

ELF IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Great ideas and burning open questions

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Abstract – Research in the field of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has been inherently connected to studies in the broad areas of Applied Linguistics and English language teaching (ELT) ever since the unresolved academic controversy on the nature of English as a global language started, in the early eighties. So far, several research projects have been carried out to enhance ELF-informed pedagogy and incorporate the use of ELF into the English syllabus through innovative teaching/learning practices (Author 2013; Bowles and Cogo 2015; Gagliardi and Maley 2010; Vettorel 2015). However, even though a shift in perspective has been advocated in order to reconceptualise the traditional approach to ELT (Lopriore 2010), this transition poses challenging open questions for discussion, including: Should any native-speaker language model be provided in language education? How are ‘errors’ going to be distinguished from creative forms of ELF? How are teachers supposed to behave when deviations from the adopted language model take place? How should teachers assess the use of ELF in the English classroom? The aim of this paper is to focus on these queries and stimulate a discussion to provide tentative answers.

Keywords: ELF; ELT; pedagogy; errors; assessment.

1. Introduction

The international spread of English in the age of globalization has turned this language into the world’s primary lingua franca (ELF), although this process, which has social, economic, political and cultural connotations (Blommaert 2010), has been characterised by constant linguistic variation and adaptation that is typical of language-contact situations. Mauranen (2012, pp. 29-30) explains that:

ELF takes place in speaker interaction; interactants come together with their own hybrid variants, variants that resemble those of people who share their background [...] but are different from those used by the people with whom they speak. [...] Therefore, ELF might be termed second-order language contact: a contact between hybrids. [...] Second-order contact means that [...] a large number of languages are each in contact with English, and it is these contact varieties (similects) that are, in turn, in contact with each other. [...] The hybrid similects that come together in ELF are related through being kinds of English, which makes major contact phenomena a good point of departure for making macrosocial predictions for ELF.

To add to an already complex picture of ELF development, let us also consider that English is not to be intended as a static, monolithic entity. In fact, *English* had rather be considered a comprehensive term that refers to a constellation of language varieties including not only official standard forms [e.g. British Received Pronunciation (RP) and American Standard English (ASE)], but also all non-standard varieties used by native speakers of English (NES) (e.g. regional varieties and local dialects), and, last but not least, World Englishes (Jenkins 2015a; Schneider 2011), i.e. the indigenized variant forms of English, which emerged in former British colonies and have progressively evolved into distinct, stabilised varieties (e.g. Indian English), or into English-based creoles (e.g. Jamaican Patwa). Essentially, what characterises English today is its dynamic plurilithicity (Pennycook 2009), and ELF is part of this picture to the extent that it is not conceived of as a distinct variety, but rather as a context-bound variable way of using the L2 (Jenkins 2011). Following Hopper's (1998) theory of emergent grammar and Tomasello's (2008) usage-based theory of language, Grazzi (2013) observes that ELF emerges as a natural affordance in authentic intercultural settings where interlocutors, who are normally non-native speakers of English (NNES), negotiate meaning through discourse and implement co-operative strategies, like accommodation, to achieve their pragmatic goals successfully.

On reflection, however, the contact between a NNES's mother tongue and English (first-order contact) deserves further exploration. Theoretically, following Mauranen's line of reasoning, we may assume that first-order contact includes all possible communicative situations where a non-native speaker's L1 is in touch with one or more native-speaker varieties of English. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that educational institutions (e.g. schools, Universities, the British Council, private language schools, etc.) are by far the most common learning environments where a systematic and structured first-order contact between a NNES' language and English takes place. As a compulsory subject of most school curricula around the world, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), i.e. as the language that is spoken by and 'belongs' to its native speakers. Therefore, the varieties that are usually chosen as exonormative reference models in school education and by Qualifications Authorities¹ (namely Trinity College London ESOL, University of Cambridge ESOL, and The City and Guilds International ESOL) are standard English (SE) – most probably RP or ASE – and/or British or American mainstream English. Because first-order language

¹ In Italy, for instance, it has become fairly common practice that middle-schools and high-schools offer optional afternoon English courses run by private language schools, sometimes in co-operation with school teachers. These courses prepare students to take the exams for the ESOL qualifications, which are aligned with the specifications of the levels of the European Framework of Reference (CEFR) of the European Council.

contact is often mediated by graded language syllabuses and teaching materials, and because language teachers are not necessarily native speakers of English, we should recognize the simple fact that a *hybrid variant* form of English, to use Mauranen's definition, is likely to emerge not only in authentic communicative environments, but also – in many cases prevalently – in pedagogic environments. Hence, it is this English, or better the *similect* that is developed in the English classroom, that students are going to use outside school as an international lingua franca, whenever they communicate in authentic multilingual and multicultural settings, for instance on the Internet, when travelling abroad, for leisure, etc. It seems reasonable to conclude that EFL (i.e. the subject taught at school) and ELF (i.e. the second-order contact of similects that takes place in real intercultural encounters) are not mutually exclusive languages, as long as they tend to converge by means of the learner/L2-user's performance (Grazzi 2013). In line with Seidlhofer (2011, p. 187) we may conclude that: "Learners of English as a foreign language assume the role of users of English as a lingua franca. As they move into contexts of use outside the classroom, EFL learners become ELF users".

