

TEIL and a Need to View the World as “Messy”

Dr. Aya Matsuda, Arizona State University

Aya Matsuda is a professor of applied linguistics in the Department of English at Arizona State University. She is also a plenary speaker at KOTESOL 2024, our international conference happening April 27–28, with the theme “Players on the World Stage: From EFL Classrooms to Global Lives.” She is an expert in the fields of World Englishes, English as an International Language, and the pedagogical implications of the global spread of English, of which she has published widely in various books and journals. After kindly agreeing to this interview with The English Connection, Professor Matsuda explains in more depth below her plenary presentation and compelling research areas. — Ed.

The English Connection (TEC): Thank you, Professor Matsuda, for agreeing to this interview with *The English Connection*, KOTESOL’s ELT magazine.

Prof. Matsuda: Thank you for having me!

TEC: We at KOTESOL are honored to have you as one of the plenary speakers at the 2024 International Conference, coming up on April 27–28. Can you share with KOTESOL members the title and content of your presentation, and perhaps a little bit on how it fits into the conference theme, “Players on the World Stage: From EFL Classrooms to Global Lives”?

Prof. Matsuda: Sure, I would be happy to. My talk is titled “From EFL Students to EIL Users: Preparing Students for Today’s Globalized World,” and it explores how we can prepare our students not just for success in their classrooms but also for success in their global lives beyond school. While English is not by any means the only important language used in today’s multilingual, globalized world, there is no question that it plays an important role as an international lingua franca. One of the most crucial responsibilities we have as English language teachers is to prepare our students for this reality.

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In my talk, I plan to first give a quick overview of the current state of the English language, specifically focusing on how its global spread resulted in linguistic, user, and cultural diversities. I will then try to demonstrate how traditional approaches to English language teaching, which tend to focus heavily, if not exclusively, on the English varieties, users, and cultures of the US and UK, may be inadequate in preparing our students for the complex reality of English usage today.

Then, using examples of pedagogical ideas, I will explore how we can better align our pedagogical assumptions and practices with the sociolinguistic reality of English as an international language (EIL) and assist our students in becoming competent EIL users who can navigate and achieve their goals in today’s globalized world.

TEC: You have described today’s world – where English is used as English as an International Language (EIL) – as a “messy world.” Can you explain what you mean by this?

Prof. Matsuda: I have used the term “messy” to describe the linguistic, user, cultural, and other diversities we find in English today. The English-speaking world represented in the EFL curriculum tends to be simple and “tidy,” where “native English speakers” are presented as English users, and share their cultures, often American or British, speaking in the “standard” variety spoken in their countries. But when we look at how English is used in the real world, it is much more complex. It is used beyond so-called “English-speaking countries” and, especially in the former colonies of the UK and US where English continues to be used regularly for domestic communication, new varieties have emerged. The spread has also resulted in a change in the profile of English users and which cultures these users bring with them when they communicate in English. One tenet of TEIL (teaching English as an international language) is that our ELT practices must acknowledge and reflect this “messiness.”

TEC: How should teachers prepare themselves, and their language learners, for this messy world of EIL?

Prof. Matsuda: This is a big question! I think one important piece is the awareness of the messiness – what kinds of English are used by whom, how, and for what purposes these days. It is also important to understand how our students will be using English within that context – are there particular varieties of English or types of English users and cultural references that they are more likely to encounter than others? That they must be more familiar with? Such specific information about learners’ needs can help teachers turn the general principles of TEIL into specific pedagogical practices.

TEC: Your invited second session is entitled “TEIL as a Tool for Decolonizing and Anti-Racist Pedagogy.” Could you give us a brief insight as to how teaching English as an international language can aid in combating racism as well as decolonization in language learning?

Prof. Matsuda: This is a question that I started exploring only recently, and I don’t feel like I have the full answer yet. But my current thinking is TEIL has the potential to minimize – though not necessarily eliminate – racism and colonialism in ELT by challenging various assumptions and widely accepted practices in ELT that resemble implicit racism and colonialism in the field. It also gives us a way to combat racism and work toward decolonization at the level that is doable in our capacity, which varies across contexts.

TEC: Is English your first language? Can you share with us your background, and your own personal experiences with language learning and EIL?

Prof. Matsuda: English is not my first language. I am originally from Japan and grew up there speaking only Japanese until the age of 17, although my school offered an English class from Grade 1, and it was always one of my favorite subjects.

My transnational life started when I traveled to the US as a high school exchange student. After spending two years in a small dairy-farming town called Colby, Wisconsin, I began my undergraduate work at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point as an accounting major and completed it at International Christian University in Tokyo as an English linguistics major. After graduating from ICU, I returned to the US to pursue graduate degrees at Purdue University in Indiana and have lived in the US since then. The insights on language, multilingualism, and identity that I gained from attending schools in two countries continue to influence the way I approach my work today.

