

# VOICING BELIEFS AND DILEMMAS FROM WE- AND ELF-AWARE REFLECTIVE TEACHER EDUCATION CONTEXTS

## Teachers' personal responses to rapidly changing multilingual contexts

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**Abstract** – The social fragmentation processes due to the recent tidal migration flows, together with the diffusion of technologies and social networks, have created new sociolinguistic environments where languages are undergoing a transformative process. As a result of increasing global mobility, the sociolinguistic reality of English, and its different realisations have become much more complex and controversial than those of other languages in the world. Issues of identity, standards, proficiency levels, intercultural communication and language relevance for English language learners and teachers, demand for a paradigmatic orientation and a reconsideration of the English curriculum, teacher education, research and classroom practice. Language teacher education is a field where, according to local contexts and to pedagogical traditions, different theoretical frameworks are being used, specific approaches adopted, course components differently combined, and teachers' and trainers' espoused theories and beliefs about English are often challenged. The purpose of this presentation is to describe and discuss a World English (WE) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)-aware approach embedded in English language teacher education courses in Italy. The adoption of such an approach elicited teachers' awareness of changes occurring in the current status of English and induced a reflective perspective on the implications of teaching it within a moveable scenario where English teaching traditions are often challenged. The relevance of this approach will be discussed and teachers' voices from three teacher education courses will be reported as representative of emerging dilemmas and a shift in perspective.

**Keywords:** English as a lingua franca (ELF); teacher education; pedagogy; reflective approach; dilemmas.

## 1. Contexts of change: new language landscapes

Demographic trends show that the world population will grow to 10 billion by the end of this century and most of this growth takes place in the developing countries where populations are younger and English is being taught at an earlier and earlier age at school. The last thirty years, characterized by globalization processes and major societal changes, have in diverse ways influenced language education and determined challenging innovations in English language teaching (ELT), redefining its construct and its approaches.

The sociolinguistic reality of English has become today much more complex and controversial than those of other languages in the world; this is

predominantly due to its global spread, its emergent role as the mostly used language in international communication and on the web, as well as to the ongoing nativization of non-native Englishes in various parts of the world.

English globalisation processes – particularly the ones occurred in the last three decades – are mostly associated with aspects such as the role English plays in facilitating international political relations and business, internet-based communication, air-traffic control, access to scientific knowledge, films, music and literature, and in improving social exchanges across linguistic communities. In his second report on the status of English, *English Next*, David Graddol claimed that the relationship between English and globalisation is a complex and reciprocal process since “economic globalisation encouraged the spread of English but the spread of English also encouraged globalisation” (Graddol 2006, p. 9).

English has grown all over the countries in addition to the autochthonous languages, but without actually threatening their existence, rather ‘with the advantage of being ethnically neutral’ (Knapp 2015, p. 174) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has become the main medium of the process of globalization, as it was very clearly described by Jenkins *et al.*,

ELF is simultaneously the consequence and the principal language medium of GLOBALIZING PROCESSES. The English language has become a lingua franca on such a scale worldwide partly in response to globalization; but also, large-scale globalization is in part incumbent on the emergence of a globally diffuse lingua franca. Therefore, close consideration of theoretical accounts of globalization given in the (typically interdisciplinary) literature is directly relevant to furthering our understanding of ELF. If globalization is the means by which the world has become more INTERCONNECTED, with our economic, cultural, political, professional and social spaces ever more entwined, then lingua franca interactions in English are the primary means by which those connections are made, by which human relations are maintained across conventional boundaries. In other words, ELF is at once a GLOBALIZED and GLOBALIZING phenomenon. (Jenkins, Cogo, Dewey 2011, p. 303)

Parallel to the globalisation processes of English, the intensification of recent tidal migration flows, together with the unstoppable diffusion of new technologies, social networks and multimedia, have created new sociolinguistic environments where all languages are undergoing a unique transformative process of their borders as well as of their traditional functions (Hoffman 2000).

One of the most challenging and problematic changes in language teaching has been the moveable and liquid scenario where new language contacts are disputing traditional language standards and forms of communication. Just as Pennycook’s ‘transcultural flows’, ways in which cultural forms move, change, and are re-used to fashion new identities in

diverse contexts, forcing us to rethink language and culture (Pennycook 2006).

This new scenario has inevitably questioned and destabilised the language education models teachers have been brought up with and still refer to. Teachers are facing new types of learners, with different language and cultural backgrounds, with special needs in terms of literacy and communication forms, and whose technological skills are much more sophisticated than those of their teachers.