One could object that the similect that is spoken in the English classroom actually corresponds to what is normally referred to as *interlanguage* (Selinker 1972) or *transitional dialect* (Corder 1981, p. 17). In reality, the concepts of similect and interlanguage are inherently different, as I am going to show. Interlanguage is defined by Corder (1981, pp. 15-16) as a "type of idiosyncratic dialect", i.e. the individual student's unstable language that is not shared by a social group. In this view, deviations from SE codified norms are considered *developmental errors* that mark the steps of the "interlanguage continuum" (Corder 1981, p. 90), the linear learning process that evolves between two opposite ends: the learner's L1 and the *target language*, English.

The students' similect, in contrast, has a social dimension to the extent that the process of learning English is "situated" (van Lier 2004, p. 8) within the environment of the classroom, where pupils interact to carry out several communicative tasks. In so doing, they *appropriate* (Rogoff 1995) English as an affordance to mediate meaning and express their cultural identities via the lingua franca. The fundamental difference between interlanguage and similect, we may conclude, is that while according to the former the student's L1 is considered a hindrance to the acquisition of the target language and becomes the main cause of 'interference' [e.g. errors caused by the occurrence of "negative transfer" (Odlin 1989, p. 26)], according to the latter the student's L1 is a valuable resource for the acquisition of English, which, as we have seen, takes place through the dynamic intra-personal and inter-personal contact between these two languages [e.g. non-standard ELF lexicogrammar forms resulting from the strategic use of cross-linguistic

transfer (Odlin 1989, p. 28)]. According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006, pp. 294-295), who draw on Vygotsky's (1987) seminal theory of the process of learning a first and second language,

Adults, in particular, have a well-developed first-language system, which [...] is their primary symbolic artifact for regulating their own cognitive activity. It is therefore natural that they should rely on this artifact to mediate their learning of anything, including additional languages. [...] Thus, pedagogies that seek to avoid reliance on learners' first language are, in our view, misguided.

In short, while the interlanguage hypothesis tends to view the L1 and the L2 as discrete, self-consistent objects that should be kept apart, the concept of similect is focused on the natural process of language contact and variation (Heine, Kuteva 2005), whereby diverse communities of learners adapt English to cope with their communicative needs, to express their cultural identities and to exploit their language experience and different language competences through participatory activity and social practice (Lave, Wenger 1991).

These reflections on the nature of the learner's language in the English classroom and on the process that leads to the emergence of a similect that students can use as a lingua franca let us see the intrinsic link between ELF research and the broad area of English language teaching (ELT), where the impact of globalization entails a conceptual reformulation of language education in respect to today's changing nature of English and its multicultural and multilingual dimension (Jenkins 2015b). In this line of reasoning, the aim of this article is to face some of the burning issues of the day concerning the implementation of ELF-informed pedagogy, and consider the new challenges that lie ahead for language teachers, methodologists and language practitioners. To this end, the purpose of this study is to attempt to provide answers to a selection of questions that were raised and considered during a pre-service teacher-education course in language teaching methodology for future Italian teachers of English (TFA) that I held at the University of Tor Vergata, Rome, in 2015, a course which was focused particularly on Global Englishes, ELF and the transition from native speakerism towards multiculturalism and multilingualism in ELT. The key questions that will be discussed in the following sections are:

1. Should a native-speaker language model be provided in language education?
2. How are 'errors' going to be distinguished from creative forms of ELF?
3. How are teachers supposed to behave when deviations from the adopted language model take place?
4. How should teachers assess the use of ELF in the English classroom?

Presumably these queries, which touch on theoretical as well as practical aspects of ELT, conceal doubts and reservations that are common among language educators and applied linguists whenever the controversial topic of ELF is called into question. Nevertheless, these legitimate concerns about the pedagogical consequences of the global spread of English induce ELF researchers to reflect on the implications of this complex sociolinguistic process in order to suggest tentative answers that may contribute to the development of a more effective and updated English curriculum.

