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ELF-ORIENTED ATTITUDES TO LEARNING ENGLISH

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Abstract – In this paper, we investigate whether the nativeness principle in language teaching and learning can ever be replaced by something more reflective of the fact that English has become not just an international lingua franca in the traditional sense of Latin, for example, but also a fluid and spontaneous set of language variations (Widdowson 2015) that emerge in contexts where L1 speakers of different languages use English primarily as *users*, rather than as mere *learners*. We look for signs that the nativeness principle is losing influence by trying to gauge how far respondents to a survey hold views which show that they are NES-norm oriented in their attitudes to English and also how they react to ELF-oriented alternatives. The methodology adopted is both qualitative and quantitative and is based around analysis of a dedicated online questionnaire administered to 188 learners of English, mostly at school or university, comparing answers to the question "Why are you learning English?", where respondents were asked to choose between ten reasons (more than one option could be chosen) and reactions to twelve statements relating to attitudes to English (classified as NES-norm oriented, ELF-oriented, or neutral) that were marked on a five-point Likert scale. Responses are analysed both individually and in comparison with each other (by measuring the correlation coefficient r) to better observe underlying trends.

Keywords: ELF; English language teaching; the nativeness principle; attitudes to ELF.

1. Introduction: The nativeness principle in the classroom

In typical teaching environments, it is still usually assumed that, in so-called foreign and second language acquisition, the goal of the learner is to emulate the native speaker of a language in their language use and orientate themselves towards the latter's culture, world view and pragmatic norms when communicating in the target language.

In recent years, however, many have come to question this view, among them, (and surprisingly given the general tone of the rest of the document) the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR - Council of Europe 2001):

> 1) It [language education] is no longer seen as simply to achieve 'mastery' of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the 'ideal native speaker' as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place. (p. 5)

Here the stated object is not to specialise in one of two languages reaching a high level of proficiency but rather to develop a knowledge of a range of languages, without necessarily aiming at becoming completely proficient in any (i.e. quantity not quality so-to-speak). Later on in the document, it elaborates further:

> 2) All knowledge of a language is partial, however much of a 'mother tongue' or 'native language' it seems to be. It is always incomplete, never as developed or perfect in an ordinary individual as it would be for the utopian, 'ideal native speaker'. In addition, a given individual

> never has equal mastery of the different component parts of the language in question (for example of oral and written skills, or of comprehension and interpretation compared to production skills). (p. 169)

Significant in Example 2 is the fact that the expression "ideal native speaker" is qualified by the adjective *utopian*, thereby clearly underlining the unreal nature of the concept evoked.

Almost everywhere else, the CEFR adopts a more traditional stance and indeed uses the expression *native speaker* (henceforth NS) as a point of reference in its scales. In particular, aspects of performance associated with non-native speakers (NNSs) indicate lower levels of performance:

> 3) Pronunciation is clearly intelligible even if a foreign accent is sometimes evident and occasional mispronunciations occur.
>
> (Descriptor for B1 band, Phonological Control, p. 117)

At other points, inability to conform to NS levels or norms is associated with socially deviant behaviours. For example, in the scale for conversation (p. 76), it states the following in the descriptor for B2:

> 4) Can sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker.

In Example 4, a stark power asymmetry is recognised between the NS and NNS with the latter obviously being expected to not stray from the former's norms, at the risk of being a figure of fun or an unwelcome distraction. In either case, it is clear that the NNS speaker must conform to NS norms to achieve anything approaching equality. By contrast, any accommodation on the part of NS towards the NNS and their variations of the target language constitutes an unwelcome inconvenience. Many within the field of ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) have come to lament this state of affairs where, in effect, the NNS is seen as an imperfect copy of the NS with fewer rights in discourse events as evidenced in Example 4.

The gradual movement arguing that the idealised native English speaker (NES) should no longer be the model for English as an international lingua franca[1] can be traced back notably to Kachru's (1985) three circles model, which, among other things, highlighted the fact that NESs account for only a minority of English speakers. This description still puts NESs at the centre, however: in the inner circle. Graddol (2010, p. 110) makes reference to Kachru's (1998) concept of *functional nativeness*[2] which describes English as a second language in countries like India where the range of domains in which it is used and depth of its penetration within society means that the users may not

[1] Care must be taken with terminology. When we say "English is an international lingua franca", we refer merely to its status as a means of communication between speakers of other languages without making any reference to what form this English may take; by contrast, when we use the term *English as Lingua Franca* (ELF), we focus specifically on the forms of the variations of English that come about when international users (predominantly NNESs) use English for spontaneous communication where the concern is predominantly communicating in the most efficacious way, reflecting also their own lingua cultural background(s) (Guido 2008), and not adhering to any prescribed model.

[2] The nativeness here relates to the language, not the speaker, i.e. English is *functionally* native to India, while Hindi, Kasmiri, Bengali etc are *genetically* so (see Kachru 1998: 1992): i.e. they are descended from and related historically to other languages in the same linguistic area.

be technically NES but have reached an exceptionally high level of proficiency. Graddol, consequently, presents a revised version of Kachru's model, which no longer makes a distinction between NES and NNES (non-native English speaker), but is based on degrees of proficiency without making reference to any NS / NNS distinction. The trouble is that proficiency needs to be clearly defined. If the gauge is nativeness, as in native-like or near native levels of proficiency, then there is a risk that the emphasis will not be on being able to perform linguistically as well as a NS (which need not mean copying the way that they do things), but rather merely on being able to emulate a NS, with communicative goals becoming a secondary consideration.

Despite the difficulties in providing an alternative to the NS model, many educators working in the area of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) have noted the mismatch between the kind of English taught at school and the kind of English that learners, use at work, in their contact with NNESs of different L1s to theirs or NESs or, especially in the case of digitally-native millennials, over the internet and social media. Such discrepancies become even starker with the adoption of methodologies like Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).[3]

This kind of English, which has also been described as *translocal*[4] (see Pennycook 2007; Blommaert 2010), where NNESs communicate mainly but not exclusively with other NNESs in a largely improvised manner has come to be called ELF (Jenkins 1998, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2015; Seidlhofer 2001, 2011). Here, the emphasis is not on emulation of the NES but on negotiation of meaning through such strategies as accommodation (Giles *et al*. 1991), and *translanguaging* (García, Wei 2014).

ELF variations are spontaneous and fluid (hence the avoidance of the term *variety* which designates more fixed and structured forms of language)[5] and by their nature endonormative. Accordingly, standards (NES or otherwise) are less relevant: a fact which presents new challenges for educators and learners. In the specific area of pronunciation, many, including Jenkins with her Lingua Franca Core (1998, 2000, 2002, 2007), have argued that the general concept of intelligibility to other participants (broadly speaking, the ease with which sounds can be linked to phonemes and thus to words and meanings) should replace that of the idealised NES pronunciation.

