the field of applied linguistics and World Englishes, Kasanga (2004) defines linguistic creativity as the ability of speakers to innovate for a wide range of reasons and purposes and is recognized “as part of the outcome of using a language”(p.285). To describe the phenomenon at length and more EIL-bound, Kachru (1985) coined the term bilinguals’ creativity to refer to “those creative linguistic processes which are the result of competence in two or
more languages” (p. 20). He elaborates that such creativity involves the designing of texts using the
linguistic resources of two or more languages together with “the use of verbal strategies in which sub-
title linguistic adjustments are made for psychological, sociological, and attitudinal reasons” (p.20).
However, Kachru applies this term to describe creativity mainly in the field of literature. In all, creative
use of English involves the attempt to go beyond the prescriptive norms. Therefore, the recreating,
refashioning and recontextualizing of English involves the bending of the norms to meet the individual
communicative needs. In addition, Kasanga (2004) shares the point that “linguistic creativity is trig-
gered by new situations, experiences and thoughts” (p. 285). Also, the fact that English is the posses-
sion of no-one has laid way for the coinage of new lexical items, extensions or restrictions of lexical
meaning of existing items emerge, or adaptations of sound patterns, morphology and syntax.

What aspects of English can be subject to creativity?

Linguistic creativity, according to Nelson (1988), can take transformation in lexical items, grammatical
structures, collocations. Actually creative potential is endless regarding just about any part of language
usage, starting from simple grammatical rules, to complex rules referring to collocational patterns,
style, appropriateness, the logic of a construction, and so forth. Concerning creativity, vocabulary is
mostly subject to the norm bending than grammar (Crystal, 2011; Rimmer, 2011). In fact, the need to
designate new objects and the desire to be witty, creative or unusual creates an obvious source of
Language describes lexical creativity as the most widely practised type, helps to solve a communica-
tion problem or to introduce an element of informality, humour, or rapport into a situation. His observa-
tion is best illustrated with this example:

During a conversation before dinner, one person, asked if she were hungry, replied hungrish,
which led others to add-ish to their responses, and to play with the suffix: starving-ish, said
one.

As Rimmer (2011) contends, the game of linguistic creativity does not tolerate all kinds of violations of
the rules. In a similar vein, Arthur (2006) and Crystal (2011) agree that not all of the coinages reach
the status of becoming real neologism-entering the language as a whole. Criteria for innovations will
decide if the coinages are codified or not. Examples from O’Grady, Dobrovolsky, and Katamba’s book
(1997) illustrate linguistic creativity that is acknowledged:

Julia summered in Paris. Harry wintered in Mexico. Bob holidayed in France. They honey-
mooned in Hawaii.

Instead of using summer, holiday, holiday, honeymoon as part of the time expression in a convention-
al way, these nouns have been turned into verbs of describing actions in certain time periods.

In general, these examples provided in this part goes in tandem with Rimmer’s (2011) conclusion that
linguistic creativity is normally changes resulting from variation on established patterns rather than the
creation of unattested forms. Accordingly, the coining of a morphological or syntactical unit, e.g. a new
subordinator, is not acceptable for the time being (Rimmer, 2011).

Criteria for innovations/creativity in English usage

Defining a clear-cut and uniform boundary between errors and creative English use or innovations re-
mains a concerning issue of debate to researchers. Standing from the paradigm of World Englishes
and EIL, Bamgbose (1998) emphasizes that innovations in non-native Englishes are often judged in
relation to the norms of native Englishes rather than for what they are or their function within the varie-
ties in which they occur. As it is put by O’Grady et. al., “underlying the creative aspect of language is
an intricate mental system that defines the boundaries within which innovation can take place” (1997,
p.1). Consequently, it is of great importance to decide “when an observed feature of language use is
indeed an innovation and when it is simply an error” (Bamgbose, 1998, p.2). Additionally, there should
be certain criteria to distinguish errors from creative English use as O’Grady et al. (1997) emphasizes
that “systematic constraints are essential to the viability of the creative process” (p. 3), arguing that “if
well-established words were constantly being replaced by new creations, the vocabulary of English
would be so unstable that communication could be jeopardized”. Rimmer contributes to the discussion
with his asserting: “there has to be a boundary between error, ignorance of the rules, and language play, recognition and exploitation of the rules” (2011, p. 24). From Bamgbose’s (1998) perspective, an innovation is an acceptable variant while an error is simply a mistake or uneducated usage. It is clearly illustrated with the following example:

It is not rare to see *Well come* instead of *Welcome* on banners in Vietnam. Normally the greeting on these banners is soon replaced with the appropriate form. For this case, it is not easy to reach a mutual conclusion that this word use shows a deficient level of English.