The following sections are intended to shed new light on our understanding of the controversial topics raised by the key questions presented earlier. Nevertheless, given the exploratory nature of this study, and due to space constraints, the answers provided here certainly do not claim to be exhaustive, although they may hopefully stimulate critical thinking and promote further discussion for language educators and applied linguists. My line of reasoning is based on the theoretical framework that I have adopted to carry out ELF research projects over the last few years (Grazzi 2013, 2015, 2016), which combines Vygotsky's (1978, 1987) sociocultural theory (SCT),² its relatively recent implementation in second language development theory (Lantolf 2000; Lantolf, Thorne 2006), and van Lier's (2004) ecological approach to language learning.

2. Should any native-speaker language model be provided in language education?

This simple question is probably the first one that comes to mind when the dominance of native speakerism in ELT is at stake. The answer, however, cannot be just a simple *yes* or *no*, but requires a more complex argumentation. First of all, the question itself is misleading and reveals a widely held misconception that is typical of schooling, the rather fetishistic idea that a language model corresponds to a static, discrete, and self-contained system of prescriptive norms, which is in the hands of an idealized native speaker and is obediently passed on to language learners by their teachers. For instance, Jenkins (2007, p. 36), who used the term “gatekeeping” to define language educators’ conservative attitude, noticed a typical contradictory behaviour apropos of non-native teachers of English, who show openness towards ELF, while in practice they tend to adhere to a “traditional RP model” (Jenkins 2007, p. 99). In a diachronic perspective, the

² Lantolf (2004, pp. 30-31, in Lantolf, Thorne 2006, p. 1) defines SCT as “a theory of mind [...] that recognizes the central role that the social relationships and structurally constructed artifacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking”.

common fallacy of the NSE exclusive ownership of English eschews the social, historical dimension of all natural languages, which in fact is marked by variability and change. English is no exception, or better yet, it may be considered the epitome of language change induced by language contact, a long process that started in the middle ages, went on in the modern age and in colonial times, and still continues today, in the era of globalization. Even from a synchronic point of view, deference to the exonormative standard language model fails to provide a realistic picture of the vivid, kaleidoscopic variety of contemporary native-speaker language usage, let alone World Englishes and the entire linguacultural landscape of ELF.

This said, it seems appropriate to reformulate the concept of *diversity* that underpins a more realistic view of English, and then suggest a different understanding of the role of the NES model in an ELF-informed pedagogy. Looking at the English classroom through the lens of ecological educational linguistics, van Lier (2004, p. 7) focuses on the related concepts of diversity and variability and contends that

A good teacher understands the learners, and this means taking the differences into account. [...] Whereas variability relates to the way different learners learn, and what that means for the teacher, diversity addresses the value of having different learners and teachers in a class (or school), and in more general terms, different kinds of people in a society, rather than a homogeneous population, however defined. In biology diversity is essential in an ecosystem, and in the same way, a diverse society (in terms of language, ethnicity, religion, interest, etc.) may be healthier in the long run than a homogeneous one. In addition, the language to be learned (whether L1 or L2) is presented as one that is not one monolithic standardized code, but a collection of dialects, genres and registers. It is often tacitly assumed that learners would be confused by being presented with a diversity of dialects, cultures, social customs, but it could be argued that more confusion ultimately results from the presentation of a homogeneous language and a single speech community, generalizations that in fact do not exist. With appropriate language learning and awareness activities, learners should be perfectly capable of understanding diversity, since it will be easy to establish that it exists in the language all around them, at home, in the community, in school, and around the world.

van Lier's vision of the value of diversity in language education may very well apply to ELF to enhance teachers' and learners' awareness of the plurilithic nature of English today. The major challenge in ELT, however, is how to manage the convergence of:

1. the EFL curriculum and its "requirements of performance [that] concern in particular comprehensibility and self-expression, compliance with a target language model (which is not necessarily standard English), [...] grammatical accuracy and situational appropriateness, participation in a speech fellowship or expression of [one's] self" (Kohn 2011, p. 81);

2. the emergence of learners' similect in the English classroom, as explained in the previous section;
3. the students' use of ELF in diverse authentic multicultural and multilingual authentic contexts (e.g. in telecollaboration and other network-based activities), characterized by other requirements of performance, as for example "negotiation of intelligibility" (Jenkins 2000, p. 166) via the implementation of appropriate communicative strategies like "accommodation" (Jenkins 2000, pp.168-171), cross-cultural transfer (Odlin 1989, p. 28), "idiomatizing and re-metaphorizing" (Pitzl 2012, p. 49).

