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**An Online Course For Teachers**

v.03

Microsoft Word version

### 10 Unit 1 Data Prompts

## 10. 1 Ontological Data Prompt

## This is a series of extracts from a personal blog about free web applications.

## Read the text, paying attention to the different ways the blogger (Young), and two commenters (Swookiee and Mani) write.

**Free nuts: top 10 free proxy softwares**

Young: To visit YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and some other websites that are blocked in China, sometimes I use free online proxy tools, but most of the time, I like using free proxy softwares, since they are faster and free of ADs. Among those free proxy softwares, below 10 are the most popular...

[...]

Swookie: [...] the problem with most of them is that the client login is being blocked, the cyberghost forum suggests a workaround for their software with hotspot, the thing about hotspot is that the are not that fast, and use deep package scanning to past you website with ADs, not really cool, cg on the other hand is waaay faster since they have a premium servers in Germany. You have to turn on hotspot log on to cyberghost then turf off hotspot and logon to the cyberghost server. you definitely can just try an connect to cyberghost straight ahead mybe thall work, it's a bit difficult for me to be testin it since im not in china

[...]

Mani: tnx. Iran as like China have limited the Internet but now a days world just like a littel village. It's very good feeling that i can help from someone that who far a way thousends kilometers. maybe someday humans live in FREEDOM. Goodluck my Brother.

### Notice:

### *Question*

What different features of the three bloggers’ use of English caught your attention? Make a note of features where the writers used English (a) appropriately and effectively, showing complex knowledge, and (b) in ways which differed from ‘Standard’ native-speaker norms.

### *Comment*

The Englishes of these bloggers (Young, Swookiee, and Mani) include a number of appropriate grammatical, lexical and spelling choices, including:

* technical vocabulary (e.g. proxy tools; client login, deep package scanning, workaround)
* metaphors (e.g. paste…with; the world as a village)
* lexical chunks (e.g most of the time; on the other hand, the thing about X is)
* spelling and capitalisation for added emphasis (e.g. ADs; waaay faster; FREEDOM, Brother)
* creating informality through features of spoken language (e.g. just try an connect, mybe thall work, testin it) and lexical choices (not really cool)
* typical features of computer-mediated language (e.g. use of lower case throughout; cg[abbreviation]; tnx)

There are also some quite complex grammatical structures and discourse features, e.g.:

* I like using free proxy softwares, since they are faster and free of Ads
* the thing about hotspot is that the are not that fast
* It’s very good feeling that i can get help from someone that who far a way thousends kilometers

We also noticed the following features that are not typical of native speaker usage:

* software used in the plural
* definite articles and plurals on nouns (e.g. the thing about hotspot, you have to turn on hot spot log on; It’s very good feeling)
* the verb be (e.g. its a bit difficult for me to be testin it; world just like a littel village; someone that who far a way)
* word order (e.g. below 10 are the most popular; you definitely can just try; far a way thousends kilometers)
* subject-verb agreement (Iran as like as Chine have…)
* complex conjunctions (as like as, that who)
* word boundaries (e.g. now a days, Goodluck)

And also some phonetic spelling and possible typos, probably due to fast typing:

* the are not that fast
* turf off hotspot, mybe
* little
* thousends

### React:

### *Question*

How do you react to the different ways these three short blog extracts are written? What do the differences suggest to you about the nature of English?

### *Comment*

From a plurilithic perspective, we observe that the bloggers are successfully communicating: exchanging specific technical information, opinions about the various technical options, general comments about the value of the blog, the current state of the world, and their hopes for the future. But they don’t need the *same* English to achieve this communicative success. Young’s usage is the closest to ‘Standard English’ and is more formal in style; Swookiee’s is more casual, with many features of spoken language; and Mani’s has the most variability and non-native features. Each is different, but all contribute to the interactants’ multiple, overlapping purposes.

Specifically, the non-native features in the writing of all three bloggers do not seem to make it difficult for them to understand each others’ meanings, even though they are different from forms we teach students to write (and speak).

Taken together, the variable forms but successful functioning of these blog posts suggest that it is not a single, fixed, monolithic code which allows English to do its job, but rather a collection of different resources, spread across users and uses. From this perspective, English is not one thing, but many. It exists in different forms: it is plurilithic.

### Reflect:

### *Question*

What are the implications of this for you as a teacher?

### *Comment*

The bloggers’ writing provides evidence of the many different forms of, and ways of using, English among its vast number of users, both native speakers and non-native speakers.

There isn’t one single form or usage for words and structures in English (or any other language). Making an appropriate choice of word, spelling or structure depends on multiple factors, including: modality (speaking/writing and the grey areas between these), place (geographical location, online/offline), topic, and (institutional) relationships/roles.