Nevertheless, the point is then there is sometimes indeterminacy between what counts as an innovation and what is regarded as an error. Here is a sentence from a letter of a Vietnamese user of English sending to her lecturer:

> The Voice [a music show on television] has attracted great attention’s from the public in Vietnam.

The student then explains that since *attention* is a singular noun, it does not meet her desire to express that evergrowing concern of the public to this programme. On realizing that it is risky to write *attention’s*, she puts *s* into apostrophes to remind the teachers of her novel linguistic usage. The how the teacher responds to the student’s English use is what that counts. Attitude of rejection may not be the option here as the student is fully aware of her choice and can make justification for it. Also, as Crystal represents in his article in 2008 that concerning grammar, several uncountable nouns have developed a countable use – usages such as *informations*, for example, which are widespread in second/foreign language situations. Some people might think these ‘un-English’, but in fact *informations* was in English once: *an information* and *informations* can be traced back to Middle English, and are found in Chaucer, Shakespeare, Swift, and many other authors. Surprisingly, what was legitimate in the past is incorrect with the present norms. Crystal (2008) speculates that it may only be a matter of time before they are back. Obviously, this example challenges the perception of error and creative English use.

Bamgbose (1998) suggests two criteria for distinguishing innovations from errors. The most readily available and often invoked criterion is an appeal to norms in native English. This takes the form of reference to a dictionary, a grammar or pronunciation manual or to the intuition of a native speaker. However, the question is that as each variety has it own norm, is it necessary that native-speaker norms are still the reference point? As for the second criterion: internal measures, Bamgbose (1998) points out five factors that are decisive to the status of innovations, namely demography (number of users), geography (spread of use), authoritativeness (status of users), codification (sanction of use), and acceptability (attitude of users and non-users) factors. Of the factors listed, Bamgbose (1998)
emphasizes that codification and acceptance must be regarded as the most significant ones. Without them, Bamgbose further explains, “innovations will continue to be labeled as errors” (1998, p. 4). Clearly, not all English users are Shakespeare, who was a keen coiner of new words and a great number have entered the language and have become conventional and commonplace such as assassination, barefaced, laughable (Widdowson, 1997). English users are definitely not enjoying this privileged treatment as this prestigious playwright. His reputation has earned his authority to have all his words counted as proper (Widdowson, 1993). After all, the acceptance of linguistic creative by norm bending is linked to the issue of attitudes. Nevertheless, while innovations in non-native Englishes are “often judged not for what they are or their function within the varieties in which they occur, but rather according to how they stand in relation to the norms of native Englishes” (Bangbose. 1998, p.1), how to behave to such innovations from students’ work is a crucial point under the paradigm of EIL and World Englishes. This will be discussed further in the section about pedagogical implications.

Voices towards creative English users

So far there has been no research documenting people’s attitudes towards the creative use of English. Therefore, I personally assume that these attitudes can be categorized into three groups. For the first category, they are people who never bear a thought of twisting and turning English to achieve their communicating purposes. Normally, these learners just adopt the language and aim at acquiring the near-native competence. Naturally the authority of correctness from the Inner Circle remains valid to this group. In the context of English classroom, “I am sorry” reflects these learners’ attitudes whenever they drift from the norms. For the second, they are the ones who are to some extent aware of their English ownership. They understand that they can design the language at their own will. However, they are ambivalent about whether to obey the norms or to go beyond the norms. In fact, they are torn between the norms as Bamgbose (1998) describes in his article about innovations in world Englishes. For the last group, these learners are ready to play with the language, designing it according to their purposes to achieve the desired communicating aims. Prodromou (2007) provides one example of creative idiomaticity for humorous effect: it’s raining kittens and puppies. It is used as in concuring with it’s raining cats and dogs. With attempts to negotiate the meanings among interlocutors, communication objectives can be achieved despite the replacement of cats and dogs with kittens and puppies. However, as Rimmer observes, a majority of learners, even the learners from the third group discussed above, “particularly in critical situations such as high-stakes examinations, may prefer to play safe, so to speak, to avoid the risk of failure” (2011, p. 25). Since there has been no official research documenting to what extent English learners use the language creatively, his observation remains valid in the context of World Englishes and EIL. Therefore, in the current context of English use, even when EIL-based researchers endeavour to publicize the spirit of equality in English use, in reality creativity cannot itself be a qualification for inclusion. Indeed in a way it is a disqualification since what counts is conformity to some norm or other.