As Kohn (2011, p. 89) observes,

The need for pedagogic interventions that help close the gap between school and real life has become obvious and urgent. Insights from the social constructivist perspective emphasize the natural inevitability for speakers-learners to develop their own English, thus backing up the general call for pedagogic change.

Hence, to answer the initial question in this section, the following tenets should be taken into account:

1. In a Vygotskian perspective, the multiplicity of NSE and NNSE varieties of English show that language is a complex symbolic artifact and that it is the communities of users who change and adapt it to serve their communicative needs and carry out several activities in different sociocultural contexts. Therefore, the ideas that *correct* English is a monad immune to change, or that it might change independently of its speakers, or even that only native speakers are entitled to change 'their' language are common fallacies. A shift in perspective in ELT (Grazzi 2013; Cogo, Dewey 2012; Jenkins 2007, 2015a; Seidlhofer 2011; Sifakis, Sougari 2010; Vettorel, Lopriore 2013) presupposes that heterogeneity of communicative practices in different contexts and for different purposes, as well as the multiplicity of *Englishes* should not be neglected in language education, but on the contrary should be embraced with an open mind.
2. Even though mainstream EFL syllabuses are still largely based on the NSE model, and although most students and language teachers aspire to develop NSE proficiency levels, with Kohn (2011, p. 84), who approaches language learning in a social constructivist perspective, we may observe that

Standard English and native speaker English can thus only serve as models and provide *orientation* [emphasis added] for non-native speaker-learners' performance and learning in so far as they have gained a second existence in

the speaker-learners' internally constructed world. But this internal construction is not just a mirror image of the external 'thing'; it is the result of processes that feed on intake from external data and, not less importantly, on knowledge, attitudes and interests already available.

The English classroom, as we have seen earlier in the Introduction, provides the primary social setting where the contact between L1 and L2 usually takes place. Nevertheless, ELF research has shown that nonconformity is intrinsic to second language development. Pitzl (2012, p. 37), for instance, contends that "it is this tension between conventionality and norm-following creativity at one level and nonconformity and norm-developing creativity at another level that ensures intelligibility and functionality of new linguistic output". Hence, we may assume that even though proficiency levels are usually defined according to the prototypical NES model, learners will inevitably deviate from it because a) variation is contingent on the learning process, and b) because the L2-user's linguacultural identity inevitably mediates the contact between their L1 and English.

3. The final consideration in this section is that ELF research has never advocated the *apriori* elimination of a NES model in ELT, nor its replacement with ELF, which, as we have seen, is not an encoded variety of English that could be taught as such, but rather a variable way of using it by NNES in diverse multilingual and multicultural communicative contexts. We had rather observe, instead, that ELF is inherently connected to one or more NSE models (either SE or other non-standard varieties of English) from which it normally tends to deviate. Jenkins (2007, p. 19) points out that "The goal of ELF is [not] to establish a single lingua franca norm to which all users should conform". In addition, in line with Seidlhofer (2006), Jenkins (2007, p. 20) affirms that she is "in favour of the more sensible notion of raising all English learners' awareness of the global role of English, and of the effort that everyone needs to make to achieve successful global communication".

In this phase of language change on a global scale, ELF research is descriptive rather than prescriptive, and its pedagogical indications, based on empirical observations, aim at "Making suggestions as to what is not necessary to teach for ELF communication, rather than prescribing what should be taught" (Jenkins 2007, p. 22). In conclusion, it seems reasonable to say that the crux of the matter is not whether a NSE model is still needed in ELT, but how possible it is to a) move from a monolithic towards a plurilithic approach in ELT; b) design a new curriculum for the English classroom where a gamut of language models (including World Englishes) and examples of successful NNES language usage are made available to students; c) plan new tasks and learning activities in order to enhance learners'

“collaborative dialogue” (Swain 2000, p. 97) and exploit their *agency* and potential as *language users* (Swain 2000; Seidlhofer 2011), i.e. their creative ability to use language to negotiate and produce meaningful, comprehensible output.

3. How are ‘errors’ going to be distinguished from creative forms of ELF?

Since the early ’70s, when the so-called *communicative revolution* in ELT took place, most applied linguists, language teachers and even official English language assessment boards have tended to consider *fluency* more relevant than *accuracy* in verbal communication. In line with Hymes’s (1966, 1972) notion of *communicative competence*, which emphasized the importance of the interconnections between different language levels (i.e. syntax, morphology, phonology, lexis, etc.) and the variable components of contextualized discourse (namely, Situation, Participants, Ends, Acts, Keys, Instruments, Norms and Genres, usually referred to as the SPEAKING model), ‘errors’ ceased to be considered indicators of unsuccessful learning and an obstacle on the way to appropriate linguistic competence, as instead was the case with the previous grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods. On the contrary, ‘errors’ came to be seen as superficial indicators of deeper cognitive processes that language students activate when they learn a foreign language (Corder 1981). ‘Errors’, in this perspective, were the result of the learner’s “heuristic hypothesis” (Corder 1981, p. 79) about the second language, that is to say, ‘errors’ provide evidence of the learner’s conscious and subconscious attempt to systematize their knowledge about the L2 by means of inference strategies, as well as learning and communicative strategies. For this reason, enhancing learners’ mutual intelligibility and fluency have become a sort of a guiding principle for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the assessment of learners’ command of English.