The complexities of the interactions between these factors mean that there are multiple possible appropriate choices—even within a single genre like a blog, as this example shows—and therefore that English cannot be ring-fenced, with ‘Standard English’ inside the fence and ‘Non-standard English’ banished to the outside. As we have suggested in earlier sections of this course, languages (including English) have no centres and extremely fuzzy boundaries.

What are the teaching implications? Perhaps that your students should learn the subset of features of English that will help them achieve their communicative goals, whatever these goals may be and however some of these features might be labelled or judged by certain users. When students ask you whether a word, structure or pronunciation is (correct) English or not, you can only honestly answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in relation to specific tasks and contexts of use—never absolutely. As the blog extracts demonstrated, there is a very wide spectrum of possible registers and users of English.

Not being able to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to students’ questions about correctness might feel a bit strange; students often expect—and we feel we should be able to provide—answers that are always true. So what can we do instead? Well, we can try and encourage our students to: (a) notice the contexts of the words, structures and pronunciations that get used in real situations; and (b) focus on achieving their desired communicative effect, without always worrying about whether something is judged ‘correct’ or not.

We may even decide that the notion of correctness itself can be abandoned (or reconfigured) in favour of a consideration of what's most appropriate or effective for a particular purpose or context (see Unit 4 for more on this idea).

To tell students that a particular word choice, spelling, structure or pronunciation is always (or never) correct (part of ‘Standard English’), would be simply untrue: this is an *ontological fallacy*, because it assumes that a single correct version of the system exists.

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## 10.2 Ethical Data Prompt

A person in a suit and tie

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[Source: [World Economic Forum](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ban_Ki-moon_1-2.jpg)]

This is an extract from an interview with Ban Ki-Moon, the former United Nations Secretary General, conducted by the Russian news agency, RIA Novosti.

The Secretary General is talking about a meeting in Russia of the Diplomatic Quartet (the United Nations, the US, the European Union and Russia) to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Read the text, paying attention to the English Ban Ki-Moon uses. (The transcript reproduced belowis incomplete and, at times, inaccurate.)

"How do you feel about the prospects for restarting the indirect talks between the Palestine and Israel after the last Arab league decision to allow such negotiations and the positive response from Israeli government? What is your overall assessment of the situation in the Middle East on the eve of the Quartet meeting in Moscow? What do you think about the role of Russia in the Middle East peace process?

I appreciate, first of all, and highly commend the initiative and leadership of Russian government to host the Quartet meeting at this time. This is crucially important timing for the peace process in the Middle East. The overall atmosphere has not been favorable. Now, with the proximity talks now being facilitating by the United States, it is very opportune timing for the principles of the Quartet to express their support and encourage further, try to find out what kind of role the Quartet can play. I'm quite convinced that this time the Quartet leaders will be able to play a significant role. I'm very much encouraged by this. At the same time I would really hope that Israeli government should fully cooperate so that this proximity talks which has been very difficultly arranged and facilitated by the United States, and by the United Nations, and many other parties will not derail because of settlement policies. I have strongly condemned this settlement policy which goes counter to the peace process mood.

Do you have any concrete proposals to the Quartet to submit them to Israel in order to stop the settlement activity?

The Quartet will issue a strong statement. First of all, the Quartet has already issued a strong statement condemning this settlement. And I'm sure that this will be reaffirmed by the Quartet meeting. However, we will discuss overall situation in the Middle East, including how to facilitate and encourage proximity talks. I believe that this proximity talk should eventually lead to direct negotiations between Israel and Palestinian authorities."

(Sputnik International, 2010)

### Notice:

### *Question*

What features of Ban Ki-Moon's use of English caught your attention?

### *Comment*

We noticed that Ban was very articulate, using a wide range of appropriate lexical choices, including:

* formal vocabulary (e.g. *commend, opportune, reaffirm*)
* metaphors (e.g. *derail*)
* lexical chunks (e.g. *go counter to*)

He also uses quite complex grammatical structures (e.g. in the sentence beginning *At the same time*…), including appropriate cohesive devices (e.g. *first of all, now, at the same time*).

We also noticed some grammatical features that are not typical of native speakers:

* variable article usage (e.g. *Russian government, Israeli government, overall situation, Palestinian authorities*)
* variable number agreement (e.g. *this proximity talks) and plural usage (e.g. later use of proximity talk)*
* intransitive use of *encourage*
* double use of -ing (*being facilitating*)
* adverbial form of the adjective *difficult: difficultly*

### React:

### *Question*

How do you react to Ban Ki-Moon's combination of sophisticated English usage with various 'non-native' features? Do you react favourably or unfavourably? Note down your immediate response?