In almost all European countries there is a growing demand for teaching the country official language as a second language to migrants, and more and more school teachers are revisiting their own teaching in order to meet the multilingual population needs and to adjust the language of schooling to the new learners' needs. Teachers are inevitably led to reconsider how to teach their own mother tongue and to adjust to learners' multilingual capacities. This new scenario triggers a shift in teachers' long-established teaching habits, challenges traditional teaching perspectives and opens up to a renovated interest in language education.

The most used second language in the world has raised a number of issues linked to its different instantiations and its function in a global, multicultural and plurilingual society. While marking new linguistic landscapes, English has enhanced the development of different cultural and language identities of non-native English speakers and teachers, as well as of teacher educators who are adjusting to these new scenarios. English has thus emerged as a post-modern form of communication where ELF is definitely 'more than English' within a complex, but fluid, sociolinguistic reality.

There are thus numerous and unavoidable implications in teaching English to multilingual learners in different contexts all around the world, and in environments where ELF has become the most widely used form of plurilithic communication adopted by people with different language backgrounds to communicate with each other.

## 2. Shifts in language teacher education

The current development of English and of its instantiations, from World English to English as a Lingua Franca, in plurilingual contexts, has elicited studies on its current role and status as well as on the contents and type of approach to be used in language teacher education courses for future teachers of English (Sifakis 2004, 2007, 2017; Bayyurt, Sifakis 2015; Lopriore 2016a; Vettorel, Lopriore 2017).

Barbara Seidlhofer (1999) underlined the shift occurring in teacher professional development programs within contexts where learners need to be

guided towards the achievement of proficiency in more than one language besides their own, while learning and appreciating the cultures of other languages:

In short, there is a sense of breaking the professional mould, with a broader conception of what it means to teach languages going hand in hand with a more comprehensive view of the languages to be taught. Thus monoculturalism seems to have been replaced by multiculturalism, monolingualism with multilingualism, and targets seem to be criterion-referenced rather than (native- speaker) norm-referenced. (Seidlhofer *ibid.*, p. 234)

Teachers of English are educated in the study of English as a standard variety whose possible and acceptable varieties are those officially adopted in former English colonies. They have studied to adhere to standard models of English, conforming to the native speakers' one. This type of education is highly influential in the ways non-native speakers will talk about English, and this is particularly true when one decides to become a teacher of English and assumes the responsibility of being an 'expert' for language learners.

Language teacher education "[...] serves to link what is known in the field with what is done in the classroom, and it does so through the individuals whom we educate as teachers" (Freeman 1989, p. 30). In order to reconsider traditional English language teaching, where teachers' view of the language is still strongly linked to teachers' individual experience of learning and living that language, the shift in perspective cannot but start from the observation of language itself. English is no longer the language most teachers were taught and/or brought up with, it has 'grown' into something different, it needs revisiting and asks for new ways of looking at it (Sifakis 2004, 2007; Lopriore 2012, 2016a, b).

The reflective approach, originally developed in teacher education to elicit teachers' reflection-on-action by asking them to voice their thoughts about their beliefs, their teaching and their understanding of the learning process (Schön 1983; Wallace 1991; Richards and Lockhart 1994; Freeman 1989; Freeman and Johnson 1998; Johnson 2009; Freeman 2016), might be considered as the most appropriate teacher education approach in a time of change, where teachers are required to thoroughly reconsider their beliefs and understandings of the language they teach, particularly if pre- and in-service teacher education courses are World English (WE) and ELF-informed, as underlined in Jenkins *et al.* 2011 article on ELF research.

However, what most assuredly has taken place is very considerable (and sometimes heated) debate about the claims of ELF researchers with regard to ELT methods, materials and practices. The debate has understandably given rise to a fair deal of controversy in the ELT profession ([...] and Jenkins (2007) for a discussion of the complex issues of attitude and identity in

relation to ELF and language teachers). Because ELF research findings pose substantial challenges to current beliefs and practice, it is likely that further engagement with ELF in the language classroom will be contested and hence gradual. For as Roberts (1998) points out, changes in the CURRICULUM and any rethinking of PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE that these changes require often provoke controversy, and can be very unsettling (Jenkins, Cogo, Dewey 2011, p. 305).

In the emerging English landscapes, new ways in devising models and actions for language awareness activities require more exposure to and investigation of authentic language data in order to trigger teachers' reflection, unveiling their existing beliefs about language, about English, and about teaching.

### 3. WE and ELF informed language teacher education

The diffusion of WE and ELF demands for a shift in the design and implementation of the FL curriculum, of classroom practice as well as the identification of new teaching and learning tools and materials. In the last decade research studies into ELF, for example, have provided stimulating findings in the English language teaching and learning processes and challenging suggestions to be considered central in English teacher education.