In this article, we will address the issue of whether such ELF variations can come to be seen as viable alternatives to traditional exonormative NES models for NNES learners of English. We will look at the concept of something that we here call *ELFness*. This can be described as an attitude to English in which the NES is no longer a model, and being able to convincingly emulate a NES is not seen as an end in itself. Instead, precedence is given to the more practical and functional concerns of being able to achieve the communicative goals that the speakers have set for themselves in a given discourse event where participants do not share a native language.[6]

[3] See Coyle *et al.* (2010).

[4] "English is a translocal language, a language of fluidity and fixity that moves across, while becoming embedded in, the materiality of localities and social relations. English is bound up with transcultural flows, a language of imagined communities and refashioning identities" (Pennycook 2007, pp. 5-6).

[5] "Variety status is achieved when variations become conventionalized and so settle into what is taken to be a systematic state, in other words, when variation is taken to be regularized to the extent that it constitutes language change" Widdowson (2015, p. 363).

[6] In the specific field of pronunciation, Levis (2005) contrasts the nativeness principle with the *intelligibility principle*, which can be seen as something similar to *ELFness*. We prefer to adopt the latter term because, while not the most elegant expression perhaps, it is more comprehensive implying an adoption of the

Inherent in this approach is the idea of languaging (see Swain 2006): language viewed as an activity within real-world contexts and not as an independent abstract system. Consequently, to "know a language" entails putting it to some specific use in a particular discourse context. *ELFness* sees languaging with English as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. It involves being prepared to adapt, accommodate, improvise, create and manipulate English, together with other linguistic resources that the user may have (i.e. to translanguage), in order to express him or herself in a way not based on the model of any other speaker (NES or not) but rather on the demands of communicating efficaciously in the given situation, as well as on concerns at a social semiotic level (see Halliday 1978) such as establishing and maintaining social relationships between participants.[7]

The last point brings up the unavoidable question of prestige. Traditional standards and more recent NES-norm oriented models survive in major part because of the prestige associated with them, notwithstanding the fact that, in the literature, the NES is left as a very general concept and little distinction is made between NESs of standard and non-standard varieties. (although in teaching materials and assessment, learners are increasingly exposed to both). Generally, something has prestige when it is desired or considered better than others; in socio-linguistic terms, it means that speakers of a given prestigious variety are accorded superior status to those speaking less prestigious varieties.[8] ELF variations can easily be dismissed as incorrect or "broken" English, much as NES regional varieties were once denigrated[9] and ELF-oriented speakers can thus be classed as incompetent users in the same way that speakers of non-standard varieties used to be, and still are in some cases, seen as uneducated and of low social status.

Learners of English and their teachers wanting to embrace a more inclusive and positive *ELFish* attitude still face an uphill struggle against misconceptions and prejudice in many cases. Yet there is room for optimism in that prestige is largely a matter of taste and social mores, which change over time. In this article, we will examine the situation regarding attitudes to ELF among learners today as a means of understanding whether traditional attitudes are indeed being challenged and whether we can identify diminishing levels of importance, even subtle ones, attached to adhering to NES s as opposed to ELF-oriented ones. To do this, we will report on a questionnaire which we administered online to learners of English in various different countries. We will detail this further in the next section.

2. The Questionnaire: the profile of the respondents

whole spectrum of features and strategies (e.g. accommodation, translanguaging, creativity and improvisation) that are typical of ELF variations.

[7] Here we are referring to the interpersonal function of language including concerns of identity (see Jenkins 2007).

[8] "Social and linguistic prestige is interrelated. The language of powerful social groups usually carries linguistic prestige; and social prestige is often granted to speakers of prestige languages and varieties" (Pearce 2007, p. 146).

[9] The Nigerian writer Ken Saro Wiwa's: "Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English" (1985), which is written in Nigerian Pidgin English, makes explicit reference to the way non-standard varieties have been stigmatized especially in colonial and post colonial contexts. However, it also shows how prestige may be also covert (Labov 2006), showing in-group solidarity against, in particular, the *status quo*.

The questionnaire was administered via an online open access platform provided by the Jotform service.[10] It was composed of a series of questions, not all of which were relevant to our research but which were included to better conceal our actual objective, and thereby reduce response bias.

Respondents were first asked a series of general questions regarding age; gender; where they were from, their L1(s) and any additional languages which they spoke; how long they had been learning English; and lastly whether they had any English language qualifications.

Then, in two dedicated sections, which we shall detail in sections 3.1 and 3.2 below, they were asked specific questions regarding their reasons for learning English and their general opinion of certain statements regarding using English.

In all, 188 respondents completed the survey. These were contacted in a number of ways: through the Università del Salento (Italy) Moodle platform; via colleagues at other universities in Turkey and Poland; and through colleagues at state schools in Italy, Germany and at private language schools in Albania.[11] Participants were also encouraged to forward the invitation to participate to whomsoever they wanted. Replies were anonymous although respondents had the option to leave an email address in order to take part in further research.

Of the respondents, 153 (approx. 81.38%)[12] were female and 35 (18.62%) were male. Of these, the vast majority were from Italy (151: approx. 80.32%), followed by 17 (9.04%) from Turkey, five (2.66%) each from Albania, France and Germany, and one (0.53%) each from Brazil, China, Lebanon, Poland and Ukraine.

As regards age, 48 of the respondents (25.53%) fell within the 11-12 to 17-18 age range[13]; 107 (56.91%) were 18-19 to 24-25; 21 (11.17%), 25-26 to 34-35; six (3.19%) 35-36 to 44-45; and six (3.19%) 45-46 to 59-60. In the survey then, the under 25-26 groups (that is mostly school or university students) made up 82.45% of the respondents.[14]

The questionnaire was designed for learners of level B1 of the *CEFR* and above. On average, respondents had been studying English for 11.32 years (standard deviation: 3.95). Regarding linguistic repertoires, on average, respondents spoke 1.08 languages in addition to their L1 and English (standard deviation: 1.03).

[10] https://jotform.com/

[11] As well as anonymous friends of friends, we should like to thank the following for their invaluable cooperation in this stage of our research: Adriana Cattell Maiorano (Liceo Arisstosseno, Taranto Italy); teachers at the Berufsbildende Schule Bernkastel-Kues, Germany; Nalan Kiziltan (Ondokuz Mayis University, Turkey); Joanna Radwanowicz (University of Bialystok, Poland); and Genci Shurdho (*Yes* schools group, Albania).

[12] Here as elsewhere, we give figures to two decimal places.

[13] Respondents were not asked their age but to give the year in which they were born.

[14] As can be seen, the respondents did not constitute a homogenous group and it might legitimately be argued that many different variables (age, gender, origin) could influence our results. A possible way round this would be to concentrate on the results of one clearly defined group (e.g. Italian females between the ages of 15 and 25). This however would be to presume that such a group did represent something more homogenous than the population as a whole (which remains to be proven, and, within such a group, or any other for that matter, there may still be further variables: character, type of teaching experienced, social class etc. – and such numerous and not-easily-identifiable factors have long plagued classroom research in general: see, for example, Allwright 1988). Here, in what we envisage as a preliminary study, we prefer to publish our full data, without filtering mainly because our focus is on identifying whether certain attitudes can be shown to exist, not, for the moment, on who exactly has them.