### *Comment*

Some people have reacted unfavourably to Ban Ki-Moon's English. For example the Reuters journalist Patrick Worsnip suggests his 'public image' needs work, mentioning in this respect his 'awkward use of English, which has television producers tearing their hair' (The Baron, 2009). In another newspaper we read: 'One recently retired UN official said that one of Ban's biggest handicaps was his lack of fluency in English, which made it difficult for him to win over audiences in the US and elsewhere' ([The Guardian, 2010](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/22/ban-ki-moon-secretary-general-un)). These reactions possibly verge on linguistic racism: see [this blog](https://www.diversitytrust.org.uk/2023/05/linguistic-racism-and-accent-bias/)from The Diversity Trust.

In fact, Ban is admired and respected by many around the world, and it seems that criticism of his English centres on his departure from native-speaker norms rather than any demonstrated or perceived intelligibility problems. From a plurilithic perspective, we observe that the non-native features of his English didn't cause us any problems in understanding the meaning he wished to convey, even though they are different from the features we teach.1

Ban Ki-Moon can clearly function effectively in English as an important global leader, despite his use of hybrid and dynamic forms which depart from the norms of 'Standard English'. If he can perform successfully at this level, and criticism of his English is seen as a matter of style rather than substance, then you might consider it unfair to apply different standards to other non-native users.

And yet non-native users of English whose writing and speaking has features which are not accepted as 'standard' are typically viewed in an unfavourable light, by native and non-native speakers alike, and in contexts in which communicative effectiveness is not an issue. Such users are judged on the accuracy of the *forms* of their English, rather than the effectiveness of the *functions* they use English to perform.

1 The only exception is perhaps principles, which is actually a mis-spelling originating with the transcriber. This is as common in native speaker texts as non-native speaker texts.

### Reflect:

### *Question*

What are the implications of this for you as a teacher?

### *Comment*

Naturally, the teaching implications of this case, like all the cases we are considering, will depend on your own context. You might feel that an insistence on 'Standard English' in the classroom is necessary, perhaps because your students are learning EAP in order to be admitted to an English-medium university in Australia or the USA. Maybe you are tutoring professionals of a British bank to work in their London headquarters and you believe they'll win more respect locally if they use 'Standard English'. Or maybe you are preparing students for a standardised test.

In other cases, you might know that control of 'Standard English' is not a viable or probable outcome for your students, because of local circumstances (e.g. limited resources or different priorities), or because students need English for specific local functions where native speakers are unlikely to figure (e.g. tourism from neighbouring non-English speaking countries).

But we never know from the first class with a student how much, and what kind, of English-using abilities they will develop. And neither do we know, in the last lesson with them, what kind of English-using contexts they might encounter (or seek) in the future, nor what kind of English-using resources they will need in such contexts.

What we *do* know is that: (a) few students will leave our classes using 'Standard English' in ways which are indistinguishable from native speakers; but that (b) few will need to. So, in fact, teachers could/should help their learners see that users of English with non-native features can be very successful communicators. (One way to do this is by presenting people like Ban-Ki Moon as role models: see Muir et al., 2021, and Unit 5, section 5.2.)

To set learners up to be judged solely on their ability to use 'Standard English' is probably not in their best interests and, moreover, is very *unfair*.

## 10. 3 Socio-economic Data Prompt

A map of the world

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Here are some numbers relating to speakers and learners of English worldwide:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ● Number of nation states in the world: | 193 (UN members) |
| ● Current world population: | 8 billion |
| ● Number of nations where English has official or special status: | > 75 |
| ● Estimated number of 'native' English users: | 388 million |
| ● Estimated number of 'non-native' English users: | 1.9 billion |
| ● Percentage of Chinese and European students learning English: | > 90% |
| ● Estimated worth of the UK’s ‘ELT industry’ in 2020: | £3 billion |

[Sources: [Worldometer](https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/); Crystal (2018); [British Council](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/english-effect-report-v2.pdf); Marr and English, 2019]

### Notice:

### *Question*

As a teacher, what do these numbers suggest to you about the size and distribution of your profession?

### *Comment*

With so many people learning English around the world, that means a lot of teachers are needed in a lot of different places!

Where are these teachers? Given that English has official or special status in more than 75 countries, and the widespread belief that English inevitably brings social and economic benefits (Marr and English, 2019), it is probably safe to say that English teachers are *everywhere*.

