

# CHALLENGING THE INTERLANGUAGE HYPOTHESIS

## The convergence of EFL and ELF in the English classroom

ENRICO GRAZZI  
UNIVERSITY OF ROMA TRE

**Abstract** – This paper follows from the PRIN Conference (PRIN 2015 Prot. 2015REZ4EZ) on ELF that was held in Lecce, Italy, at the University of Salento, on December 4-6, 2019. Here, the PRIN Unit of the Roma Tre University presented the findings of their three-year study in a panel session entitled: *English as a Lingua Franca: challenges and new paradigms for native and non-native teachers, insights from the language classrooms and implications for teacher education*.<sup>1</sup> One of the main aims of this article is to show how possible it is to find a convergence between English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) in second language education, by means of the learner's performance. This assumption is based on the author's critical analysis of the *interlanguage hypothesis* in English language teaching (ELT), seen through the lens of ELF theory. One of the fundamental tenets of this study is that today's plurilithic dimension of English as a global language entails a reconceptualization of the second-language learner's 'errors', which challenges the prescriptive role of standard English. Given the dynamics of English as a contact language, it is assumed that a more effective pedagogical approach should take into consideration the sociocognitive processes connected to language variability and the learner's linguacultural identity.

**Keywords:** ELF; interlanguage; errors; World Englishes; Standard English; teacher education.

*It's scientifically impossible for the  
bumblebee to fly; but the bumblebee, being  
unaware of these scientific facts, flies anyway.*  
(M. Huckabee, Former Governor of the  
State of Arkansas, 2008).

<sup>1</sup> PRIN 2015: Prot. 2015REZ4EZ *English as a Lingua Franca in domain-specific contexts of intercultural communication: a Cognitive-functional Model for the analysis of ELF accommodation strategies in unequal migration contexts, digital-media virtual environments, and multicultural ELF classrooms*. Composed by:

Research Unit 1: Università del Salento - Principal Investigator: Prof. Maria Grazia Guido.

Research Unit 2: Università di Verona: Prof. Roberta Facchinetti.

Research Unit 3: Università Roma Tre: Prof. Lucilla Lopriore.

## 1. Introduction

The *interlanguage hypothesis* (Selinker 1972) is undoubtedly a major milestone in the history of applied linguistics, as it attempted to provide a theoretical framework to understand the process of second-language learning and acquisition within an educational context. In the full bloom of the communicative approach, this theory, which is ingrained in the field of psycholinguistics, focused on the analysis of the adult language learner's output that was taken as an indicator of the mental structures and processes involved in the progression through developmental levels of competence. Tarone (2018) observes that between the late 1960s and the early 1980s

The general idea that the language of second language learners is an autonomous linguistic system, distinct from both a NL and TL, was developed at about the same time by three scholars. [...] Nemser (1971) referred to learner language as an 'approximative system,' and Corder (1967, 1981) called it 'transitional competence.' Eventually, the term 'interlanguage' (Selinker 1972) was the one that caught on.

Today, almost fifty years after these three scholars published their work, the interlanguage hypothesis has become an established paradigm in second language education, whereby the idealized educated native speaker and the standard variety of any foreign language provide the pedagogical reference model to design national language curricula, produce teaching materials, define assessment criteria of language learners' competencies, and certify students' proficiency levels (the CEFR<sup>2</sup> is a case in point). Nevertheless, my intent here is to re-examine the underlying assumptions of the interlanguage hypothesis, with a focus on English language teaching (ELT) in the age of globalisation, when English has become the world's dominant lingua franca (ELF). In this perspective, the main aim of this paper is to take into consideration the notion of 'error' and compare the way it is intended according to the interlanguage hypothesis, and the way it is intended according to ELF theory.

As Widdowson (2013, p. 193) wrote:

[...] the very reality of ELF as a phenomenon should at least make us think critically about taken-for-granted assumptions about what and how English might be taught as a subject. This is not at all to propose that the conventional practices associated with current English teaching should all be abandoned and replaced by ELF. The teaching of English will always need to be

<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe 2001, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

pedagogically designed and the contexts of classrooms can never replicate contexts of use: they represent different realities. In this respect, ELF and EFL, however it is defined, will always be different. The question is how these realities can be most effectively related. The significance of ELF research is that it points to the possibility of a relationship between use and learning and its implications for teaching which are very different from those that inform conventional EFL pedagogy.

It is in this vein that I will reflect on the *convergence* of EFL and ELF by means of the learner's performance, and discuss the central tenets of the interlanguage hypothesis in English language teaching.

## 2. The convergence of EFL and ELF in the English classroom

Indeed, our contemporary "recognition of pluricentricity and multi-identities of English" (Kachru 2003, p. 20) has led to a different conceptualisation of language deviations from encoded norms (the so-called 'errors') that are usually observed in language contact situations. Consequently, the sociolinguistic dynamics that is intrinsic to the emergence of ELF in intercultural communicative contexts has challenged the monocentric ideology of standard English (SE), and has accordingly questioned the dogma to conform to established standard norms at all language levels, namely phonological, lexicogrammar, and discoursal (see for example Seidlhofer 2003, pp. 7-32, where the contentious debate over institutionalised native varieties of English is well exemplified through the re-release of Quirk's and Kachru's thought-provoking contributions).