3. The Questionnaire: responses

In the sections below, we will look in detail at the responses obtained for the two main parts of the survey, the first being the options chosen for the general question "Why are you learning English?" (Section 3.1) and then in 3.2, the degree of agreement expressed (by means of a Likert scale) to a set of 12 statements relating to attitudes to using English.

3.1. "Why are you learning English?"

After the general background questions, respondents were asked to choose between various replies to the question "Why are you learning English?" (see Figure 1 below). They were given ten options and were free to choose as many of them as they liked; on average they choose 4.16 (under 50%) of the options. The options and the results are given in Figure 1:

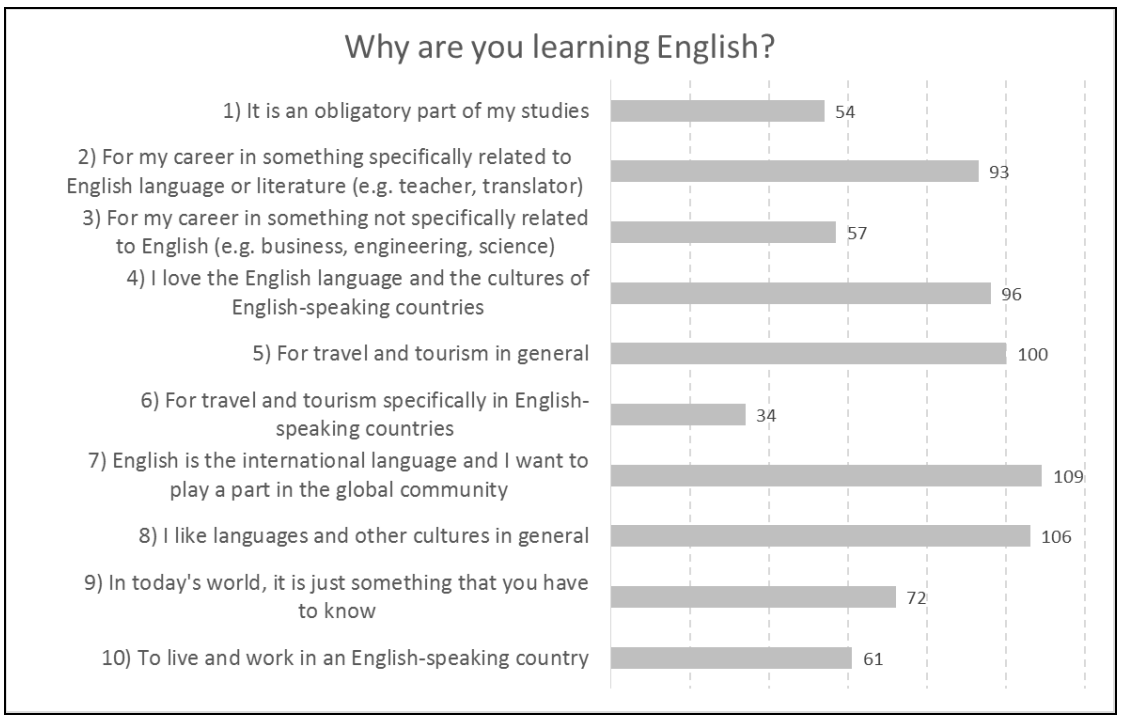

Figure 1
Reasons for learning of English, number of respondents choosing each option.

These responses individually show that the most popular reason for learning English is Choice 7 ("English is an international language and I want to play a part in the global community") and the least is Choice 6 ("For travel and tourism specifically in English-speaking countries").[15] This already shows a distinction between using English as a Lingua Franca for use among NNESs and as a traditional foreign language for use in

[15] It is interesting that choice 1 ("it is an obligatory part of my studies") does not score higher even though it is undoubtedly true for most respondents. One explanation is that, although English is technically a compulsory subject (like mathematics, for example) at school and university in most of the countries covered by this survey (notably Italy), most respondents view it as something more: a subject or skill that they can actively engage with.

countries where English is spoken as a native language, and it is clear that the former has overtaken the latter. Further confirmation comes from comparing pairs of replies. Choice 5 (for travel and tourism in general) is chosen almost three times more than Choice 6. Similarly, Choice 8 ("I like languages and other cultures in general") scores marginally higher than Choice 4 ("I love the English language and cultures of English-speaking countries"). Indeed, grouping the responses into whether they relate more to contexts where models based on NES norm-oriented English (English as a foreign language that adheres to a NES model) may seem more appropriate or to ones where ELF-oriented English may seem more so (English as a lingua Franca, where NES norms take second place to communicative concerns), allows one to see that this tendency is also strong across all the replies (Figure 2):

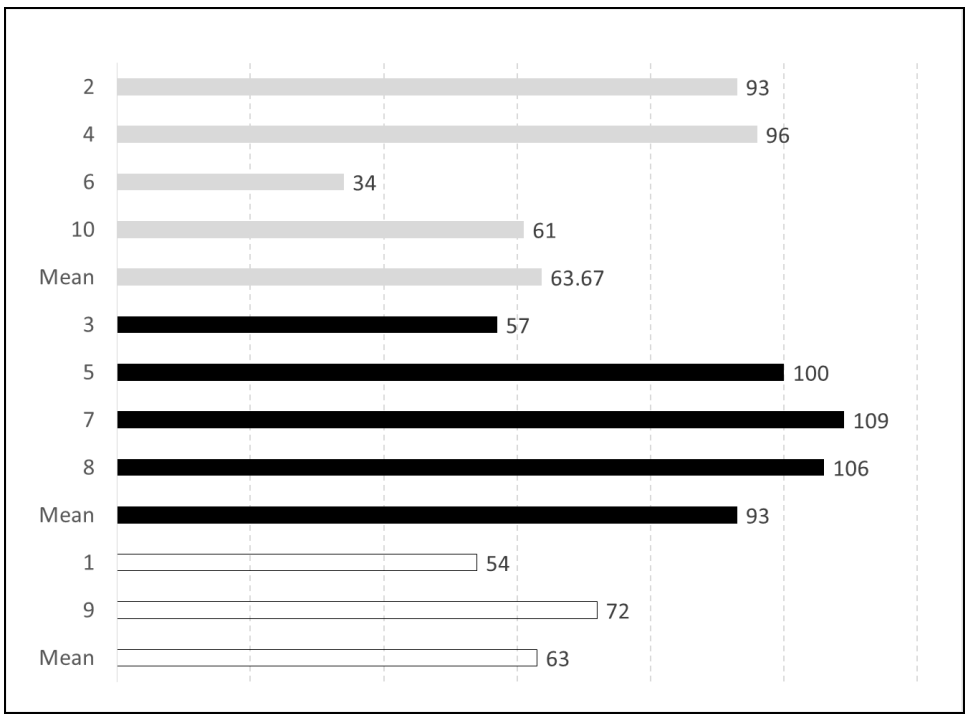

Figure 2
Responses from the questionnaire grouped together according to whether they are NES-norm oriented (light grey), ELF-oriented (black) or neutral (white) with total score from all respondents.