How many English teachers are there? Again, it is impossible to give an accurate number. In their 2013 report, [*The English Effect*](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/english-effect-report-v2.pdf), the British Council estimated 12 million, but we think this was a gross underestimate, and the number will have grown considerably since then.

### React:

### *Question*

Given that there are so many learners of English in so many countries around the world, how sustainable is a ‘native speaker’-oriented industry? Note down your immediate response.

### *Comment*

Given the numbers of people learning English and their geographical distribution, ‘non-native’ speaker English teachers will outnumber ‘native’ speaker teachers quite substantially. This has implications for the kinds of Englishes that are being taught. An absolute insistence on ‘native speaker’ norms in many English language classrooms will not be **feasible**.

Given the large number of users of English in so many countries around the world, it is likely that in many places English is as useful locally as it is globally. Local uses of English mean that an insistence on ‘native speaker’ norms in some classrooms will not be not **desirable**.

But English language teaching (including coursebook publishing and testing) is worth £3 billion a year to the UK economy (source: [British Council](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/english-effect-report-v2.pdf)). UK and US-based publishing and testing companies may continue to make a lot of money in this lucrative market, although local alternatives are also starting to gain market share.

### Reflect:

### *Question*

What are the implications of this for you as a teacher? Make a note of your ideas.

### *Comment*

If, as we think likely, monolithic ideas about English gradually lose their grip, and awareness of the value of local or lingua franca Englishes increases, teachers who have specialist knowledge of the communicative practices in specific contexts of use will be more in demand. Their specialist knowledge, not their nationality, will increasingly be regarded as important (and deserving of higher pay).

UK/US-based materials will seem less relevant and teachers will develop learning materials that better meet local needs. Monolithic ideas about English will take longer to shift when it comes to testing (see Unit 4: Teaching English), and in the meantime the government agencies and private companies behind IELTS and TOEFL will continue to aggressively market their products.

Beliefs about certain varieties of English sounding more ‘beautiful’ or ‘educated’ than others may continue to influence parents and learners, who will be prepared to pay higher rates for ‘native speaker’ teachers. But we think they will gradually become more aware that this will be a waste of money, for two reasons:

* firstly, the teachers might be from the ‘right’ country, but given the diversity of English within these countries, they may not speak the ‘right’ variety;
* secondly, unless the learners are both young and highly motivated, the variety of English they acquire will not be the same as the variety spoken by their teacher.

English is a global commodity and teachers, as well as learners, are from a wide variety of countries and language backgrounds. It is surely the job of all teachers, whether ‘native’ or ‘non-native’ speakers, to help our students think of English as a legitimate part of their linguistic identity. Bearing in the mind the number of teachers and learners involved in this global industry, insisting on a single, correct form of English (usually a UK- or US-centred ‘Standard English’) is simply not sustainable.

## 10. 4 Pedagogical Data Prompt

1. “Many nouns can be counted—one friend, two friends, for example. […] Other nouns cannot be counted—*air*, *wind*, and *pollution*, for example. They have no plural forms, are used with singular verbs, and are called “noncount” nouns. But noncount nouns can also be things that we can count! First, there are those that it would take a lifetime to count, so we call them by a more general noncount noun, such as *hair*, *sugar*, or *flour*. And then there are those that we categorize into general groups that are named by noncount nouns, such as *furniture*, *mail*, *silverware*, and *china*. Of course we can count *chairs*, *tables* or *beds*, but the general category *furniture* is never made plural. The noncount noun *mail* includes the *letters* and *cards* that we can count. English has a lot of these words.”
2. “At ellona, we make it a priority to adapt ourselves to the needs of each of our customers. Contact one of our air quality experts for more informations and personalized advices.”
3. “We have bought a house in [place X]. [Y] and [Z] were recommended as sales representatives for this area by friends. They were very helpful providing information about houses and their neighborhood, and also advices on local contacts regarding furnitures, redecorating the garden etc. They are skilled people and very easy to talk to and very friendly. We recommend them highly.”

The paragraph in (1) is from the first page of *English Vocabulary for Beginning ESL Learners*, part of McGraw Hill’s ‘Practice Makes Perfect’ series, of which over two million books have been sold.

The passage in (2) is from the contact page of the website of *ellona*, a French air quality specialist, and the comment in (3) is from the testimonial page of a Norwegian real estate company specialising in Spanish properties.

### Notice

### *Question*

What does the use in (1) of *can(not)*, *we*, and *never* reveal about the perspective on English grammar being presented there? How is this perspective challenged by the way nouns are actually being used in (2) and (3)?