As French (2011),³ former assistant director of Cambridge Language Assessment ICAEA, explains in an interview on BBC Radio 4: “In terms of communicating, what we are concerned about is whether the messages are communicated and if the error interferes with communication. Then it is an issue. But if it doesn’t, particularly at the lower levels, then picking up on the details is not such a problem.”

It is quite evident, therefore, that there is a red thread running through CLT and ELF theory as far as the pragmatic importance of mutual

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b013q210>

intelligibility and communicative competence are concerned. For this reason, Leung (2005, p. 120) has proposed “a re-articulation of the concept of communicative competence in English as a second or additional language in contemporary conditions”, where native-speaker English is not the unique reference model in ELT. He (2005, p. 139) contends that

it seems absolutely necessary for the concept of communicative competence to attend to both the standard and local Englishes, and to tune in to both established and emergent forms and norms of use. [...] In the light of what we now know in terms of World Englishes and ELF, it is quite clear that, from the point of view of curriculum conceptualization, the unquestioned and routine adoption of a particular native-speaker variety of English and a particular set of idealized social rules of use is no longer educationally satisfactory or desirable. [...] The pedagogic language model for any English-teaching programme should be related to its goals in context.

In line with Leung, it seems reasonable to assume that one of the criteria to distinguish ‘errors’ from creative forms of ELF consists in taking into consideration the communicative contexts and the pragmatic function(s) that different forms of learners’ discourse are expected to accomplish. This entails that the degree of acceptability or unacceptability of non-standard language forms may essentially depend on two fundamental factors: a) the intelligibility of non-standard forms in discourse; b) the congruence between discourse and the variability of multicultural and multilingual communicative contexts (e.g. the use of the appropriate language variety; the use of the appropriate language register, etc.).

In conclusion, a tentative answer to the initial question in this section may be that the polycentric nature of ELF defies the classification of non-standard uses of English as ‘errors’, and questions the notion of standardness (Coupland 2000). Consequently, decisions about the acceptability of deviations from any given language model in the English classroom depend inevitably on the students’ tasks and their pedagogic goals. As Seidlhofer (2011, p. 98) observes,

ELF users too are seen to be languagers. [...] They are focused on the interactional and transactional purposes of the talk and on their interlocutors as people rather than on the linguistic code itself. [...] The focus is on establishing the indexical link between the code and the context, and a creative process in that the code is treated as malleable and adjustable to the requirements of the moment.

The following section will further explore the topic of ‘errors’ and its implications, particularly as regards the language teacher’s role within the framework of an ELF-aware pedagogy.

4. How are teachers supposed to behave when deviations from the adopted language model take place?

The natural emergence of a similect within the English classroom poses a challenging issue for language teachers, who usually hold favorable attitudes toward the global spread of English as a lingua franca, but at the same time are at a loss when it comes to managing deviations from the exonormative NSE model. This raises a critical question about the teacher's behavior in ELF-aware language education: when and how are teachers supposed to provide corrective feedback (CF) for learners' non-canonical forms of speech?

The basic assumption to answer this questions, as was mentioned earlier, is that ELF, which is not (yet) an encoded variety of English, is not supposed to replace Standard English or other native-speaker varieties of English in language education. ELF researchers who are focused on raising ELF awareness among language teachers believe instead that in order to update the English curriculum it would be necessary to provide learners with a wider perspective in viewing and understanding the plurilithic nature of English today. This entails, for instance, the incorporation of World Englishes in the English syllabus and the integration of ELF as a viable option to carry out international communication. This would also be consistent with the theoretical postulation of the student-centred approach in language teaching/learning. Jenkins (2007, pp. 21-22) contends that

ELF is a matter of learner choice. [...] In this sense, ELF increases rather than decreases the available choices, while it is the insistence on conformity to [native-speaker] NS norms [...] that restricts them. [...] ELF researchers merely suggest that learners should be put in a position to make an *informed* choice by means of having their awareness raised of the sociolinguistic, sociopsychological, and sociopolitical issues involved. [...] At present, they restrict themselves to [...] making suggestions as to what is not necessary to teach for ELF communication, rather than prescribing what *should* be taught.