Research findings in ELF have major implications for a multitude of common beliefs and assumptions about what is sanctioned as good practice by the profession. The PEDAGOGIC IMPLICATIONS of ELF include the following key areas in particular: the nature of the LANGUAGE SYLLABUS, TEACHING MATERIALS, APPROACHES and METHODS, LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT and ultimately the KNOWLEDGE BASE of language teachers. All this has, of course, far reaching implications for language teacher education. ELF research, then, is not about determining what should or should not be taught in the language classroom. Rather, ELF researchers feel their responsibility is to make current research findings accessible in a way that enables teachers to reconsider their beliefs and practices and make informed decisions about the significance of ELF for their own individual teaching contexts. (Jenkins, Cogo, Dewey 2011, p.305)

Research studies on ELF have recently highlighted aspects of the communicative processes, such as the accommodation process in ELF interactions in terms of pragmatic strategies use (negotiation, repetition, rephrasing or paraphrasing strategies) that unveils speakers' willingness to accept differences and adjust to the interlocutors' linguacultural practices during, for example, instances of miscommunication, and whose implications have too often been disregarded in language education (Knapp 1987; House

2002, 2009; Seidlhofer 2004, 2011; Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, Pitzl 2006; Jenkins 2007; Klimpfinger 2009; Mauranten, Ranta 2009; Hüttner 2009; Cogo, Archibald, Jenkins 2011; Knapp, Meierkord 2002; Jenkins, Cogo, Dewey 2011; Cogo, Dewey 2012; Baker 2015).

The perspectives emerging from most research studies on ELF communication demand for a view of English as a social practice and for a better understanding by teachers and learners of the inherent language variability and diversity of English. These conceptions should now inform ELT teacher education programs, moving beyond the ‘native’/‘non-native’ distinction. The process is slow, but it is moving ahead, and English and subject matter teachers are increasingly being involved in bottom up processes leading to a shift in perspective in terms of both contents and approach and in favour of an ELF-informed and an ELF-aware perspective in language education (Sifakis 2007, 2017; Lopriore, Vettorel 2015, 2016; Lopriore 2016 b, c; Bayyurt, Lopriore, Vettorel, forthcoming).

#### 4. Voicing changes: case studies in teacher education

Revisiting language teacher education courses in a time of change means focusing mainly on those aspects that the changes English is undergoing, specifically ELF, have highlighted as pivotal in learners’ language capability development.

The three pre- and in-service language teacher education courses under scrutiny here were organized and run at a university in Rome; they were run within a WE and ELF-informed perspective. Almost all courses lasted between 18 and 20 weeks and were attended by an average of 70 participants, mostly Italian native speakers.

WE and ELF were course embedded notions through all the course components, the approach was meant to:

- engage the participants in a reflective process;
- challenge their beliefs and views about language;
- develop their knowledge, skills, attitude and awareness in order to make their own informed choices;
- develop their professional identity as non-native teachers of English.

The transdisciplinary module *From English to Englishes* in all three courses was aimed to offer teachers the opportunity to learn about English, explore its current instantiations – WE and ELF – discuss the implications for English teaching and learning and identify ways to take the current state of English into account.

The main areas addressed in the new courses were:

- Spoken language features;
- Pragmatic issues, not just formal issues of language;
- Young and multilingual learners' repertoires of codes;
- New forms of audio materials and types of aural perception;
- Translanguaging strategies and learners' shuttling among codes & languages;
- Creative use of language;
- New repertoires & multimedia.

Teachers were involved in:

- Exploring and discussing the notion of authenticity in reference to current uses of English, and what the language learners needed to be exposed to and use;
- Exploring the notion of culture in language teaching and discussing changes in English speaking cultures, as well as in intercultural communication in multicultural and plurilingual societies. Noticing different instantiations of English in a variety of contexts within course-books, course materials or English materials from a variety of multimedia sources;
- Discussing their individual reactions to features of 'non-standard' Englishes, particularly if they were going to be used in an EFL classroom;
- Reflecting upon opportunities and implications of including different samples of English, English speaking cultures and intercultural communication awareness in their teaching;
- Exploring the potential of 'noticing' and 'languaging' activities;
- Including 'noticing' and 'languaging' in the activities they devised.

All this was achieved by exposing the teachers to multiple video stimuli, engaging them in group discussions in class or during their individual and group work on the platform. Individually and in small groups, the teachers developed teaching plans and teaching materials to be later used in the classroom, they discussed their practicum experiences and produced their end-of-course teaching projects when acting on the Moodle platform. Teachers, in small groups, were engaged in 'noticing' the language being used in course-books and audiovisual resources, through focused awareness tasks. They were also involved in 'languaging' tasks whereby they were encouraged to make meaning through the language encountered, that is talking-it-through. They had then to adapt materials and devise lesson plans within a non-standard perspective, using noticing and languaging tasks.