As for “linguistic activists”, they have voiced their protests against the so-named “ sloppy” or “half-educated” English (Kasanga, 2004). This originates from the reality that language change in native speaker English is often regarded as a sign of creativity and innovation while non-native speaker-led change, particularly in the Expanding Circle, is labelled as errors regardless of how widespread its use or the degree to which it is mutually intelligible among speakers of ELF (Jenkins, 2006). Kachru’s (1992) sixth fallacy about the users and uses of English across cultures also describes that diversity and variation in English are indicators of linguistic decay and native scholars and ESL programs bear the responsibilities to restrict such decay. Therefore, deviation at any level from the native norm is an error. Actually, what is considered creative in the mouth of the L1-user is often seen as a deviation in the mouth of even the most advanced successful bilingual user of the language (Widdowson, 1993). These linguistic purists argue that while non-native English is merely a transitional and unstable code striving for perfection (Bamgbose, 1998), any attempts to bend the rules are misconstrued as linguistic incompetence. They reject innovative language use in order to restore respect for basic rules (Kasanga, 2004). In a similar vein, Rimmer (2011) observes that there is a great deal of resistance to credit- ing learners with an active role in the development of English. Learners are seen as on the receiving end of change when it comes and their attempts to be innovative are dismissed as uninformed. After all, “native speakers have a licence for change which is withdrawn for learners” (Rimmer, 2011, p. 22).
Standing on a different stance, proponents of the EIL or World English paradigm argue that “a prescriptive attitude stifles creativity” (Kasanga, 2004, p. 285). McArthur (2006) also expresses his high evaluation of the creativity potential of learners of English in shaping and re-shaping the language beyond conventional grammatical and lexical rules. Several other scholars also express their voice against the rejection of creative English by non-native English learners. Kasanga (2004) emphasizes that “the rejection of the legitimacy of creativity in new varieties of English is indeed, more sentimental than factual. In a similar vein, as Aitchison (2001, p. 258) observes, the judgments about what is good and what is bad are usually idiosyncratic, often based on subjective feelings about the new words. Personally, I support their confirmation as so far there has been no official body taking the responsibility of giving final judgment of correct and incorrect English produced by non-native speakers. In all, “given the pluralistic contexts of the use of English and the view of new varieties of English as independent varieties with established norms, creativity is a fully legitimate phenomenon in new Englishes (Kasanga, p. 291). Comprehensive arguments for the claim of legitimacy will be discussed in details in the following part.

After all, the multifacets of attitudes towards the creative use of English reflect Dennett’s assertion: “English may be the language of the global village, but the villagers are far from agreement on what is good use of the language (1992, p.13).

The legitimacy of linguistic creativity in English by non-native users

“The price of a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kind of use” (Achebe, 1975, p.100).

Achebe’s statement shows that proponents for pure English or linguistic activists against creative English use from non-native speaking countries are far too naïve to protect English against any “contamination” or misuse. How can the language that has a history of hundreds of years of development and has spread to numerous parts of the world and has been used by local people there remain unchanged? In fact, the history of the English development has proved that “language change is a natural and inevitable phenomenon that is irreversible” (Aitchison, 2001, p.259). In a similar vein, the notion of pure English is challenged with the fact that seventy-five percent of English words are “exotic filched” (Burridge, 2002). Also, “the new-English speakers are not just passively absorbing the language, they are shaping it.” (Nihalani , 2010, p. 25). In all, all languages are characterized by variations and change (Rimmer, 2011). Therefore, if English is a dynamic language characterized by ever-growing innovations, “it has thus been touted as a borrowing language” (Strevens, 1980,p. 85). Noticeably, McKay, a commentator in the field of EIL emphasizes that changes occur in English is inevitable as a result of its international role and “those changes that do not impede intelligibility should be recognized as one of the natural consequences of the use of English as an international language” (2002, p.127). Another scholar, Widdowson (2003) observes that being an international language, English is spread as a virtual language, being variously actualized, far from bearing a set of established encoded forms or staying unchanged into different domains of use. Consequently, in the course of time, the forms of English and norms of language use have changed to meet the needs of the communities, which is called “nativation,” “localization,” “indigenization,” “colonization” (Widdowson, 2003). In terms of linguistic innovations, Bamgbose (1998) confirms that “although attention is usually focused on linguistic nativization, no less important is pragmatic and creative nativization which are more difficult to ignore in determining the communicative competence of speakers in the sociocultural setting of language use”. In fact “controlled experimentation” with the language will bring about the fresh appearance to the language itself. Put it all together, protesting against innovations means going against the natural development of English, particularly with its status of an international language.