As can be seen in Figure 2, Choices 3, 5, 7 and 8, which could be seen as more ELF-oriented are on average chosen by more respondents than those that seem more NES-norm oriented (Choices 2, 4, 6 and 10) by a considerable margin (93 versus 63.67).

While Figure 2 shows that most respondents are learning English for reasons linked more to its role as international lingua franca than to its status as a traditional foreign language, it does not automatically follow that they then see ELF-oriented norms as acceptable alternatives to a NES-norm oriented model Indeed, they may be unaware of any apparent contradiction in learning English for ELF-oriented goals while still seeking to emulate pursuing NES-norm oriented models. However, it does show that in so far that learners envisage using English in contexts where NES norms take second place to communicative concerns, their relationships to English are now predominantly ELF-oriented and thus that there is at least potential for a shift in their attitudes to such norms.

In the next section, we will explore further respondents' reactions to various statements regarding using English and, in their replies, look for evidence supporting or

contradicting the premise that they remain predominately NES-norm oriented.

3.2. Reactions to statements related to attitudes to using English

In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rank 12 statements related to using English on a five-point Likert scale. These statements were drawn up by us to cover different motives for learning English and to highlight typical areas where, in our estimation, NES-norm oriented or ELF-oriented norms may be more appropriate. The statements on the questionnaire were all positive; negative ones were avoided because they can be misread or cause confusion. Not all of the statements relate specifically to the issue of NES-norm oriented models versus ELF-oriented models, in order that the object of the survey were not made too obvious to respondents (thereby reducing response bias). Furthermore, as shall be seen in the following sections, many of the reactions to the single statements are so interesting as when reactions to different statements are compared or viewed in the context of each other.

As before, the statements were presented in a more or less random order, but could be grouped according to whether they reflected NES-norm oriented or ELF-oriented attitudes, or were neutral. In Figure 3 we show the statements in the order in which they were presented; in brackets we indicate how we categorised them, although respondents received no such indication:

1. “I am satisfied with the level of my grammar and vocabulary in English” (Neutral)
2. “I am satisfied with my pronunciation when I speak English” (Neutral)
3. “I try to hide my national / ethnic origins, when I speak English” (NES-norm oriented)
4. “English is not my native language but it is special to me. Using it feels natural.” (ELF-oriented)
5. “I like to experiment and be creative when I use English.” (Neutral)
6. “When I speak English, I have an accent typical of someone from my country.” (Neutral))
7. “To me, English is a foreign language. It is something that I borrow, not something that I can call my own.” (NES-norm oriented)
8. “I sometimes speak English or use English words and expressions with my friends just for the fun of it.” (Neutral)
9. “I will never sound like a native-speaker of English but I still feel confident using it” (ELF-oriented)
10. “When I speak English, I feel like a different person to when I speak my own language.” (NES-norm oriented)
11. “When speaking English, I think it is acceptable to use words and expressions from other languages if it helps communication.” (ELF-oriented)
12. “If I could, I would like to speak English so well that people would think that I was born in an English-speaking country.” (NES-norm oriented)

Figure 3
Statements relating to using English to be ranked against 5-point Likert scale..

The statements, sorted into the three categories (NES-norm oriented, ELF-oriented and Neutral), and how they were rated by the respondents taken as a group, are given in Figure 4. The marking system adopted was as follows: “I strongly disagree” minus 2 points; “I

disagree" – minus 1 point; "I am undecided" – 0 points; "I agree" – 1 point; "I strongly agree" – 2 points:[16]

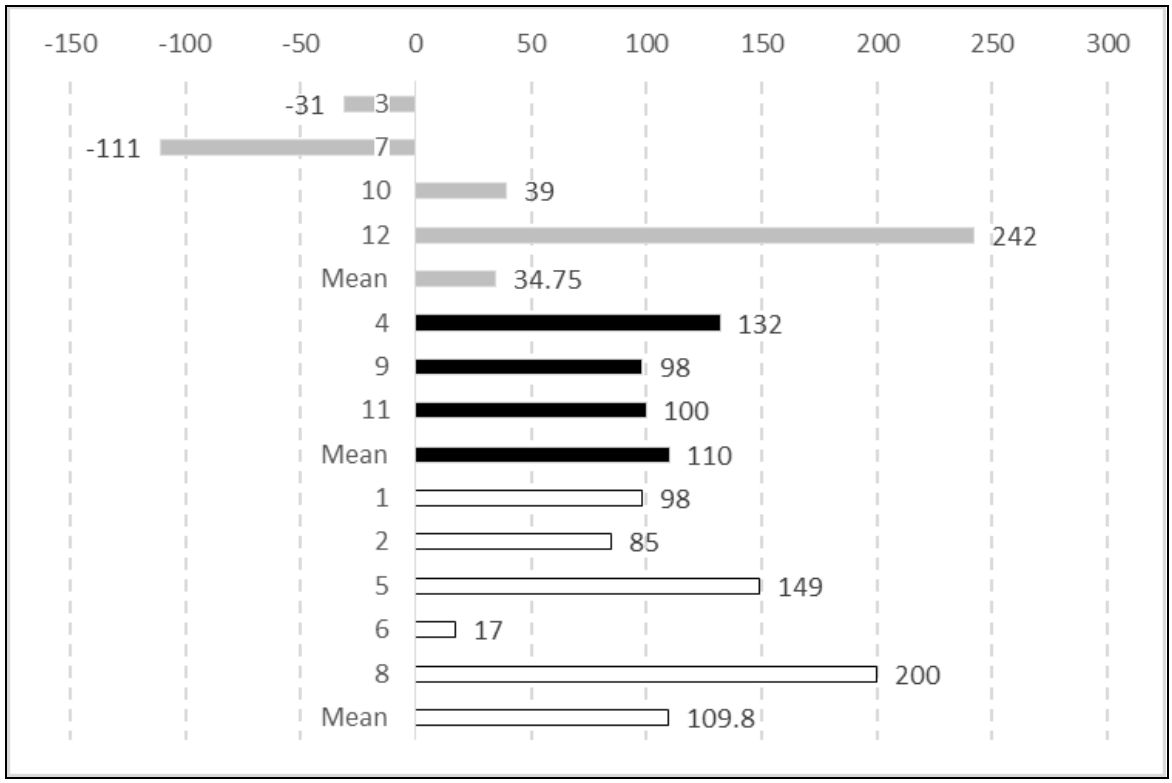

Figure 4
Responses to statements from questionnaire grouped together according to whether they are NES-norm oriented (light grey), ELF-oriented (black) or neutral (white) with total score from all respondents.

Figure 4 shows that again, on average, respondents agree more with ELF-oriented Statements than they do with NES-norm oriented ones even though the most popular Statement by a wide margin falls within the latter category (12: "If I could, I would like to speak English so well that people would think that I was born in an English-speaking country.").