### *Comment*

In the textbook presentation of non-count nouns for beginning ESL learners, the author is categorical about what *can’t* be said in English:

* Other nouns cannot be counted […]. They have no plural forms […] and are called “noncount” nouns.
* [T]he general category *furniture* is never made plural.

Learners are told that “we”, presumably native speakers, refer to certain concepts using noncount nouns because it would take too long to count them or because “we” categorize them into general groups, and that other concepts (but not furniture) can be pluralised because “we” can count them.

This language suggests a monolithic perspective, in which English grammar is uniquely determined by native speakers and allows no variation.

The data in (2) and (3), however, show users of quite complex and intelligible English putting the plural suffix -*s* on *information*, *advice,* and *furniture*. These data suggest that for some users of English these nouns *can* be counted: “they” *do* make *furniture* plural!

### React

### *Question*

As a teacher, how do you feel about the pluralisation of non-count nouns in (2) and (3)?

### *Comment*

For most English teachers, these forms are, unequivocally, *errors*. (They’re errors also for probably all native speakers of British or American varieties of English and for many who have learned one of these varieties as a second or foreign language.) You might correct these forms if your students used them in speaking activities, and would almost certainly (be expected to) correct them if they were used in written work or tests.

Yet countable use of nouns like *informations*, *advice,* and *furnitures* is a “notable and widespread” feature of non-native Englishes (Hall *et al*., 2013). If you were raised and/or currently teach in countries like Kenya, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, you might be very familiar with these forms. Some teachers from these countries might not even realise that they are treated as ungrammatical by native speakers of British and American English varieties.

Many varieties of global Englishes (see Unit 2) treat ‘mass’ nouns such as those in (2) and (3) as countable. In their book on world Englishes (WE), Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008, p.53) state that “[a]lmost every study of individual WE varieties in Africa and Asia reports frequent examples like *furnitures*, *equipments*, *staffs*, *fruits*, *accommodations* […].” Yet when an English teacher questioned why his students’ use of *several informations* should necessarily be corrected, the prominent linguist Randolph Quirk fulminated that entertaining such an idea was “half-baked quackery” (Quirk, 1990, p. 8).

The monolithic idea that only the native-speaker grammatical rules of standard English are legitimate learning objectives is very firmly entrenched.

### Reflect

### *Question*

How helpful is it for learners to be introduced to this quirk of English native-speaker grammar on the very first page of their textbook? Why do you think the author gives this topic such prominence?

### *Comment*

The class of nouns which are non-count for native speakers is very small, and within the overall grammatical system of Standard English, it’s a negligible phenomenon. Indeed, in Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik’s (1985) painstaking description of the grammar of Standard English, countability takes up fewer than seven out of over 1,600 pages (less than half a per cent). Furthermore, pluralisation of these nouns leads to no loss or change of meaning: if anything, saying *furnitures* or *advices* instead of ‘pieces of furniture’ or ‘pieces of advice’ conveys the concept more simply and efficiently.

So why is it on p. 1 of the textbook? Why does it feature so prominently in other grammar learning and teaching textbooks (e.g. DeCapua, 2008; Murphy, 2019) and online resources (e.g. [EFLnet](https://eflnet.com/grammar), [LearnEnglish](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/grammar/a1-a2-grammar/nouns-countable-uncountable), and [Dave’s ESL Café](https://www.eslcafe.com/resources/grammar-lessons/nouns/nouns-1-countable-nouns))? Hall *et al*. (2013) argued that countability is a prime example of Henry Widdowson’s (1994) insight about grammatical features as *shibboleths*, markers of native-speaker *social* *identity* rather than communicative tools. Widdowson wrote:

“[I]t is precisely because grammar is so often redundant in communicative transactions that it takes on another significance, namely that of expressing social identity. The mastery of a particular grammatical system […] marks you as a member of the community which has developed that system for its own social purposes. Conversely, of course, those who are unable to master the system are excluded from the community. They do not belong. In short, grammar is a sort of shibboleth.”

So, should teachers support and perpetuate teaching and learning goals which ‘exclude’ non-native speakers from the community of global English users? In this course we’ll be arguing that, instead, teachers should prioritise learning goals which enable English users to communicate effectively in the likely contexts in which they will need the language. As explained in Unit 2, for most global users of English, these contexts will involve users of other non-native varieties, where adherence to native-speaker norms will not necessarily be helpful or indeed relevant.

To be effective and satisfied communicators in English, many learners will need pedagogy which prioritises grammatical features that are important for meaning rather than for identification with native speakers. Data like those in the prompt above suggest that the teacher’s role needs to be re-assessed, and that a unique instructional focus on learning and using the monolithic norms of native-speaker ‘Standard English’ is not at all *helpful*.