Before moving on to the analysis of the interlanguage hypothesis within today's changing scenario in ELT, I would like to make my stance clear on ELF. Hence, I would like to quote two definitions that I find particularly illuminating. The first one, by Mauraanen's (2012, p. 29), is based on the theory of language contact and on the assumption that ELF is shaped by speakers' interaction:

[...] ELF might be termed 'second-order language contact': a contact between hybrids. [...] Second-order contact means that instead of a typical contact situation where speakers of two different languages use one of them in communication (first-order contact), 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. Their special features, resulting from cross-linguistic transfer, come together much like dialects in contact. To add complexity to the mix, ENL [English as a native language] speakers of different origins participate in ELF communities. The distinct feature of ELF is nevertheless its character as a hybrid of similects.

The second definition, by Jenkins (2015, pp. 73-74), may be considered the end point of a conceptually defined process, whereby the author, after having traced the remodelling of ELF theory over the years, finally proposes her own conceptualisation that is based on multilingualism:

[...] the alternative I am going to suggest is a view of ELF that positions it within multilingualism, rather than the current view which sees multilingualism as an aspect of ELF. In other words, what I am talking about could be called ‘English as a Multilingua Franca’ with the following working definition:

- Multilingual communication in which English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen.

In other words, English as a Multilingua Franca refers to multilingual communicative settings in which English is known to everyone present, and is therefore always potentially ‘in the mix’, regardless of whether or not, and how much, it is actually used. It follows from this that instead of talking about ELF users, or more specifically NNES/NES ELF users, we can talk about ‘ELF-using multilinguals’ and ‘ELF-using monolinguals’, or ‘Multilingual ELF users’ and ‘Monolingual ELF users’. The first has the advantage of using ELF as the modifier, while the second has the advantage of highlighting multi- and monolingualism by putting them first.

It should be observed that, generally speaking, ELF theories derive from an observation of authentic communication within intercultural settings, where English is used as a mediational affordance to accomplish several pragmatic goals. In this respect, the classification of ELF features – i.e. the classification of deviant forms of English at all language levels, from phonological elements (Jenkins 2000) to creative uses of lexis (Pitzl 2012) – has been the first step towards a deeper understanding of the sociocognitive processes that allow ELF to emerge. As Seidlhofer (2009, p. 241) has pointed out: “[...] the crucial challenge has been to move from the surface description of particular features, however interesting they may be in themselves, to an explanation of the underlying significance of the forms: to ask what work they do, what functions they are symptomatic of.” It is in this perspective that Cogo and Dewey (2012, p. 18) investigate into ELF, which they believe:

- involves online modification of English language resources to suit the particular communicative needs of interlocutors, resulting in innovative uses of lexicogrammatical, pragmatic and sociocultural forms (and so is a legitimate manifestation of English in its own right)

- entails age-old processes that occur whenever speakers interact, including processes of identity signalling, codeswitching, accommodation and language variation (and so is a natural and inevitable part of sociolinguistic realities, including the investment of identity and culture).

Everything said, however, an area of ELF research that seems to have been quite neglected so far is the interplay between foreign language education and ELF, in ELT. On the one hand, most studies on ELF have been focused on samples of authentic texts, in order to collect quantitative and qualitative data from real communication (e.g. through the compilation of corpora of spoken and written ELF like ELFA, VOICE, and ACE<sup>3</sup>); while on the other hand, studies on the pedagogical impact of ELF on schooling have been mainly concerned with the importance of raising teachers' and learners' awareness (Bayyurt, Sifakis 2018; Grazzi 2018; Sifakis 2018; Tsantila *et al.* 2016) of the plurilithic dimension of English today (Graddol 2006; Pennycook 2009), or with the implementation of innovative intercultural activities (e.g. telecollaboration) that allow language learners to cooperate with students from other countries via the Internet (Grazzi 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Kohn 2017). In a certain sense, what appears to be a common assumption in ELF studies is that a) when communication is solely confined to the English classroom, it cannot provide samples of real ELF discourse, firstly because ELT is normally based on teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), and secondly because the English classroom is not an authentic communicative environment, unless real communication is carried out (e.g. through intercultural web-mediated telecollaboration, and through the use of English as a contact language in multicultural and multilingual classes); b) when ELF is the primary object of research, the fact that international speakers may use English, albeit with variable levels of command of the language, is taken as an obvious fact. Hence, the variable circumstances where the process of teaching/learning of English takes place is not often taken into consideration. As proof of this, let us read again Jenkins's words in the quotation above, that reads: "English as a Multilingua Franca refers to multilingual communicative settings in which *English is known to everyone present*" (emphasis added). This wording appears to be rather opaque, for it might suggest the idea that English is a *reified, discrete object* that ELFers possess and use on purpose, as an optional tool, to cope with their communicative needs. This, however, is not a common situation in ELF settings, where instead ELFers rather show their uneven competencies and mixed abilities in English, and make use of their "lingual capability" (Widdowson 2015) to exploit all the language resources available to them in order to negotiate meanings.