It is encouraging that total response scores range widely from -111 to 242 because this shows that, in the survey, there is no immediately notable *acquiescence bias* whereby respondents are prone to show greater agreement with statements than they would otherwise do.

In the subsection below, we shall look at how responses to the various statements are related to each other by means of calculating the correlation coefficient between them. Then, in the following subsections below, we will make some comments on the response scores for each of the three categories outlined on Figures 3 and 4 in turn.

[16] Very occasionally, respondents omitted, for whatever reason, to give a response. In such cases, for the calculation of averages etc., we assigned the reply 0 points, that is, the same as "I am undecided".

3.2.1. Correlation coefficient between responses to statements

To understand how the various scores associated with the different responses to the statements relating to using English (see Figure 3) may be linked to each other, one can use a statistical tool called the correlation coefficient *r*. This is a value between -1 and +1 which shows how strongly two variables are related to each other. If the relationship is positive, both sets of values rise together; if it is negative, one rises as the other falls. A score of ± 1 indicates a *perfect* correlation; ± 0.70, a *strong* correlation; ±0.50, a *moderate* correlation; and ± 0.30, a *weak* correlation. 0 indicates no correlation at all, i.e. that the two variables are completely independent of each other. Calculating the correlation coefficient involves a complex set of calculations but can be done automatically using a special tool in Excel (which uses the classic Pearson formula).

In Table 1, we show in a matrix the various correlation coefficients between the different scores for the responses to the statements regarding using English, thereby showing how far response scores to one statement are related to those for every other:

	1										
2	0.50	2									
3	0.00	0.00	3								
4	0.31	0.34	0.00	4							
5	0.18	0.10	0.00	0.39	5						
6	-0.23	-0.48	0.00	-0.18	-0.12	6					
7	-0.18	-0.23	0.00	-0.43	-0.22	0.31	7				
8	0.19	0.21	0.00	0.33	0.21	-0.01	-0.08	8			
9	0.16	0.06	0.00	0.08	-0.16	0.16	0.13	0.14	9		
10	-0.03	0.11	0.00	0.15	0.12	0.01	-0.03	0.12	0.01	10	
11	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.23	-0.07	0.00	0.02	-0.01	0.19	11
12	0.06	0.08	0.00	0.26	0.16	-0.06	-0.21	0.32	-0.13	0.21	0.12

Table 1
Correlation coefficients of scores for pairs of statements related to using English.

As can be seen, nine pairs of scores for responses to statements can be judged as correlated to some degree (shaded on matrix). The strongest of these are the response scores for Statements 1 and 2: 0.50, which qualifies as a moderate positive correlation (hence the darker shading). All the other coefficients are weak (lighter shading): Statements 1 and 4 (positive); 2 and 4 (positive); 2 and 6 (negative); 4 and 5 (positive); 4 and 7 (negative); 4 and 8 (positive); 6 and 7 (positive); and 8 and 12 (positive).

What this shows is that in the responses to the statements related to using English, there is no easily discernible pattern of correlation to be seen either between responses within the same category (NES-norm oriented, ELF-oriented or neutral) or between responses of different categories.

When we look at the pairs of scores for responses to statements in the context of the category to which they belong, e find a rather complex picture (Table 2):

	NES-norm oriented	ELF-oriented	Neutral
NES-norm oriented			
ELF-oriented	4-7 (-)		
Neutral	6-7 (+) 8-12 (+)	1-4 (+) 2-4 (+) 4-5 (+) 4-8 (+)	1-2 (+) 2-6 (-)

Table 2
The pairs of scores for responses to statements in the context of the category to which they belong.

As can be seen, only one of the pairs of correlated scores, 4-7, does not include a statement from the neutral category. This involves responses to NES-norm oriented and ELF-oriented statements and the correlation is, as expected, negative, albeit weak. The most common combination for correlated scores is Neutral / ELF-oriented, and the statement whose response score seems to correlate most with other scores (but in each case, only in a weak manner) is that for Statement 4 ("English is not my native language but it is special to me. Using it feels natural."). It correlates positively with the response scores for neutral statements, but negatively with the single NES-norm oriented statement, which as we say above is as expected. What is also worthy of the note, is the absence of correlation between scores for statements within either of the categories of NES-norm oriented or ELF-oriented, underlining once again the fact that respondents to this survey cannot be easily placed within either the NES-norm oriented or the ELF-oriented category.

3.2.2. NES-norm oriented statements

Within the category of NES-norm oriented, Number 12 ("If I could, I would like to speak English so well that people would think that I was born in an English-speaking country") meets with the highest level of agreement of all the statements presented to respondents. That so many respondents agree with it and to such a high degree may not come as a surprise as this view is still conventional wisdom among many educators and is incardinated in such documents as the *CEFR* (see Section 1).

It is however surprising that there is no linear relationship between 12 and 3 ("I try to hide my national / ethnic origins, when I speak English"). As Table 1 shows, the correlation coefficient is 0, indicating that there is no relation at all between the two sets of scores. This is unexpected seeing that the two statements are harmonious and one may have expected to find a clear positive correlation, with marks for the one rising in unison with those for the other. This inconsistency is also apparent, without any complicated calculation, by the simple fact that Statement 12 attracts the highest level of agreement in the survey, while Statement 3 gets a low average score: the second lowest. Statement 3 is also remarkable in that its response score shows an almost total absence of linear relationship with the response score of any other statements related to using English (see Table 1).

There is reason to suspect that the responses either for Statement 3 or for Statement 12 or both, have been affected by bias of one sort or another. Statement 12, as we have mentioned, very much encapsulates the conventional wisdom of the nativeness principle. Consequently, it could be argued that, if anywhere in the survey, one may expect some acquiescence bias here (see Section 3.2) as studies have shown that it typically occurs when "truisms" – commonly heard statements which are rarely contested – are used in surveys (see Jackson 1967). Indeed, supporting the idea that the scores for 12 have been exaggerated by bias is the fact that all the other statements in the category of NES-norm oriented are, by contrast, given markedly low scores. Indeed one of the NES-norm oriented statements is met with widespread disagreement (Statement 7: "To me, English is a foreign language. It is something that I borrow, not something that I can call my own"). We will return to this in Section 3.2.3, where we compare replies to it with those to Statement 4.

However, there are grounds for suspecting that not too much weight should be given to replies to Statement 3 because perhaps respondents are reluctant to admit to a form of behaviour which, described in such stark terms, could be seen as unfaithful to their own national or ethnic group. This is perfectly understandable; Statement 3 touches on the issue of identity, which Jenkins (2007) examines in depth. A major drawback with the nativeness principle is that emulation comes at a cost: that of obscuring one's own origins, typically a large part of a user's identity, which may run against their primary community values (Guido 2008). In Subsection 3.2.4, we will make some comments about Statements 2 and 6 and how they are correlated, which will also shed light on the respondents' feelings about camouflaging their national / ethnic origins.