Let us now consider some relevant cases of ELF utterances that are taken from a corpus that I (Grazzi 2016) compiled in 2015 as part of a European research project on ELF and intercultural telecollaboration. A group of Italian and Finnish high-school students volunteered to interact online in order to improve their intercultural and communicative competences. They created a community of practice (CoP) (Wenger 1998), whose task was to discuss several topics related to their cultural background and lifestyles. The examples that have been selected here are intended to show how the contact of the Italian and Finnish similects turns learners into *languagers* who produce authentic ELF discourse.

The utterances produced by Italian students are indicated by (I), while those produced by Finnish students are indicated by (F). Each utterance may contain more than one non-standard form of ELF, but only those that belong to the two typologies that are presented here, *lexical transfer* and *creative use of English*, are taken into consideration. These are underlined and followed by a short description given in brackets.

Examples of *lexical transfer*

1. How to start? Well, I have interest in a lot of things and this would be a quality if I didn't have the terrible habit of getting annoyed of almost everything after a while. (I) (*false friend; cross-linguistic transfer*)
2. My favorite singer is Celine Dion: her voice is perfect and limpid. (I) (*non-standard collocation; cross-linguistic transfer*)
3. Tell me if you prefer starting a new topic, because I could keep on this without problem, at least for a little more. (I) (*non-standard multi-word units (MWUs); cross-linguistic transfer*)
4. Finland don't have pretty much traditional food. We are like English kitchen. (F) (*false friend*)

Examples of *creative use of English*

1. I love Finland and the Finnish people and culture, but somehow my heart longs abroad. (F) (*non-standard idiom; re-metaphorization*)
2. For my 18 years old I gave a very big party where we danced a lot. (I) (*non-standard MWU*)
3. I could say my adolescence was very centered in music. (F) (*extension of semantic field: from physical centre to figurative meaning; re-metaphorization; cross-linguistic transfer*)
4. At the moment I don't have any life-controlling hobby, as I'm trying to focus on the schoolwork. (F) (*open-choice principle in complex word formation; re-metaphorization*)
5. I've done karate for eight years and this is the ninth one. It's a very beautiful activity which allows me to get the stress off my chest and be more calm, in a peaceful state of mind. (I) (*non-standard idiom; re-metaphorization; cross-linguistic transfer*)
6. I think that it's important and formative to do a sport which motivates you and better and color your life. (I) (*re-metaphorization; cross-linguistic transfer*)

These examples show that ELF variations are instances of language continua (Trudgill 1999) and that especially with cases of cross-linguistic transfer the contact between the L1 and the L2 may result in new, creative constructs that reinforce the meaning potential of ELF. Lexical substitutions or grammatical modifications in multi-word units (MWUs), for instance, should be considered approximations rather than 'errors'. As Mauranen (2011) and Vetchinnikova (2014) argue, memory for meaning is stronger than verbatim memory for structure, hence, we may add, this explains why variability in MWUs is a typical feature of ELF. According to Vetchinnikova (2014) the

process that leads to variability in MWUs is similar both for NES and NNES, although the higher occurrence of this phenomenon in ELF discourse is probably due to the non-native speakers' lower amount of exposure to complex English MWUs.

Most notably, the instances of ELF speech reported above did not seem to lead to any significant communication breakdowns within the CoP. This seems to confirm the hypothesis that ELF is an effective mediational tool for the English classroom whenever learners are given the opportunity to interact in real multicultural settings. van Lier's (2004, p. 85) words offer an illuminating description of the dynamics of language change in the language classroom:

Speakers want to embroider and invent, sounding new and different, signaling their individual and group identity. On the other hand, speakers (and often official agencies and institutions, such as schools) wish to establish official standards and guidelines for 'correct' language, thus attempting to reduce variations in use. [...] 'Language' in its more general sense, is emergent, not fixed, in flux rather than static. Like culture [it is] open to processes of inclusion and exclusion, prescribed and proscribed patterns of use, permeated by value judgment, markers of identity, and signs of success.

This said, we may answer the key question in this section by saying that when the focus is on ELF and fluency-oriented instruction, teachers should distinguish non-standard deviations that do not affect the overall communication flow from deviations that require CF to avoid misunderstandings. Ellis and Shintani (2014, p. 275) observe that "Learners are in a classroom to learn a language and believe that having their errors corrected will help them to achieve this". The authors (2014, p. 275) go on to say that "CF is likely to be more effective if it occurs in response to learners' attempts to communicate". With Lantolf (2000), Ellis and Shintani (2014, p. 262-263) explain that

Sociocultural Theory claims that CF mediates learning not by providing learners with 'data' which they then process internally, but by affording them opportunities to collaboratively produce new linguistic forms. [...] Thus, correction is not something done to learners but rather something carried out with learners. It enables the joint construction of a zone of proximal development⁴ [...] It constitutes a form of other-regulation directed at helping learners to self-regulate (i.e. access and use the L2 independently).