What I would like to point out, therefore, is that when the impact of ELF on ELT is the object of research, it would be advisable to take into consideration the interaction between the learning context where L2-users

<sup>3</sup> - ELFA corpus, 2008, Director: Anna Mauranen. <http://www.helsinki.fi/elfa/elfacorus>.  
 - VOICE, 2009, Director: Barbara Seidlhofer. [www.univie.ac.at/voice/index.php](http://www.univie.ac.at/voice/index.php).  
 - ACE, 2014, Director: Andy Kirkpatrick. <http://corpus.ied.edu.hk/ace/>.

develop their competencies and knowledge, and the opportunities they have to communicate in authentic intercultural and multilingual environments. As Byram (1997, p. 71) claims:

[...] most language learning takes place, or at least begins, in educational contexts. The model does not therefore depend on the concept of neutral communication of information across cultural barriers, but rather on a rich definition of communication as interaction, and on a philosophy of critical engagement with otherness and critical reflection on self.

What is more, since English has become a compulsory school subject in most countries that are involved in the process of globalisation, the relationship between EFL syllabuses and a gamut of other available sources of meaningful input in English (e.g. TV programmes, films, music, digital gaming, online websites, etc.) contribute to the development of the learner's second language skills and abilities. In a nutshell, it would not seem too far-fetched to suggest that, given the student's motivation to learn, there is a direct relationship between a) the process of teaching/learning English in a pedagogical environment; b) extra-scholastic sources of English input; and c) the emergence of ELF as the verbal medium that allows intercultural and international communicative events to take place. This is the process that I (Grazzi 2013, p. 67) have defined the *convergence* of EFL and ELF "in the speaker/learner's performance." Similarly, Seidlhofer (2011, p. 187) observes that what essentially distinguishes EFL from ELF is the different contexts of use of these languages, and the different roles that the language learner assumes in them accordingly: "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."

Interestingly, Kohn (2011, p. 80), whose theoretical standpoint about second-language learning is based on constructivism, moves in the same direction when he describes the relationship between the role of standard English in ELT, and the learner's development of their personal voice:

[...] people acquire English, or any other language, by creatively constructing their own version of it in their minds, hearts and behaviour. This process of constructing one's language is influenced by a number of factors as, for example, *target language orientation*, exposure to various manifestations of English in pedagogic contexts or in natural ELF communication, mother tongue(s), attitudes and motivations, goals and requirements, language approaches taken, and effort invested. But none of these factors determines the outcome. Acquiring a language is the very opposite of copying or cloning -it is a cognitive and emotional process of sociocultural and communicative construction. [...] Regardless of how powerful the communicative and communal pull towards a 'common core' might be, the English that people develop is inevitably different from any target language model they choose or

were forced to adopt. [emphasis added].

The convergence of EFL and ELF brings us back to one of the main issues we are considering in this article, i.e. a critical analysis of the interlanguage hypothesis through the lens of ELF theory. This will be the central topic of the following section.

### 3. A critical analysis of the interlanguage hypothesis

Selinker's (1972, p. 210) purpose was to elicit "behavioral events [...] underlying 'attempted meaningful performance' in a second language. The term 'meaningful performance situation' [refers] to the situation where an 'adult' attempts to express meanings, which he may already have, in a language which he is in the process of learning." The keywords contained in these few lines are *behavioral events* and *meaningful performance*, which show that the pragmatic dimension of second-language communication is indeed the primary focus of Selinker's research. In other words, it is the linguistic analysis of the utterances students produce when they carry out communicative tasks that is considered to be the key to a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes involved in second language learning. The logical entailment of this approach is that the starting point of this analysis consists in the linguistic features that distinguish the learner's output at all levels (phonological, lexicogrammar, and discursal) from standard discourse, i.e. the learner's 'errors'. Consequently, error analysis becomes the primary tool to shed light on the psycholinguistic processes that are embedded in second language development. Corder (1981, p. 10) makes an important distinction between two kinds of learner's errors:

[...] errors of performance will characteristically be unsystematic [e.g. slips of the tongue] and the errors of competence, systematic. [...] It will be useful therefore hereafter to refer to errors of performance as *mistakes*, reserving the term *error* to refer to the systematic errors of the learner from which we are able to reconstruct his knowledge of the language to date, i.e. his *transitional competence*.