Another explanation for the marked difference in average scores and lack of a correlation between Statements 3 and 12 is that, although they appear harmonious, each refers to a completely different type of situation, thus making it perfectly possible to agree with either depending on context. According to this view, respondents may equate being as proficient as possible with a kind of ideal (but possibly unachievable) state of native-like proficiency: the key words in Statement 12 being *"if I could"*. That is to say, if circumstances permitted, the respondent would like to be as proficient in English as a NES but treat this only as a notional prospect; if circumstances do not permit (as must be so in the majority of cases), and the respondent is not proficient enough to be perceived as something close to a NES, they would then prefer to be identified with their own national / ethnic group.[17] Following this logic, the difference between Statements 3 and 12 is essentially that the former asks about realistic aspirations and the latter about their dreams. Statement 9, "I will never sound like a native-speaker of English but I still feel confident using it", also has relevance to Statement 12 as it shows how many respondents actually firmly doubt that they ever will be able to be to emulate a NES successfully: at least 98 out of 188 (approx. 52.13%).[18] Notwithstanding this, in our survey, no notable linear relationship is found between the Statements 9 and 12 (see Table 1).

[17] Perhaps many respondents would opt for the best of both worlds: being proficient enough to have NES functionality and yet still clearly identify themselves with their own national / ethnic identity (or even some other one, if they so desire), as have done figures such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Monica Bellucci, or Chow Yun Fat. This is a point that merits a lengthy study in its own right.

[18] Given the fact that Statement 9 contains two parts, firstly the fact that the respondent will never be able to sound like an NS, and secondly that, notwithstanding this, they will still feel confident speaking English, it would be wrong to assume that the rest (approx. 47.87%) think that they will be able to sound like an NES. This group includes those who do not feel confident using English but these respondents will in turn be divided between those who think it possible to sound like a NES and those who do not.

Whatever the exact reason for it, the marked lack of correlation between Statements 3 and 12 indicates that respondents may indeed have conflicting views over what kind of English to use, which would confirm that the traditional nativeness principle as outlined in Section 1 is becoming increasingly inappropriate in the context of English as an international lingua franca and with the evolution of ELF variations.

Response scores for Statement 7 ("To me, English is a foreign language. It is something that I borrow, not something that I can call my own.") show a weak positive correlation with those for Sentence 6 ("When I speak English, I have an accent typical of someone from my country.") – 0.31, see Table 1. This cannot be explained by the fact that those who feel less proficient (as shown by the strong influence of their L1 on their pronunciation of English) feel naturally more estranged from English, because no similar correlation is found between Statement 7 and either Statement 1 or 2 which both also relate more directly to linguistic proficiency. Rather, identity would seem to be a factor: the respondents whose pronunciation of English is indicative of their origins (which may not necessarily be a sign of a lack of competency but a choice – see Jenkins 2007) also feel more distant from English and consider themselves *outsiders*. This is obviously an attitude which is on one level a rejection of *ELFness*, which advocates equality among users regardless of whether they are NES or NNES, however it is not necessarily an espousal of a recognition of any need to emulate the NES and cannot thus be seen as consistent with the nativeness principle. Perhaps it represents a halfway house between the two extremes of NES-oriented and ELF-oriented norms: a stance that accepts the traditional idea of a language as belonging only to its NSs, but rejects the concept of learners needing to emulate NSs. If such an analysis is correct, it is evidence that the respondents' attitudes are indeed changing, perhaps towards an acceptance of *ELFness* – although we cannot say for sure here as we have no indication of which direction the change is moving in.[19]

Statement 10 ("When I speak English, I feel like a different person to when I speak my own language") receives a low but positive average score. The fact that there is no notable negative correlation between Statement 10 and the scores for any of the ELF-oriented statements is not so surprising as the absence for a positive correlation between it and the average scores for the other NES-norm oriented statements. This is because "feeling like a different person" when speaking English is in perfect line with the practice of emulation. However, and this may explain the absence of the expected correlation with any of the other NES-norm oriented statements, it also emphasises how aspiring to sound like someone else (in this case, a notional NES) involves the adoption of a new identity,[20] and arguably, in effect, the suppression of one's "true self", in that particular linguistic code at least.

3.2.3. ELF-oriented Statements

ELF-oriented statements scored much higher than NES-norm oriented ones and about the same as neutral ones, the average being 110 points (see Figure 4). The most popular statement is Number 4 ("English is not my native language but it is special to me. Using it feels natural." On Tables 1 and 2, it emerges that it is also the statement that is correlated

[19] Longitudinal studies could address this question.

[20] Titles of some traditional ELT school books, such as the *Imagine You're English* series popular in France in the 1970s and 80s (Gibbs and Goodey, Editions Belin), encapsulate and promote this idea.

(mostly positively) with the response scores for the other statements regarding using English.

The one response score that it can be contrasted with is that of Statement 7 ("To me English is a foreign language. It is something which I can borrow, not something I can call my own."), mentioned briefly in Section 3.2.2. The correlation coefficient is -0.43 (see Table 1) indicating a weak negative linear relationship between the two statements: a higher score for one normally corresponds to a lower score in the other.

The precise way English can be "special" requires further investigation but it is reasonable to assume that it signals appropriation of the language. Rejection of Statement 7 ("To me, English is a foreign language. It is something that I borrow, not something that I can call my own.") moves even more explicitly in this direction. The idea of a language being special and something one can possess marks a transition from seeing oneself primary as a NNES to becoming an ordinary user, which is essential if English is to cease being an exonormative international lingua franca and for there to be an evolution of endonormative ELF variations.

Statements 9 ("I will never sound like a native-speaker of English but I still feel confident using it") and 11 ("When speaking English, I think it is acceptable to use words and expressions from other languages if it helps communication.") both receive similar scores but the former is slightly lower. Each however finds wider agreement from the respondents than those for NES-norm related statements, with the obvious exception of Statement 12, or even greater than the average for NES-norm statements (see Figure 4).

One could expect to find a linear relationship between responses for scores for Statement 9 and Statement 4 ("English is not my native language but it is special to me. Using it feels natural") but, as evidenced on Table 1, there is none to speak of as the correlation coefficient is only 0.08. One may have supposed that, for the respondents, the idea of English being special and using it feeling natural would have related to the idea of feeling confident using it, however this is clearly not the case and the two ideas are, in their minds, independent of each other.

Possibly the term *confident* causes confusion as it can be defined in two ways: one relating to believing one's level of proficiency is high enough to meet one's requirements with ease; the other relating to a lack of self-consciousness or embarrassment, arising for whatever reason, when using the language. The two, of course, are usually linked; embarrassment is often caused by lack of proficiency, but it could also have psychological causes unrelated to competence. Respondents who identify themselves as confident could be classed as *independent users*: a term also used in the *CEFR* as a general description of B1-2 level speakers, because they have sufficient resources not to have to rely on the support of other participants in a discourse.