Another argument for the right to bend the norms for innovations is concerned with the ownership of English. Why can non native learners not use English with their own identity incorporated into the language? Given this spirit, why can users of English from the Outer and Expanding Circle not express their messages effectively through the use of English? English belongs to no one entails the possibility that its users have the right to appropriate it to accommodate their needs. After all, learners have the right to bend the norms for their purpose of using the language creatively. Many speakers of World Englishes use English in their own way as an expression of their identity and their cultural values because language is “a major means (some would say the chief means) of showing where we belong, and of distinguishing one social group from another” (Crystal 2003, p. 22). After all, I agree with Rim-
mer that given the fact that English belongs to ones who use it, using it creatively is a game “which learners can play on equal terms with native speakers (2011, p.23). Rimmer also states that by bending the norms, “competitors can improve their own chances in the game as well as contribute to a wider reevaluation of the rules (2011, p.23).

Let us take one example from China:

I found the sentence from this sign interestingly creative. Instead of applying the much used imperative forms for public signs such as “Do not walk on the grass”, I suppose either for the purpose of attracting attention or creating special effects, this sign has made a difference. Personally, I considered the sentence reflects the successful bending of the norms at discourse level to convey the intended communicating purposes.

Put it all together, English users and proponents for EIL and World Englishes are eligible to question whether it is necessary that innovations in English by people from the Expanding or Outer Circle need approval from Inner Circle’s linguistic gatekeepers (Jenkins, 2006).

Pedagogical implications to unleash linguistic creativity for Vietnamese learners

Given the fact that English should belong to any users regardless of geographic boundaries and nationalities and its linguistic creativity is legitimate, teachers in the context of Vietnam should promote students’ courage to go beyond the linguistic norms. However, the current teaching practices have proved to lay challenging obstacles to the proposed initiative. In Vietnamese classrooms, memorization of grammatical rules, grammatical accuracy, mechanical drills, and repetition are still the teaching norms in Vietnam (Tomlinson & Dat, 2004). It is true that if students go away from the norms, the teacher intervenes immediately because (s)he has to make sure that the students have to rigidly follow the rules. Actually, corrective feedback is part of the teachers’ role. What is more, the fact that learners are expected to work as hard as possible to achieve correctness in their work has refrained them from experimenting with linguistic norms. In fact a majority of Vietnamese learners of English would choose to obey the rules of grammar and discourse forms for communication rather than shape the language to suit their purposes. It is not common in Vietnam classrooms to observe teachers keep correcting students’ use of “was” into “were” after the verb “wish”. Several others are truly rigid norm followers. They insist that the students should have a clear-cut distinction of past and past perfect tense even in spoken English. Being supposed to obey the rules all the time, there is little likelihood that the students dare to take risk to play with the language, especially when a majority of Vietnamese learners of English are exam-driven. Therefore, first and foremost, the teachers themselves have to realize the fact that English belongs to whoever uses it. In other words, English users have the right to twist and turn the language to accommodate their diverse purposes in different contexts with different people. Secondly, the teachers should treat the English use by students from both prescriptive and descriptive perspectives. Since a large number of Vietnamese students learn English to deal with “standardized” tests and test examiners may not accept any
deviations from the norms, it is understandable that they have to “go by the book”. Nevertheless, in other contexts, the teachers should not let the rules restrain their students’ linguistic freedom. For example, to name traditional dishes of Vietnam, the teachers often refer to sources of guide books written by “native speakers” because they believe that the coinages from these native speakers are legitimate. What I suggest here is why not letting Vietnamese students coin the English equivalents on their own. These lexical innovations may be codified or may be merely for one-off effect. What is important here is that the teachers can make their students to be more confident with the language they use. After all, as Rimmer explains, any users of the language have a “natural propensity” to twist and turn the language (2011, p.26). To play it safe and to draw the audience’s attention, in the context of written English, any creative English items are recommended to be put in apostrophes or to be accompanied with a footnote justifying their innovations. In addition, the teachers are supposed to demolish the binary distinction of English use between right and wrong or correct and incorrect. In other words, I believe that the English use by the students should be treated as being appropriate or not, depending on the contexts. The norms from one country can not be imposed to another.

