

COMMENT



Point of View
Kathryn Alevizos and Zanne Gaynor

Native English speakers need to brush up on their language skills too!

The international classroom has been an uneven playing field for too long. It's time for change, argue Zanne Gaynor and Kathryn Alevizos

According to a report by the British Council, non-native speakers of English now exceed native speakers by an estimated ratio of 4:1 – and that number continues to grow.

English is widely accepted as the *lingua franca* used in business, education and travel, to name but a few. So, if you're a native English speaker, you're fine – everyone understands you ... except the problem is, they don't.

The English that native speakers use at home or with friends is unlikely to be the English that overseas students or colleagues have been exposed to. A lack of awareness of this difference can cause problems in the language classroom.

While experienced EFL teachers are often well-attuned to the problems their students face when communicating with native speakers of English, this is not the case for everyone. It can take years of teaching to become skilled at adapting your language; knowing when to avoid a troublesome idiom or a tricky phrasal verb. And even experienced teachers can benefit from a reminder to adjust their language, particularly if moving from teaching advanced students to beginners.

So why are the communication skills of native-speaker English teachers so often overlooked? This is the question that led Zanne Gaynor and Kathryn Alevizos to write and publish their book, *Is that clear? Effective communication in a multilingual world*.

Kathryn explains, "During our careers in EFL, Zanne and I both started to feel a

growing sense of imbalance, or even injustice, in how English language learning is approached. It seems that everything is geared towards the L2 speaker making the effort to improve their English, with an abundance of courses, books and materials to support them in this goal. For native English speakers, on the other hand, there is little or no expectation to adapt or change our language, after all, we already speak excellent English."

In his review of the book, David Crystal, British linguist, academic and author, said, "*Your message is needed, succinct and to the point. You are right: so many people have never thought about these things. And little nudges in the right direction are just what they need.*"

“We use language instinctively and often just aren't aware how difficult it is for speakers of other languages to understand.”

Zanne and Kathryn feel passionately that better international communication should be a shared responsibility – where the native English speaker also makes an effort and takes measures to make their language easier to understand.

So, Zanne and Kathryn condensed their combined years of experience as language school owner, CELTA trainer, exam writer and course book author into a handy guide that helps native English speakers adapt their language in international settings.

Zanne explains the aim of their book, "We want to make our readers think twice about the language they use in the classroom or socialising with non-native English speakers. We know all too well how we can confuse speakers of other languages – without even realising it."



CHIEF CROW DARIA/SHUTTERSTOCK

"A student once asked why I began the class saying 'festival'," recalls Kathryn. "I realised he hadn't understood the words 'first of all'. We naturally merge words together when we talk."

"We've also seen how being too polite can be a minefield in everyday conversation," says Zanne, "For example, if somebody asks you 'Would you like some more cake?' and you reply, 'Oh, I'd love to but I shouldn't. It was really nice though, thanks', is the answer here yes or no? If you're talking to somebody who doesn't speak English as a first language, it's unclear."

"We use language instinctively and often just aren't aware how difficult it is for speakers of other languages to understand."

But is the book just dumbing down English?

Absolutely not, Kathryn explains. "It's just a question of tailoring your language to the person you're speaking to. We already do it. We don't speak to family members in the same way we speak to our boss at work or our bank manager. We just know how to adapt. The fact is, we can forget to do this when we're in the EFL classroom, either at home or abroad."

And with the growth of online EFL teaching, Zanne and Kathryn argue that the need for clear communication is greater than ever. Without the usual non-verbal cues that support understanding, students can find it even harder to follow native English speakers.

Zanne points out that, "while there's a wealth of useful advice on the internet about teaching online; from tips on using Zoom to where to find the best online resources, again the striking omission is any reference to the importance of clear communication. Concise and accessible advice on how you can adapt

your language to better meet your students' needs is maybe harder to find – yet it's so key to effective teaching."

Zanne and Kathryn believe that *Is that clear?* is a must-have guide for any native English speaker embarking on an EFL career, moving to online teaching or just wishing to improve their communication skills as a teacher.

As Kathryn points out, "Our students put in such a lot of effort, isn't it fair that we meet them halfway?"

Kathryn Alevizos and Zanne Gaynor are authors of *Is that clear?* and founders of Acrobat-Global, a company specialising in effective international communication. PDF of *Is that Clear?* available at <https://payhip.com/AcrobatGlobal> 25% off with the code ITC2020. Also available on Amazon in paperback and Kindle.

Kathryn Alevizos has been involved in language training for more than 20 years. She has taught in companies, universities and in private language schools as well as teaching refugees and asylum seekers. She has worked as a CELTA teacher trainer, is a published author with Pearson and a consultant for Cambridge Assessment.

Zanne Gaynor has taught in Spain and in the UK and ran her own government accredited school in the Balearic Islands from 2003 to 2006. In 2005 she started writing EFL materials. Her books have been published by Pearson, Macmillan and Richmond. She recently worked with asylum seekers and in 2019, gained a postgraduate award in Education (TESOL) from Oxford Brookes University.

OUT OF THE BOX

Help us do better on racism

Jodie Gray says it's time to take a closer look at ELT industry attitudes and explains how English UK is leading the way

Like so many, we at English UK were appalled by the horrific murder of George Floyd in the USA. We watched news of, or participated in, protests around the world and

To that end, English UK is establishing an action group to consider how we embed the values of anti-racism, diversity and inclusion throughout the sector. The

many sources being shared across media channels regarding anti-racism. As international educators working in the UK ELT sector, we strive to bring communities together. We are listening and learning how we can do better.

Our sector is not diverse enough – that is evident when the industry comes together at events and conferences. Many of us have witnessed instances of racism that are too often swept under the carpet of 'cultural differences.' We tend to rely on images and messages about the UK that promote our tradition and history but ignore our diversity and multi-culturalism.

It is important to acknowledge where we can improve, openly discuss the complexities and contradictions and take action. We believe that we have an obligation as educators to those from around the world to move this conversation forward in as open a way as possible.

“We tend to rely on images and messages about the UK that promote our tradition and history but ignore our diversity and multi-culturalism.”

first task of this group will be to draft an amendment enshrining our collective commitment to anti-racism in the rules of English UK. This group will be an open, dynamic and safe space to share views and develop clear actions. If you

are part of the UK ELT sector and would like to be involved, email jodie.gray@englishuk.com.



Jodie Gray is the Interim Chief Executive of English UK, the UK's national association of accredited English language teaching centres.