The way Corder conceives of learner's errors seems to be perfectly in line with the way ELF scholars define ELF speakers' deviations from standard norms. Let us consider, for example, what Corder wrote in 1981, and what Jenkins says in an interview given to Grazzi in 2018. Indeed, the two linguists' points of view show strong conceptual similarities. Corder (1981, pp. 18-19) contends that

The only sentences in anyone's speech which could, I suggest with justice be called *erroneous* are those which are the result of some failure of performance. [...] My principal reason for objecting to the terms *error*, *deviant*, or *ill-formed* is that they all, to a greater or lesser degree, prejudge the explanation of the idiosyncrasy. Now, one of the principal reasons for studying the learner's language is precisely to discover why it is as it is, that is, to explain it and ultimately say something about the learning process. If, then, we call his sentences deviant or erroneous, we have implied an explanation before we have ever made a description.

Similarly, Jenkins (as cited in Grazzi 2018, p. 16) says:

For me, the only thing that counts as an error in ELF communication is something that doesn't communicate effectively. [...] Anything that communicates effectively in the context of the interaction is not an 'error' as far as I'm concerned, and I think it would be better not to even use the term 'error' in respect to ELF, but to replace it with 'ineffectiveness' or something like that.

However, apart from what these two definitions of errors have in common, it is important to notice that according to Corder the purpose of error analysis is to reveal the psycholinguistic process/es that cause deviations from standard norms. In this respect, Selinker's (1972, p. 212) theoretical framework of the interlanguage hypothesis incorporates Lenneberg's (1967) concept of *latent language structure* to investigate the process of adult second-language learning. Here is how Selinker (1972, p. 212) defines this psycholinguistic structure:

I shall further assume that there exists in the brain an already formulated arrangement which for most people is different from an exists in addition to Lenneberg's latent language structure. It is important to state that with the latent structure described in this paper as compared to Lenneberg's, there is no genetic time table; there is no direct counterpart to any grammatical concept such as 'universal grammar'; there is no guarantee that this latent structure will be activated at all; there is no guarantee that the latent structure will be 'realized' into the actual structure of any natural language (i.e. there is no guarantee that attempted learning will prove successful), and there is every possibility that an overlapping exists between this latent language acquisition structure and other intellectual structures.

Notably, according to Selinker (1972, p. 212) the concept of *successful learning* applies to adult learners who reactivate their latent language structure (i.e. the same structure that allowed them to acquire their native tongue) and "achieve native-speaker 'competence'." Moreover, Selinker goes on to say:

[...] This absolute success in a second language affects, as we know from



observation, a small percentage of learners – perhaps a mere 5%. [...] Regarding the study of [...] the vast majority of second language learners who fail to achieve native-speaker competence [...] [t]he notion of ‘attempted learning’ is independent of and logically prior to the notion of ‘successful learning’. [...] We will focus on attempted learning by this group of learners, successful or not, and will assume that they activate a different, though still genetically determined structure [...] Whenever they attempt to produce a sentence in the second- language, that is whenever they attempt to express meanings, which they may already have, in a language which they are in the process of learning.

Selinker (1972, p. 213) uses the phrase “‘target language’ (TL)” to refer to the language the learner is attempting to learn, which in terms of language education corresponds to the standard language spoken by an ideal educated native speaker of the foreign language. It follows from that, that because the utterances produced by most learners usually differ from a corresponding, albeit hypothesized, set of utterances produced by a native speaker of the TL, we should postulate “[...] the existence of a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learners attempted production of a TL norm. This linguistic system we would call ‘interlanguage’ (IL).” (Selinker 1972, p. 214).

In line with Selinker, Corder (1981, p. 17) classifies IL as an “idiosyncratic dialect”, that is the language that each individual second-language learner develops during the process of learning/acquisition of the L2. On a par with other languages, IL

[...] is regular, systematic, meaningful, i.e. it has a grammar, and is, in principle, describable in terms of a set of rules, some sub-set of which is a sub-set of the rules of the target social dialect. [The learner's] dialect is unstable (we hope) and is not, as far as we know, a ‘langue’ in that its conventions are not shared by a social group [...], and lastly, many of its sentences present problems of interpretation to any native speaker of the target dialect. [...] It is a dialect whose rules share characteristics of two social dialects of languages, whether these languages themselves shares rules or not. An alternative name might be *transitional dialect*, emphasizing the unstable nature of such dialects. (Corder 1981, pp. 17-18)

This conceptualization of IL is essentially the result of observations of adult language learners’ output. It is therefore thanks to error analysis that Selinker (1972, p. 215) could identify five psycholinguistic processes that are “*central to second-language learning: first, language transfer; second, transfer-of-training; third, strategies of second language learning; fourth, strategies of second language communication; and fifth, overgeneralization of TL linguistic material.*” Selinker (1972, p. 229) observes that these processes are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, the attribution of IL phenomena to any of

them may not be always certain. Given that the observation of psychologically relevant data of second-language learning is based on the analysis of surface structures of IL utterances, they might in fact be connected to one or more of the five processes mentioned above. Finally, Selinker (1972, p. 217) claims that “Combinations of these processes produce what we might term entirely fossilized IL competencies.” He goes on to say that it seems that *language transfer* and a *strategy of communication* induce many second-language learners to believe that “they know enough of the TL in order to communicate. And they stop learning.” Selinker (1972, p. 217). Notably, Selinker (1972, p. 217) links the phenomenon of fossilization also to the emergence of what today we had rather call outer-circle varieties of English:

[...] Not only can entire IL competencies be fossilized in individual learners performing in their own interlingual situation, but also in whole groups of individuals, resulting in the emergence of a new dialect (here Indian English), where fossilized interlanguage competencies may be the normal situation.