Other argument for the advocacy of linguistic creativity is Cook’s (2000) emphasis of the fact that twisting and turning the language is crucial to the learning experience. First, new experiences with the language enable learners to experiment with the language and adapt it for their own purposes. Second, being encouraged to play with the language, learners will develop a clear sense of their ownership to English which plays a fundamental part in “forging a linguistic identity” (Rimmer, 2011, p. 26) through the process of instilling their creativeness and distinctiveness in it (Kachru, 2000). Hopefully, from the assumed norm receivers, they can actively change their image into norms-transformers. In a similar vein, Arthur (2004) appreciate users’ potential of linguistic creativity by putting this question: “Why not break the rules from time to times?”. When learning a foreign language, he explains, we are expected to conform, to play safe because we do not know the rules. But after we learned the language, we still want to play safe because we do not want people to think that we are making mistakes. Rules are important but so are creativity, poetry, games, and telling and understanding. Thus, learners should be aware of when to bend the norms to “stretch” their diverse communication needs. Concerning the teachers, they are supposed to update their knowledge of the current position of English and the diversity of Englishes. Teaching methodology informed of such knowledge will pave ways for an appreciation of innovations in English from their learners. They should then realize that no matter that much of creative English usage is idiosyncratic and ephemeral; it still illustrates the potential of learners to influence the direction of English and their English proficiency as well. In fact, Widdowson (2003) confirms that in order to be creative with the language, learners are supposed to be proficient in that language to the extent that they possess it, make it their own, bend it to their will, assert themselves through it rather than simply submit to the dictates of its form.

Another implication is that there should be changes to the English teaching priorities which can be tabulated in the following manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“target language”</td>
<td>Repertoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text and language as homogenous</td>
<td>Text and language as hybrid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining a community</td>
<td>Shuttling between communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on rules and conventions</td>
<td>Focus on strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and discourse as static</td>
<td>Language and discourse as changing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language as context-bound</td>
<td>Language as context-transforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery of grammar rules</td>
<td>Metalinguistic awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text and language as transparent and instrumental</td>
<td>Text and language as representational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1 as problem</td>
<td>L1 as resource</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Shifts in pedagogical practice (quoted from Canagarajah, 2006)*
It can be inferred from the table that dramatic changes have been made to the teaching assumptions. Accordingly, instead of trying to join the supposed-English-speaking community, one should know strategies of negotiation to shuttle between communities. Also, “in a context of diverse norms and conventions in the system of English language, it is more important to understand the relativity of notions of correctness (2006, p. 602). I agree with Canagarajah that ELT should relate to Global English “as a plural system with heterogeneous grammatical and discourse conventions (2006, p.xxvii). Further, he contends that: “not all textual or linguistic difference is an error” (2006, p. 602). In fact, many presumed errors, like the case of attention’s” can be choices consciously made by authors from a range of different options in order to achieve their communicative purposes. For this reason we must encourage students to orient themselves to strategies of communication, and deemphasize a strict adherence to rules and conventions. The rules and conventions can be negotiated for one’s purposes with suitable strategies. We have to teach our students strategies for rhetoric negotiation so that they can modify, resist, or reorient themselves to the rules in a way favourable to them (p. 602). As Achebe (1975) contends, creativity is appreciated when users should know how to twist and turn the language in a way that make his/her message stand out without changing the language “to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost” (p.61). The most significant issue for any English users bearing the intention of bending the norms is that “he should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience” (Achebe, 1975). Hence, any creative language use should go hand in hand with a convincing linguistic justification. Students are encouraged to twist and turn the language on the one hand but on the other hand they should be ready to provide reasonable explanations for their norm bending. After all, final judgment from the teacher depends on the adequacy and credibility of the argument made. Finally, as there has been no research into the field of linguistic creativity by Vietnamese learners, there will be a wide range of issues for researchers to explore. However, such kinds of research may encounter great challenges in collecting linguistic items for analysis. As a result, it is necessary to build a corpus of English use in both spoken and written forms by Vietnamese English speakers. This corpus is expected to be a resource of linguistic use of English by Vietnamese which can be used for a wide range of research analysis. On the basis of this database, researchers are then supposed to study creativity in English of Vietnamese users in terms of its mechanism, purposes and characteristics. Such kind of research is proposed not to promote a single way of being creative and suppressing other ways but to function as description of the development of English use in term of English creativity by Vietnamese users.

Conclusion

After all, creative in language use should be encouraged, despite of its being the mother tongue or other tongue. In fact, language users deserve the right to twist and turn the rules to satisfy their linguistic curiosity, to assert their identity, or just a sense of fun. In the context of Vietnam, users of English should take an active role in the learning of this language. Given the fact that under the EIL paradigm, English is no longer norm-bound, its users can engage critically in the act of changing the rules and conventions to suit their interests, values, and identities. In that way, “their isolated attempts can be considered as part of the phenomenon that powers change” (Rimmer, 2011, p. 23). What counts here is the attempt of the teachers to unleash their students’ linguistic creativity. After all, creativity, as Carter contends, “is far from being simply a property of exceptional people” but “an exceptional property of all people” (Carter, 2004, p. v).

References