Nowadays, I use both English and Japanese on a daily basis, being connected to both English-speaking and Japanese-speaking communities, in-person and virtual. There are areas I'm stronger in in one language over the other, but these two languages are equally important to who I am today.

TEC: You are the editor of the book *Preparing Teachers to Teach English as an International Language* (Multilingual Matters, 2017) in which you brought together a collection of over 30 EIL teacher educators and researchers from countries around the world, exploring theoretical approaches and models; teacher education programs; and courses and activities in TEIL teacher education. Please share with us the process and challenges of editing and publishing such an important addition to the TEIL literature.

Prof. Matsuda: This was such a rewarding project! I decided to edit this book because I sensed the frustration among teachers who were told that their current practices are inadequate in preparing their students for their future use of EIL but received no guidance on what to do about it. My primary goal was to provide a good balance of theory and practice, with a set of ready-to-use pedagogical ideas that can be adapted to different teacher education contexts. I also wanted to bring together scholars from World Englishes and English as a lingua franca – two scholarly fields that inform TEIL but do not interact with each other as often as they could – so that we can all work together to move the idea of TEIL forward.

As for the process, I first ran my ideas with the acquisition editor of Multilingual Matters, whom I had the pleasure of working with for my first edited book (*Principles and Practices of Teaching English as an International Language*, 2012). Once I had the contract, I recruited the authors. For the first two chapters that provided the theoretical foundations, I invited colleagues who were already doing innovative work in teacher preparation for TEIL. For other chapters that showcased teacher education program models and pedagogical ideas, I solicited them through a call for papers. The chapters were revised several times based on internal and external reviews. I believe the whole process took about 2 and a half years from the time when I received the contract to the publication of the book.

Editing is not for everyone. I've heard some people say they much prefer to write a book on their own, and yes, it can sometimes be a challenge to balance the unique voice of each chapter and the coherent vision of the volume. But I enjoy editing tremendously because I learn so much from reading other people's work, and contributors collectively move the thinking further than I can do alone. And more than anything, an opportunity to work with dedicated contributors, reviewers, and publishing editors is priceless!

TEC: With what you know personally about Korean society, along with being an expanding circle country, how can you apply your views on TEIL to Korean ELT?

Prof. Matsuda: I admit that my knowledge of Korean society is limited (and I am looking forward to learning more in April!), but from what I have heard from my students and colleagues, I understand that the *suneung* and testing in general have strong washback effects on ELT in Korea. In such a context, teachers often do not feel they have the freedom to deviate from the existing curriculum and teaching materials or to incorporate TEIL practices. I believe, however, that there are ways to bring in, or even "sneak in," TEIL principles into even a very strict curriculum. I hope to share some such examples during my talk and to think creatively about the application of TEIL in various instructional contexts in Korea.

TEC: You are a faculty member in the Linguistics and Applied Linguistics/TESOL Department at Arizona State University. The TESOL program is one of the oldest and most respected in the country.

Prof. Matsuda: Yes, our Master of TESOL (MTESOL) program began in 1969 (celebrating its 55th birthday this year!) and is now offered in-person and online. The program offers opportunities for students to develop scholarly and professional knowledge and skills in four main areas that are central to TESOL – language, learning, teaching, and research – with a very strong (and popular) supervised internship

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component. MTESOL students on campus often take courses with students from our MA and PhD programs in linguistics and applied linguistics as well as a graduate certificate program in computer-assisted language learning. These graduate programs are quite diverse, with students from 37+ countries and 40+ languages altogether, creating a vibrant EIL community. It is such a privilege to teach in this program. Our students come with diverse experiences in TESOL and generously share their knowledge and insights to support each other. I get inspired and learn so much from working with them!

TEC: Will this conference event be your first trip to Korea? Any personal plans, if you're able to get away with some free time?

Prof. Matsuda: Yes, it will be my first time, and I am very excited about it! My daughter, who attends university in Japan, is planning to join me for the conference, and we are hoping to extend our stay after the conference to explore Seoul a little bit. A former student of mine has offered to show me around, and I am grateful for that! Any sightseeing suggestions from the readers would be greatly appreciated, too.

TEC: Thank you, Professor Matsuda, for your time and for sharing with TEC readers your compelling conference presentation topic and your other research interests. I truly hope your visit to Korea is an enjoyable one, and I look forward to meeting you in person at the conference.

Prof. Matsuda: Thank you! I look forward to meeting you all soon and learning from you.

Interviewed by Andrew White, TEC Editor-in-Chief