This synopsis of Selinker’s and Corder’s core ideas about the process of second-language learning and acquisition gives us the opportunity for a critical overview of the interlanguage hypothesis from the theoretical standpoint of ELF theory. Before we move on to the following sub-sections, where a few specific critical issues will be taken into consideration, I would like to point out that although the interlanguage hypothesis and ELF theory were formulated in completely different social, historical and cultural contexts, it seems reasonable to reconsider Selinker’s and Corder’s assumptions in the light of current scientific knowledge and expertise, given the fact that a) despite everything, the interlanguage hypothesis is still a pivotal concept in second-language education; and b) ELF, especially outside the academia, is still mistaken for interlanguage, i.e. a defective dialect used by non-native speakers of English.

### **3.1. ELF vs. Interlanguage as an idiosyncratic dialect**

As we have seen in the previous section, Corder (1981, p. 17) classifies interlanguage as an *idiosyncratic dialect*. This presupposes that even though the interlanguage is systematic and meaningful, its rules are developed by the individual learner as part of the process of second-language learning/acquisition. These rules partially coincide with those of the TL, and it is assumed that the distance between the interlanguage and the TL tends to decrease as the learner improves along a continuum that goes from their L1 to the L2. According to Corder (1981, p. 102): “Part of the task of acquiring a second language is finding out how much we already know of it. The more

we find we know, the less the magnitude of the learning task.” Corder’s focus, as we can see, is on the individual student’s cognitive process of second-language learning, which actually eschews the social dimension of the foreign language classroom.

Let us now consider ELF and see why it should not be categorized as interlanguage. From a sociocultural point of view, ELF is a variable social construct that emerges in authentic communicative contexts where international speakers with diverse sociolinguistic identities and cultural backgrounds communicate. Being a second-order contact language, ELF had rather be intended as a performative language where different linguacultures meet and inform each other by way of the interlocutors’ performance. ELF, we may conclude, is inherently a social construct that, like all natural languages, emerges in the contingencies of usage for interpersonal communication. Tomasello (2003, p. 13), who follows Vygotsky’s (1978; see also Lantolf, Thorne 2006) sociocultural theory (SCT) in language acquisition, argues that in usage-based grammar

[...] processes of grammaticalization and syntacticization [...] are cultural-historical processes, not biological ones. Thus, it is a historical fact that the specific items and constructions of a given language are not invented all at once, but rather they emerge, evolve and accumulate modifications over historical time as human beings use them with one another and adapt them to changing communicative circumstances (Croft 2000).

In addition, we should also consider that while the interlanguage hypothesis postulates native-speaker competence as the ultimate goal of second language teaching/learning, the linguistic reference model of ELF communication is not necessarily standard English. In fact, the multilingual and multicultural dimension of ELF may prove to be more appropriate than monocultural standard English to mediate meanings in international contexts and represent different linguacultural identities (Batziakas 2016). In any case, deciding when it is appropriate to use ELF or standard English is an option that should be left to second-language users.

From a pedagogical point of view, we may also observe that the interlanguage hypothesis, with its focus on the individual learning process, does not seem to be in line with the contemporary sociocognitive perspective (Batstone 2010) in second-language teaching/learning. Indeed, this is a process that largely depends on the variable components of the educational ecosystem (van Lier 2004) where schooling takes place. According to this approach, the teacher and the students take an active participation within a learning community, and their interaction is an essential component of successful learning. For example, the role of the Vygotskian ZPD (zone of proximal development) in second-language development (Lantolf, Thorne

2006) shows that the improvement of the individual language learner may depend on appropriate and timely peer support and companions' corrective feedback.

### 3.2. *ELF and Interlanguage Transfer*

As we have seen in Section 3, Selinker (1972, p. 215) identifies five psycholinguistic processes that are “*central* to second-language learning.” In this section, I would like to comment on the first one (*language transfer*), and the fourth one (*strategies of second language communication*), the reason being that these are often interconnected in second-language use and take on a different interpretation from an ELF standpoint.