Statement 11 ("When speaking English, I think it is acceptable to use words and expressions from other languages if it helps communication") relates to the issue of translanguaging and it is encouraging for proponents of *ELFness* that it also receives widespread support among respondents. This means that a good proportion of even those respondents who think that NESs should provide the model for their English accept that sometimes emulation of the NES (presumably a monolingual one at least)[21] will have to

[21] This is a point which requires further investigation; the assumption in literature and among educators and policy makers is very much that NES are monolingual (see Jenkins 2015) but it would be interesting to ascertain whether NNES consider the possibility of a NES knowing any other language than English (as a good number do) and thus whether translanguaging strategies could be effective and / or permissible with them.

take second place to being able to communicate effectively. This shows acceptance of the fact that using a language is ultimately only a means to an end, not an end in itself: something we identified in Section 1 as a fundamental principle of *ELFness*.

3.2.4. Neutral statements

The neutral statements in the survey were partly used as distractors to camouflage the real object of the research and thus limit any respondent bias but mainly to provide data against which to compare replies to other statements.

The first two statements, 1 and 2, ("I am satisfied with the level of my grammar and vocabulary in English"; "I am satisfied with my pronunciation when I speak English") both receive scores (98 and 85 respectively) that are lower than the average for neutral statements as a whole (109.8). However, as emerges from Table 1, with a correlation coefficient of 0.50, their response scores are the two most closely linearly related of all the statements. In effect, those respondents who declare themselves satisfied with their pronunciation are also likely to declare that they are satisfied with their grammar and vocabulary. This seems perfectly logical seeing that both these statements refer to satisfaction with aspects of linguistic performance. The response scores for both Statements 1 and 2 are also positively correlated to Statement 4 ("English is not my native language but it is special to me. Using it feels natural.") – respectively 0.31 and 0.34 (see Table 1). It would seem that the more satisfied respondents are with their linguistic own performance, the more natural using English feels, which is an understandable sentiment.

Statement 2 in particular is of interest not so much in itself but when it is compared to Number 6 ("When I speak English, I have an accent typical of someone from my country"). Statement 6 is marked as the item on the survey that respondents seemed to have most problems answering. Fifty-eight out of 188 respondents (approx. 30.85%) choose the option of "undecided" here, the average for all the statements being 36.83 (approx. 19.59%). This point aside – and it can be appreciated how, for the average user, evaluating one's own accent may be problematic – what is interesting is to see how many of those who identify themselves as having an L1-influenced pronunciation when they speak English are actually satisfied with their pronunciation, as this would indicate a clear departure from a NES-norm oriented model.

As seen on Table 1, there is negative correlation coefficient of -0.48 between the response scores for these two statements (2 and 6), a figure which is at the high end of a *weak* correlation range, almost in the category of *moderate* (-0.50 or less). This means that the more a respondent considers their accent when speaking English to be typical of someone from their country, the less satisfied they are with their pronunciation when they speak English. This shows that, in matters related to pronunciation, retaining one's ethnic / national identity is not considered a good thing. It would seem reasonable to deduce from this that the respondents favour NES accents (see also Statement 12), but this is not certain: they may prefer other, at this point undescribed, models (perhaps based on a general concept intelligibility – see Christiansen 2014, Jenkins 2000) but this is something that needs more detailed investigation than we can provide here. Comparison of Statements 2 and 6 also provides an indication of how likely respondents really are to try to hide their national / ethnic origins when they speak English: see Number 3 ("I try to hide my national / ethnic origins, when I speak English"): a statement which received overall a negative score.

There is also a weak correlation (0.31) between Statement 1 and 4 ("English is not my native language but it is special to me. Using it feels natural") – see Table 1. There is a

similar linear relationship with Statement 2 (0.34) which is to be expected seeing that, like Statement 1, it also relates to aspects of linguistic performance. In each case, it transpires that the more satisfied respondents are with their performance (grammatical / lexical, pronunciation), the more they find English special and feel natural using it. A fair conclusion from this would be that, as users feel more proficient in English, they start to feel a sense of ownership or mastery of it and feel comfortable using it.

Statement 5 ("I like to experiment and be creative when I use English") scores relatively high (149, i.e. higher in fact than any of the ELF-oriented statements) and is the second most popular statement in the neutral category after Number 8. Within ELF, the issue of creativity has started to receive a lot of attention (see for example Seidlhofer, Widdowson 2009), because it can be seen as intrinsically opposed to emulation as the freedom to experiment, improvise and innovate is another sign of approbation of the language by users, in contrast to a subservience to pre-established norms set by another group of users (NESs).

It is relevant to note at this point that the response score for Statement 5 does indeed show a weak positive linear relationship with Statement 4 ("English is not my native language but it is special to me. Using it feels natural.") with a correlation coefficient of 0.39 – see Table 1. The most likely explanation for this seems to be that, before one can start being inventive and creative with a language, one first has to think of it as something special and to find using it natural: this latter being a process that in effect amounts to appropriation.

Care must however be taken with the term *creative* as it is vague and could be taken in the more restricted sense that in linguistics has come to be associated with Chomsky, that is, the ability to generate new linguistic items and structures using the finite set of rules which constitutes the grammar of the language in question. In effect, creativity and experimentation could be accommodated within a NES-norm oriented approach to English, i.e. the respondent declares a pleasure in being creative and experimental in their attempts to emulate NESs.[22] Within an ELF variation context, where the very concept of grammar is more fluid and unstable, creativity may involve the novel application of forms, rules and principles from other languages (translanguaging), sometimes combining elements from different linguistic codes in a process of hybridisation. It may also entail the invention of completely new forms as a user may do in their own L1 (see Christiansen 2016 on the manipulation of English). Traditionally, as Jenkins (2007) points out, such creativity on the part of the NNES user (or learner) is often dismissed as "error".

Whatever precise meaning of creative is interpreted by the respondents, it is obvious how the pleasure of creating and experimenting within the context of NS emulation may evolve into something free form, less norm-oriented. The widespread agreement with Statement 5, although cautiously classed as neutral here, may thus point to a tendency towards increasingly ELF-oriented attitudes.

Statement 8 ("I sometimes speak English or use English words and expressions with my friends just for the fun of it.") can be seen as associated to the ideas of creativity and experimentation, ludic activities often serving as forums in which to explore existing and new possibilities. Like Number 5, it also shows a degree of familiarity and appropriation within a given social group that is a product of the translocality of the language. At a score of 200 – almost twice the average (109.8) for the neutral statements as a group, Number 8 is the second most popular statement in the survey (see Figure 4).

[22] Christiansen (2015) makes an analogy with classical music of a norm oriented kind and free-form jazz of the improvised kind. Each kind of music cited entails creativity, but of subtly different kinds.

However, as Table 1 shows, there is no notable linear relationship between Statements 8 and 5 or 4 even though one may have expected to find one.

Table 1, however, shows that there is a weak positive correlation (0.32) between response scores for Statement 8 and Statement 12 ("If I could, I would like to speak English so well that people would think that I was born in an English-speaking country."). This indicates that those respondents who would like to speak English well enough to be taken for a NES are also predisposed to using English words and expressions with friends just for the fun of it. One might speculate that this is because these respondents are motivated and ambitious and see using English in such a way as a useful, and no doubt entertaining, form of practice.