⁴ Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) defined the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers".

In conclusion, we may say that within a sociocultural framework, once the teacher has taken into account a) the learner's developmental level; b) the learning objectives of classroom activities; c) the pragmatic features of the communicative event students are involved in, they should help learners identify relevant deviations from the norms and repair them in order to improve the comprehensibility and pragmatic effectiveness of their discourse. Different types of oral and written CF can be selected for this purpose (see for example Ellis, Shintani 2014, pp. 264-265). Alternatively, teachers should also promote peer-correction in a ZPD (Vygotsky 1978; Lantolf, Thorne 2006; van Lier 2004), which fosters cooperative learning practice and stimulates students' language awareness.

5. How should teachers assess the use of ELF in the English classroom?

The critical issue that is addressed in this section, the assessment of learners' use of ELF, is directly connected to how teachers position themselves in relationship to the variability of English in today's web-connected global village. ELF researchers, as we have seen earlier, envisage a general change in perspective as regards language education, in order to tackle the unresolved problems stemming from the incorporation of ELF into ELT. The move from monolithic native speakerism to the multicultural and multilingual dimension of ELF (Jenkins 2015b) questions deeply entrenched beliefs, attitudes and approaches that language teachers and even students tend to cling on to, to the point that resistance to change may somehow be considered prejudicial. For this reason, this study attempts to sketch out an alternative paradigm in mainstream English teaching that is inclusive of diverse English voices, and which culminates with the discussion on assessment criteria, a controversial topic that is directly connected to the issue of 'errors' presented in Sections 2 and 3.

The rationale behind this article, as was mentioned in the Introduction, is that EFL and ELF tend to converge through the learner's/L2-user's performance when students are involved in intercultural language practice within an authentic international communicative context, e.g. on the Internet. In a social constructivist perspective, innovative web-mediated learning activities such as cooperative creative writing and intercultural telecollaboration (Grazzi 2013, 20015, 2016) provide the appropriate ecological setting where ELF emerges as a *legitimate* mediational artefact (Lantolf, Thorne 2006) that learners/L2-users from different linguacultural backgrounds share and co-construct. Consequently, it is argued that ELF non-standard features should not be automatically stigmatized by language

teachers as ‘errors’, on the basis of the traditional interlanguage paradigm. On the contrary, they should be taken as acceptable alternative forms, provided these a) do not hinder communication, and b) favour the performative use of ELF. With Widdowson (2003), we may conclude that the fundamental criterion for the assessment of learners’ use of ELF should be based on the L2-users’ ability to negotiate meanings and produce discourse that is intelligible and appropriate to their pragmatic goals. This entails that in assessing students’ performance in ELF-mediated contexts teachers should also consider the students’ ability to implement appropriate adaptive communicative strategies, as for example accommodation, repetition, cross-language transfer, paraphrasing, substitution, coining new words, asking for clarification, self-repair, code switching, building rapport within a CoP. In a nutshell, learners’/L2-users’ success should be assessed in terms of their *lingual capability* (Widdowson 2015). The logical entailment of the principles that should guide language teachers in the assessment of learners’ ELF performance is that more time and effort should be dedicated to the development of the communicative strategies mentioned above, which are consistent with Leung’s reconceptualization of communicative competence (see Section 3). These strategies, we may contend, should become a central component of the English language syllabus, with a special focus on stimulating students’ ELF awareness.

The following section is meant to recap briefly on the main points that have been raised so far, in the hope that the tentative answers that were given to the four key questions raised in this article may contribute to the ongoing debate over a new education policy for ELT, in an age when English is going through a huge transition from a foreign to a global language.

6. Discussion

Notwithstanding the fact that the variability of English in the age of globalization and of the digital revolution is plain to see, and even though nowadays the communities of NNEs outnumber those of NESs, the dominant pedagogical model in ELT is still firmly rooted in native speakersim. After more than twenty years since the primacy of SE has been challenged and the phenomenon of ELF has been the object of advanced University research, international conferences and academic publications, it seems that mainstream ELT has hardly been affected by the great sociolinguistic changes that have turned English into an international lingua franca. In other words, we could observe that in most cases the English curriculum has been immune to sociolinguistic changes and has tended to perpetuate anachronistic ideologies such as the monolithic nature of English, the native-speaker’s ownership of the language, and the idealization of an

abstract, archetypal native speaker as the reference model for teachers and learners. Hence, it seems reasonable to argue that a radical change is needed in language education (Cogo, Dewey 2012) in order to turn the English classroom from a temple of orthodoxy into a vivid environment that is attuned to the complex linguacultural dynamics that are taking place nowadays.