The interlanguage paradigm presupposes that the learner's native tongue ‘interferes’ with the acquisition of the L2 and in the majority of cases results in the ‘fossilization’ of deviant forms (i.e. negative transfer). This negative interpretation of the role played by the learner's L1 in second language development is consistent with the view that this is a linear process between two extremes, namely the L1 and the L2. Therefore, the more proficient the student becomes, the more they should approximate the native-speaker's command of the language and do without their native tongue. This paradigm, which is typical of foreign language teaching, entails that there should be no L1 ‘contamination’ of the TL, which is ideally ‘owned’ by the community of native speakers, and that, according to Selinker, only 5% of non-native speakers are able to fully master (see Section 3). Today, however, the reality of ELF as the primary world's lingua franca, and the unprecedented fact that non-native speakers of English largely outnumber native speakers have challenged the concept of ‘ownership’ of the language (Widdowson 2003, pp. 35-44) and have inevitably outdated the interlanguage hypothesis.

From a constructivist point of view, we may assume that today's progressive differentiation of ELF from the varieties of native-speaker English is part of a sociocultural process of change, adaptation and appropriation of English that takes place in the *glocal* (Robertson 1995) dimension of international communicative contexts. Hence, to understand the nature of ELF it is necessary to connect its non-standardness and variability to the different sociolinguistic identities of those who use it. This implies that the L1 of the English learner/speaker should not be considered a hindrance in ELT, but in fact may represent a valuable resource for successful L2-users. Given the status of ELF as a contact language, we may then conclude that L1 transfer, at all language levels, had rather be conceived of as both a feature of ELF as well as a communicative strategy. As Seidlhofer (2011, p. 208) concludes:

[...] the traditional way of prescribing the English of the subject needs to be reconsidered because it is based on assumptions about the objectives and processes of learning that are outdated, and irrelevant, and unrealistic for most learners. The pedagogic relevance of ELF [...] [i]s that it suggests an alternative way of thinking.”

### 3.3. *The Interlanguage hypothesis vs. Global Englishes*

As we have seen in the previous sections, the interlanguage hypothesis is based on a monolithic conception of the TL in second-language education. In Selinker’s (1972, p. 213) own words: “[...] the generally accepted notion ‘target language’, i.e. the second-language the learner is attempting to learn, is here restricted to mean that there is only one norm of one dialect within the interlingual focus of attention of the learner.” We may assume that, in the case of English, the TL corresponds to standard English, i.e. the native-speaker dialects that have official status (basically the British RP and the American GA), notwithstanding they are normally spoken by a restricted minority of native speakers. Ergo, a corollary of the interlanguage hypothesis might be that all non-standard English social dialects are irrelevant in ELT. What is more, all indigenized and nativized varieties of English, which mostly originated at the time of British colonization – the so-called Postcolonial Englishes (Schneider 2011, p. 30) – are downgraded to “new dialect[s] [...] where fossilized interlanguage competencies may be the normal situation (Selinker 1972, p. 217). By analogy, this also applies to ELF, that is all the new non-standard, non-native, non-postcolonial forms of English that emerge in transnational, communicative settings. Hence, we may conclude that the interlanguage hypothesis has two major drawbacks: a) it is based on the primacy of *native-speakerism* (Holliday 2005) in second language education that, especially as regards ELT, precludes the possibility for learners to become aware of the plurality of English/es in today’s globalized world; and b) it perpetuates the common stereotype and misconception that postcolonial varieties of English are inaccurate and intrinsically ‘erroneous’. These are two highly controversial issues in ELT still today, where multiculturalism is largely unheard of, and English curricula often ignore the reality of Global Englishes (Galloway, Rose 2015; Jenkins 2015).<sup>4</sup> We may therefore claim that the interlanguage hypothesis is by now inadequate to meet the new demands of contemporary language education in the age of globalization, which, in the case of ELT, had rather be

<sup>4</sup> In 2018, the research team of Roma Tre University that participated to the national project on ELF (see footnote n. 2 in this paper) organized a teacher-education course entitled: *New English/es Landscapes: Revisiting English Language Teaching & Learning*. Grazi was in charge of a part of the course dedicated to the following topic: *Introducing World Englishes for the English Classroom*.

more oriented towards the development of learners' intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997, 2008; Byram *et al.* 2017; Grazzi 2018; Holmes, Dervin, 2016; Houghton, Hashimoto 2018).

## 4. Conclusions

This paper has pointed out that in the age of globalisation the spread of ELF as the dominant world's lingua franca has inevitably challenged the concept of English as a monolithic language and has shifted the ownership of this language from the hands of its native-speakers to those of the international L2-user. The direct entailment of this important sociolinguistic phenomenon is that English has become a primary contact language and therefore is subject to changes brought about by the dynamics of the mediation of meaning between different linguacultures, and different sociocultural identities. A peculiar feature of ELF, however, is that language variation, a historical process that is common to all natural languages if considered diachronically, is now taking place in communicative settings where interlocutors often do not often speak English as their L1. Moreover, this article has shown that notwithstanding EFL is still widely considered the exonormative pedagogical reference model in language education, it tends to converge with ELF through the learner's performance. Hence, we may assume that the intercultural and multilingual nature of ELF challenges the interlanguage hypothesis, which instead is centred on native-speakerism.