Trainee teachers – individually and in groups – were asked to explore English language in use through task-based activities, identify differences,

discuss norm deviations and the degree of acceptance of non-standard uses of English. Teachers were involved in individual and group tasks, engaged in considering how far they were ready to detach from traditional routines, when they usually rely on familiar course-books, by taking the risk of exposing their learners to new Englishes or ELF, and/or to accept and include deviations from the norm (Lopriore 2016a, c).

Some of the tasks included:

- exploring WE and ELF through corpora: from the BNC to the VOICE extracts and through videos.
- identifying ELF traits and exploring them as localised forms.
- investigating the notion of intelligibility.
- noticing and using different types of communicative strategies.

Task examples During their *From English to Englishes* module,

- 1) teachers were first introduced to language corpora and to different ways of consulting them; in small groups they learnt how to consult English corpora, eg the *British National Corpus*, using the *Corpus.BYU.edu*,<sup>1</sup> they were then guided to consult the *VOICE Corpus*<sup>2</sup> and asked to compare samples of spoken exchanges and notice differences between the BNC and the VOICE examples, particularly in the different uses of communicative strategies.
- 2) Teachers were later on presented with different short excerpts of TV series (eg *LOST*, *Bing Bang Theory*, *Modern family*, *Breaking Bad* etc. with non-native speakers interacting in English with native speakers), asked to notice differences in interactions or strategies used by the interactants, and if intelligibility had been a problem.

In their final lesson plans teachers included:

- cross-cultural activities;
- speaking activities;
- English as a medium for learning about different cultures;
- learners' use of communicative, repair strategies & accommodation skills.

#### **4.1. Teachers' voices voicing dilemmas and beliefs**

During the courses, trainee teachers had the opportunity to discuss the approach used in the course and the issues that had emerged in terms of WE

<sup>1</sup> website <https://corpus.byu.edu>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.univie.ac.at/voice/>



and ELF and new ways of teaching English. Their comments were quite revealing of the changes that had been triggered by the course.

In the comments that teachers made during the discussion, different issues were raised: some address teachers' response to the current status and instantiations of English, some highlight the limitations of teaching materials in terms of authenticity (T.3) that still resist incorporating samples of WE or ELF; others (T.1, T.5, T.7) reveal teachers' surprise in discovering different variations of English (T.2), the relevance of exposing learners to authentic materials (T.3) that triggers different attitudes towards non-standard forms, while some comments highlight the importance of the approach used (T.4, T.6, T.8) as well as teachers' uncertainties (T.6).

Their beliefs had been challenged by the exposure to other instantiations of English and their comments at the end of the courses have unveiled their profound dilemmas:

“I now see so many different ways of saying things in English. It is so rich...” (T.1)

“Watching films and soap operas with my learners, I realised I had never understood how spoken language works...*non importa se non è standard*/it doesn't matter if it is not standard” (T.2)

“ [...] the themes are all about English life in UK and the functions are all about situations of real life but students look like just visitors, tourists. ....we are not always tourists in UK, so we need to learn to deal with all life situations” (T.3)

“Considering the evolving status (of English), teachers can't insist on proposing static models; but they should, instead, expose their students to many varieties at the same time: educating, thus, to difference” (T.4)

“Another thing I did not know before was that even a native speaker of English can consider himself a foreigner in a country where a new variety of English is spoken because of its culture” (T.5)

“It's not enough to understand what teaching materials and tools to be used, but HOW teachers should use them” (T.8)

“I did not know of the several changes of the language in all the world and that English takes a lot of words from the country where it's spoken” (T.7)

“These ‘new forms of English’ make me feel uncertain, ...*ho capito, ma poi come controllo/* I understood, but how can I be in control?? (T.6)

## 5. Conclusions

The adoption of a WE- and an ELF-aware reflective approach, later on embedded within all course components, sustained the participants’ appropriation of their own teaching process and triggered a more focused awareness and use of course-books and materials. This new type of awareness emerged both in the teachers’ lesson plans and projects and in their group discussions on the course; also, a shift in perspective in terms of attitudes and identities emerged. Yet, awareness cannot be taught, it can only be enhanced through reflective approaches where teachers explore, discover and make decisions about the subject they teach or they use for teaching, i.e. English.

The approach adopted elicited teachers’ awareness regarding changes occurring in the current status of English and induced a reflective perspective on the implications of teaching it within a moveable scenario where English teaching traditions were inevitably challenged and dilemmas are still there and coexist with teachers’ new professional profiles. If awareness of the current plurality of English is raised in teacher education courses, there are good chances that this perspective is taken into account afterwards in the classroom with students. Hence, the importance of theoretical concepts linked with hands-on activities in teacher training courses to provide chances to experience the implications of WE and ELF in a plurilithic perspective.

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