The aim of this article, that is based on a social constructionist approach to language development, is to enhance critical thinking as regards the implications of ELF in ELT and teacher education. It has focused on four engaging questions that should lead researchers and language educators to further investigate into the possibility of activating a process of awareness raising, in order to suggest new pedagogical trajectories. The four areas of language educations that have been taken into consideration are: a) the role of native-speaker language models in mainstream language education; b) the distinction between 'errors' and creative forms of ELF; c) ELF deviations from standard norms, the role of teacher's corrective feedback, and the role of learners' peer corrective feedback in a ZPD; d) ELF and assessment in the English classroom. The selection of these controversial topics was not random, though. In fact, they had stimulated heated discussions during a teacher education course (TFA) that I held at the University of Tor Vergata, Rome, and during several undergraduate courses on Global Englishes and ELF that I have taught in the past few years. Therefore, the methodological considerations that are offered here are the result of those debates, which will hopefully generate further understanding of the relationship between ELF and pedagogy.

7. Conclusions

The conceptualization of English as a global language places a strong emphasis on the plurilithic nature of this language (Pennycook 2009; Hall 2013), its context-bound variability, its multilingual dimension (Jenkins 2015b), and most importantly its socio-pragmatic effectiveness. In addition to these core tenets, the conceptual scheme underpinning the ideas set forth in this article is informed by the relatively recent implementation of Vygotsky's (1978, 1987) sociocultural theory in educational linguistics (Lantolf 2000, 2004; Lantolf, Thorne 2006; Swain 2000, 2006; van Lier 2004), by Hopper's (1998) theory of emergent grammar, and by Tomasello's (2003, 2008) usage-based theory of language. This shows that a blended approach in ELF research is necessary in view of a theorization of an ELF-aware language curriculum for the English classroom.

By and large, the expected outcome of this article is to show practitioners involved in language education how possible it is to embrace a

broader notion of English language teaching/learning that incorporates today's global, multicultural dimension of ELF.

In schematizing, the essential notions about language that are supposed to provide a sound theoretical support to a deep change in ELT could be synthesized as follows:

1. Meaning and form are dialectically dependent upon one another and are intrinsically connected to speakers' cultural backgrounds. Language, therefore, had rather be conceived of as *linguaculture* (Agar 1994).
2. Grammar is not a pre-existing closed system but is *emergent* in dialogic activity (Hopper 1998).
3. Language is a rule-governed system, but is not controlled by rules. Rules are like inherent building codes - that make communication possible thanks to *linguistic recursion* (Mooney, Evans 2011).
4. *Structural change* is determined by social and cultural phenomena in which structures are used and adapted to speakers' variable needs (Tomasello 2003).
5. Language is a *complex adaptive system* (CAS) (Larsen-Freeman 2016).

As for the pedagogical implications of ELF-aware language teaching, the redefinition of the teacher's roles may include the following indications:

1. The teacher guides students to make higher standards achievable through a relocation of their identity and culture in intercultural settings where they can express their "social and personal voice" (Kramsch 1993, p. 233) as *linguagers*.
2. The teacher should support the implementation of effective communicative strategies in ELF contexts to improve learners' communicative competence.
3. The teacher fosters collaborative dialogue within multilingual and multicultural communities of practice, e.g. through web-mediated interaction, to improve learners' intercultural competence.
4. The teacher encourages peer corrective feedback and language development within a ZPD to give students the opportunity to raise their awareness of the variable nature of English as a lingua franca.
5. The teacher considers deviations from standard norms acceptable, provided a) they do not affect the overall communication flow; b) they are consistent with the learners' language level and sociopragmatic goals; c) they are appropriate to each specific communicative context.
6. The teacher should present several varieties of English so that learners become familiar with the concept of multilingualism and linguacultural diversity.

7. Conformity to NS-models should not be enforced in the English classroom and the assessment of learners' competences should be based on the students' *communicative capability* (Widdowson 2003).

Obviously, these points are not exhaustive, as they are intended as part of a wider pedagogical framework that requires further research projects, appropriate teacher-education programs, as well as new syllabuses and teaching materials. In any case, ELF studies have shown that a whole new scenario has begun to unroll in ELT and it is advisable that educationalists, school institutions and language teachers cooperate to face the new challenges of language pedagogy.

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