As this article has tried to demonstrate, although the conceptualizations of the learner's 'errors' in Corder (1981) and Jenkins (as cited in Grazzi 2018) show some interesting similarities, the interlanguage hypothesis and the way it conceives of the psycholinguistic processes involved in foreign language learning/acquisition appear to be antithetic to the way ELF theory conceives of learner's deviations from the norm. A case in point is Selinker's (1972) definition of interlanguage transfer, which presupposes that the learner's L1 interferes with the L2 and is the major cause of the fossilization of deviant language forms. For this reason, we may argue that the interlanguage hypothesis reinforces the ideology of native-speakerism, to the point that it even fails to recognize the status of postcolonial varieties of English. On the contrary, having considered ELF from a constructionist theoretical standpoint, it has seemed reasonable to claim that the learner's L1 is a valuable resource that supports the acquisition of English and may be used strategically to allow the linguacultural identities of ELF users to emerge.

Finally, it was pointed out that according to the interlanguage hypothesis, the student's interlanguage is considered an idiosyncratic dialect that results from a cognitive process that takes place within the individual

learner. On the contrary, according to ELF theory ELF emerges naturally as a multilingual social construct, and is appropriated by interlocutors as a mediational affordance.

Finally, we may conclude this critical analysis of the interlanguage hypothesis and agree with Tarone's (2018) general observation when she says that: "The interlanguage hypothesis provided the initial spark that ignited a field of research on second language acquisition/learning, and it continues to provide a broad and productive framework for research across multiple theoretical orientations." Everything said, it seems reasonable to claim that the time is ripe to develop new educational trajectories in ELT and teacher education, whereby the findings of ELF research could be exploited to implement projects focused on the pedagogical implications of an ELF-aware approach in the language classroom. Indeed, this was the core objective of the PRIN project carried out by the Roma Tre University research unit, which included the implementation of a teacher development course for the integration of ELF and World Englishes into the ELT syllabus.<sup>5</sup>

**Bionote:** Enrico Grazzi is Associate Professor of English at the University of Roma Tre, Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Cultures. His main interests are English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), Educational Linguistics, and Sociocultural Theory (SCT). His research is based on a Vygotskian approach to second language development, particularly as regards intercultural communicative competence and innovative learning activities (e.g. fanfiction and telecollaboration). His recent publications in these areas include *Trajectories of Change in English Language Teaching. An ELF-Aware Approach*, Tangram Edizioni Scientifiche, Trento, 2018. Grazzi is a qualified teacher trainer and textbook writer. He is a member of AIA (the Italian Association of Anglistics), a member ELF-ReN (the English as a Lingua Franca Research Network), a member of CultNet (a network of interculturalists in foreign language education), and a past President of TESOL-Italy (2002-2004).

**Author's address:** [enrico.grazzi@uniroma3.it](mailto:enrico.grazzi@uniroma3.it)

<sup>5</sup> A detailed account of this teacher development course is going to be published in the second part of a book edited by Lucilla Lopriore, the coordinator of the PRIN project carried out by the Roma Tre University research unit.

## References

- ACE 2014, Director: Andy Kirkpatrick. <http://corpus.ied.edu.hk/ace/> (7.5.2020).
- Batziakas B. 2016, *Making Specific Meaning through Flexible Language Use in ELF Conversations*, in Lopriore L. and Grazzi E. (eds.), *Intercultural Communication: New Perspectives from ELF*, Roma TrE-Press, Rome, pp. 273-289.
- Batstone R. 2010, *Sociocognitive Perspectives on Language Use and Language Learning*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Bayyurt Y. and Sifakis N.C. 2018, *ELF-aware teaching, learning and teacher development*, in Jenkins J., Baker W. and Dewey M. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of English as a Lingua Franca*, Routledge, New York/ London, pp. 456-467.
- Byram M. 1997, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.
- Byram M. 2008, *From Foreign Language Education to Education for Intercultural Citizenship: Essays and Reflections*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.
- Byram M., Golubeva I., Hui H. and Wagner M. 2017, *From Principles to Practice in Education for Intercultural Citizenship*, Multilingual Matters, Bristol.
- Corder S.P. 1967, *The Significance of Learners' Errors*, in "International Review of Applied Linguistics" 5, pp. 161-170.
- Corder S.P. 1981, *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Council of Europe 2001, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Croft W. 2000, *Explaining Language Change: An Evolutionary Approach*, Longman, London.
- ELFA corpus 2008, Director: Anna Mauranen. <http://www.helsinki.fi/elfa/elfacorporus> (7.5.2020).
- Graddol D. 2006, *English Next: Why Global English May Mean the End of 'English as a Foreign Language'*, The British Council, London.
- Galloway N. and Rose H. 2015, *Introducing Global Englishes*, Routledge, Abingdon/New York.
- Grazzi E. 2013, *The Sociocultural Dimension of ELF in the English Classroom*, Anicia, Rome.
- Grazzi E. 2015a, *ELF and the Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence: an Italian-American Telecollaboration Project*, in Vettorel P. (ed.), *New Frontiers in Teaching and Learning English*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, pp. 179-204.
- Grazzi E. 2015b, *Linking ELF and ELT in Secondary School through Web-Mediation: The Case of Fanfiction*, in Bowles H. and Cogo A. (eds.), *International Perspectives on English as a Lingua Franca*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 55-71.
- Grazzi E. 2018, *Trajectories of Change in English Language Teaching. An ELF-Aware Approach*, Tangram Edizioni Scientifiche, Trento.
- Grazzi E. and Maranzana S. 2016, *ELF and Intercultural Telecollaboration: A Case Study*, in Lopriore L. and Grazzi E. (eds.), *Intercultural Communication. New Perspectives from ELF*, Roma TrE-Press, Roma, pp. 109-133.
- Holliday A. 2005, *The struggle to teach English as an international language*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Holmes P. and Dervin F. (eds.) 2016, *The Cultural and Intercultural Dimensions of*