4. Conclusions

As we state in Section 2, the results that we report in this paper come from the responses to a questionnaire by a rather heterogeneous sample of respondents with a disproportionate number of Italians, females and young people. Further research is thus necessary to ascertain how far this sample is representative of ELF users as a whole: in particular those learning English. Studies of specific types of learner or user in precise context, especially longitudinal ones, would no doubt serve to study better the dynamics of attitudes.

That said, the results of this research show that certain attitudes do exist among at least some learners of English and thus highlight some interesting issues which certainly merit further investigation. From the results of the first part of the questionnaire (Section 2), "Why are you learning English", it is shown that the majority of respondents choose options that relate to contexts where English is not a traditional foreign or second language, but where it is an international lingua franca in contexts were ELF variations are seen to be emerging and which seem to be increasingly a more appropriate form of English than native speaker varieties.

The second part of the survey (Section 3) showed that, although most respondents readily give voice to the idea that NES-norm oriented language is preferable as encapsulated in Statement 12 ("If I could, I would like to speak English so well that people would think that I was born in an English-speaking country."), looking at their replies to other statements and comparing their replies to different statements shows that the issue is more complicated.

In general, in the questionnaire, ELF-oriented attitudes seemed to predominate (average 108.67 vs. 34.5 for NS oriented or 86.50 for neutral). Indeed, between NES-oriented statements and ELF-oriented statements as a whole, the correlation coefficient is only 0.04, signalling that there is no noteworthy linear relationship between the two variables. Curiously, if we compare the total for ELF-oriented statements against those for NES-norm oriented ones excluding Statement 12, which was met with considerably more approval that any of other statement in the category, then the correlation coefficient is even smaller: -0.02, indicating even less of a linear relationship.

The lack of linear relationships between the categories shows that respondents cannot be usefully divided into two different groups according to whether they tend to agree with NES-norm oriented statements over ELF-oriented ones, or vice versa. Rather, like human subjects everywhere, they oscillate between two opposing views, at times voicing contrasting opinions. The correlation for the response scores for Statements 6 and 7 also indicates that perhaps some respondents hold views midway between the two poles of NES-norm and ELF-norm orientation and are maybe in the process of moving from one

position to another (see Section 3.2.2).

Both sets of orientations are then found in the attitudes of respondents across the board in our survey. This realisation is confirmed by the apparent inconsistencies we discussed in the responses to particular pairs of statements (e.g. Statements 3 and 12 – see Section 3.2.2), which show that the nativeness principle has come to co-exist in the minds of respondents with more ELF-oriented attitudes. This tendency is also shown in the *CEFR* (as discussed in Section 1) which seems at one point to reject the nativeness principle but which mostly, notably in the various assessment scales (particularly those relating to pronunciation), has no hesitation in making recourse to it, repeatedly.

That the nativeness principle still manages to be so resilient in the hearts of NNESs particularly in matters regarding pronunciation (see the negative correlation between response scores for statements 2 and 6) is no doubt due to the fact that it receives widespread official sanction, not just in the *CEFR* but by educators and in teaching materials, language assessment and official curriculums. In such contexts, ELF remains very much a fringe view which, though widely held among academics, still lacks active supporters.

As this paper shows, users share many of ELF's key ideas, but as yet there is no single one which catches the imagination as much as "If I could, I would like to speak English so well that people would think that I was born in an English-speaking country" which constitutes in effect a simple, easy to grasp, slogan that encapsulates the nativeness principle. Like most slogans, such a statement may become meaningless in the sense that, although often repeated, it may come to bear no relation to reality (for example, in other surveys, it has be shown that respondents similar to those in this study are by no means proficient at identifying NESs when listening to recordings of different speakers– see Christiansen 2014). What appears to have happened in this survey is that most respondents consciously pay lip service to the nativeness principle while unconsciously setting themselves goals and harbouring attitudes and that are more coherent in an ELF-oriented mind-set.

There are then reasons to sustain that the prerequisites for what we have chosen to call *ELFness* to gain ground and replace the idea of the nativeness principle already exist, but the movement has not yet started. Obviously, as we say in Section 1, there is a serious issue of prestige; the nativeness principle has a long and esteemed history and the very idea of *ELFness* (or any other alternative label that might eventually be given to the phenomenon) may be an intolerable degradation to purists of English. Furthermore, the notion of *ELFness* as a separate or alternative concept to the nativeness principle may not even exist in the minds of the learner, which is obviously a barrier to acceptance. Arguably however, as users from Kachru's expanding circle become ever more numerous and proficient, and as English language learning enters the compulsory school curriculum at earlier ages, and as methodologies like CLIL become more common, using English will become second nature to learners: something everyday and ordinary. What have traditionally been called learners will see themselves as much users of English as they consider themselves users, rather than learners, of mathematics when they go about the calculations that are part of daily routine (e.g. counting change, calculating time, working out the best price between different special offers, dividing up bills in restaurants etc.).

Those born after about 1980 are often called "digital natives" (Prensky 2001) due to the fact that they are exposed to the world of ICT more or less at the same time as they are exposed to the physical world and feel equally at home in each. One can envisage a situation where future generations could in an analogous manner b constitute "ELF natives" because for them, using English will be just one of the skills that they have their

disposal to survive in the contemporary world and take for granted. The idea of some mythical NES of an inner circle, presumably from an existing standard, variety providing them with a model will be as bizarre as the idea of a computer engineer of the 1960s operating a mainframe computer constituting the point of reference for smartphone users today.

In essence, the question posed in the title of this paper is will learners ever realise this? We think that undoubtedly they will, but trying to predict when it will happen exactly is foolhardy. If among official channels, educators, and academics more widely the rationale behind a more ELF-oriented view to English language teaching takes hold, and there is a movement to actively promote *ELFness* in the way that the nativeness principle has received official sanction, then the change could be relatively rapid given the results of this survey, which show that the basic attitudes intrinsic to ELF are already current among this sample of learners and more common indeed than many traditional NES-norm oriented ones.

If this does not happen and the nativeness principle continues as "conventional wisdom" in the original Galbriathian sense, and *ELFness* continues to exist (like, for example, the Emperor's nakedness in the Hans Christian Anderson story) only as something that everybody sees but that nobody talks about publicly, then the current situation could continue for a considerable time to come. But not indefinitely. The world is undergoing massive geopolitical changes and it is reasonable to suggest that, whichever countries or inter / supra-national groupings of countries emerge as most influential, the idea of nations having their own individual economies is long past and the planet will be ever more globalised and there will thus still be a need for a lingua franca – a role that ELF variations seem in best position to fill whatever role the countries from the inner circle play. Gradually, the element of standard English of the traditional kind taught in schools within these lingua franca variations will very probably diminish and users will in any case associate ELF (or whatever it comes to be called) less with the traditional English-speaking world (the inner circle) and become less inclined to consider speakers from such an area as anything more than fellow users, not models to be emulated.

In either case, it is in our estimation a matter of *when*, and not *if*.

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