- English as a Lingua Franca*, Multilingual Matters, Bristol.
- Houghton S.A. and Hashimoto K. 2018, *Towards Post-Native-Speakerism: Dynamics and Shifts*. Springer, Singapore.
- Jenkins J. 2000, *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Jenkins J. 2015, *Global Englishes*, Routledge, Abingdon/ New York.
- Kachru B.B. 2003, *Liberation linguistics and the Quirk Concern*, in Seidlhofer B. (ed.), *Controversies in Applied Linguistics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 19-33.
- Kohn K. 2011, *English as a lingua franca and the Standard English misunderstanding*, in De Hower A. and Wilton A. (eds.), *English in Europe Today. Sociocultural and Educational Perspectives*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 71-94.
- Kohn K. and Hoffstaedter P. 2017, *Learner agency and non-native speaker identity in pedagogical lingua franca conversations: insights from intercultural telecollaboration in foreign language education*, in “Computer Assisted Language Learning” 30 [5], pp. 351-367.
- Lantolf J.P. and Thorne S.L. 2006, *Sociocultural Theory and the Genesis of Second Language Development*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Lenneberg E.H. 1967, *Biological Foundations of Language*, John Wiley and Sons Inc., New York.
- Nemser W. 1971, *Approximative Systems of Foreign-language Learners*, in “International Review of Applied Linguistics” 9, pp. 115-123.
- Pennycook A. 2009, *Plurilithic Englishes. Towards a 3D model*, in Murata K. and Jenkins J. (eds.), *Global Englishes in Asian contexts. Current and future debates*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 194-207.
- Quirk R. 2003. *Language varieties and standard language*, in Seidlhofer B. (ed.), *Controversies in Applied Linguistics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 9-19.
- Robertson R. 1995. *Glocalization: Time-space and heterogeneity-homogeneity*, in Feathersome M., Lash S. and Robertson R. (eds.), *Global Modernities*, Sage, London, pp. 25-44.
- Seidlhofer B. (ed.), 2003, *Controversies in Applied Linguistics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Seidlhofer B. 2009, *Orientations in ELF Research: Form and Function*, in Mauranen A. and Ranta E. (eds.), *English as a lingua franca. Studies and findings*, Cambridge Scholars Press, Newcastle upon Tyne, pp. 37-59.
- Seidlhofer B. 2011, *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Selinker L. 1972, *Interlanguage*, in “International Review of Applied Linguistics” X [3], pp. 219-31.
- Schneider E.W. 2011, *English Around the World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Sifakis N.C. 2018, *Principles and challenges of ELF for EFL teaching and teacher education: the ELF-awareness perspective*, in Cavalheiro L. (ed.), *Preparing English Language Teachers for Today’s Globalized World*, Húmus, Lisbon, pp. 27-45.
- Tomasello M. 2003, *Constructing a Language*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) and London.
- Tarone E. 2018, *Interlanguage*, Wiley Online Library. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0561.pub2> (7.5.2020).

- Tsantila N., Mandalios J. and Ilkos M. (eds.) 2016, *ELF: Pedagogical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Deree – The American College of Greece, Athens.
- van Lier L. 2004 *The Ecology and Semiotics of Language Learning: A Sociocultural Perspective*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Boston, Dordrecht, New York, London.
- VOICE 2009, Director: Barbara Seidlhofer. <https://www.univie.ac.at/voice/index.php> (7.5.2020).
- Widdowson H. 2003, *Defining Issues in English Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Widdowson H. 2013, *ELF and EFL: What's the difference? Comments on Michael Swan*, in "Journal of English as a Lingua Franca" 2 [1], pp. 187-193.
- Widdowson H. 2015, *Bilingual competence and lingual capability*, plenary talk given at the International Conference on Bilingualism 2015, University of Malta, Malta.