

ELF-aware language teaching at the Center for ELF: Five guidelines

ELFセンターにおける英語を共通語として認識した 言語教育: 5つの指針

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ABSTRACT

This paper documents what features the English version of the newly launched Center for English as a Lingua Franca website, namely five guidelines proposed for teaching English as a global lingua franca. These guidelines suggest shifting away from predictability and testability and prioritising individual agency and action in language teaching, in preparation for the unpredictability and unexpectedness of global communication among English users.

KEYWORDS: English language teaching (ELT), English as a lingua franca (ELF), English as a multilingua franca (EMF), Multilingualism, ‘Trans-’ theories

1. INTRODUCTION

Having been established in 2014 by the founding director Masaki Oda, Tamagawa University’s Center for English as a Lingua Franca (CELFL) is among the world’s first centres seeking to apply English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) research to teaching English for academic purposes (see Oda, 2017). At the time of this publication, the programme starts its 10th year, and with a view to commemorating its decennial development, CELFL launches a new website in both Japanese and English.

In consultation with the current director Paul McBride and other CELFL faculty, and partially based on our previous work (Ishikawa & McBride, 2019), I have drafted the manuscript for the new website. While the Japanese webpages aim to inform prospective students of the ELF programme, the English webpages hope to facilitate discussion of ELF pedagogical applications both inside and outside of CELFL. As the ELF field is constantly evolving, the English version, in particular, is likely to keep updated. The present paper documents my initial draft for the English pages, focusing on the rationale behind five guidelines to be proposed for ELF-aware language teaching at CELFL. Specifically, prior to the guidelines proposal, this paper first introduces ELF as

a major field in applied linguistics, and then appraises teaching and learning English in terms of (1) its use as a lingua franca in a multilingual world, (2) the theories du jour in applied linguistics, namely ‘trans-’ theories, and (3) the prevalence of Standard English in ELT.

2. APPLIED LINGUISTICS, GLOBAL ENGLISHES, AND ELF

Applied linguistics is commonly defined as “[t]he theoretical and empirical investigation of real-world problems in which language is a central issue” (Brumfit, 1995, p. 27). Global Englishes is a research thread in applied linguistics, and a major real-world problem for its scholarship is how English users communicate effectively in the world. Statistically, 388 million first-language (L1) English speakers (i.e., Anglophones) of different origins constitute a tiny minority of an estimated 2.3 billion English speakers (Crystal, 2019). Global Englishes is relatively new in academia and comprises two thriving research fields: World Englishes (WE) and ELF. The former is often associated with a ground-breaking forerunner English as an International Language (EIL) (e.g., Smith, 1981).

While WE has enquired into the relationship between the global spread of English and different local cultures and identities (e.g., Kachru, 1992), ELF has enquired into transnational communication through English. ELF corpora, such as the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE), have attested that monolingualism in English is no longer the norm. Instead, ELF corpus analytic studies illustrate that multilingual influences and effects are contingent across linguistic levels, such as phonology, grammar, lexis, pragmatics, and discourse structure (e.g., Cogo & Dewey, 2012). In this regard, ELF ethnographically informed studies have repeatedly indicated that mutual understanding derives from linguistic accommodation or adjusting and adapting language use according to the situation (e.g., Dewey, 2011), often through pre-emptive and other communication strategies (e.g., Dimoski et al., 2019). Put differently, participants, including Anglophones, need to use linguistic resources flexibly and dynamically in order to fit communication partners and purposes. More recently, with an increasing recognition of inherent multilingualism in global communication (see Section 3), and in conjunction with ‘trans-’ theories, especially translanguaging (see Section 4), ELF research has started to question the existence of the clear boundary of the English language. To put differently, it has duly accentuated the malleability and permeability of named languages.

3. TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH WITHIN MULTILINGUALISM

In applied linguistics, many Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies have viewed additional language learning as if it were a universal process of becoming another monolingual person who speaks a second language as the main language “rather than different people from monolinguals in L1” (Cook, 2013, pp. 37–38). Supported by this view, the ELT and testing industry can be seen as abstracting and materialising a ‘standard’ variety in a couple of Anglophone countries and commodifying it globally as

Standard English (e.g., Leung, Lewkowicz & Jenkins, 2016). Despite the monolingual, nationalist ideologies surrounding English language learning, our real-world communication goes across the national scale, and English is normally just part, not the whole, of our communicative repertoires.

Jenkins (2015) foregrounds multilingualism in the ELF field, and her notion of English as a *multilingua franca* (EMF) posits that multilingualism is “the one single factor without which there would be no ELF” (p. 63). The working definition of EMF scenarios is: “Multilingual communication in which English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen” (p. 73). English users in a multilingual world face the opposing forces of monolingually orientated, ideological ‘fixity’ and multilingual, pragmatic ‘fluidity’ during interaction. The ideology of national languages, especially ‘standard’ varieties, as systematic ‘objects’ remains powerful whenever we learn language and communicate. This seems to be particularly true of Standard English in English Language Teaching (ELT). Even so, English learners and users develop and exploit linguistic resources in a situated social context, frequently multilingual, through and across global networks. With a view to reconciling the tension between ideological and pragmatic considerations, EMF awareness (Ishikawa, 2020a) advocates challenging dominant essentialist, nationalist discourses around the English language. To be specific, taking such an approach, instructors provide students with experiences of EMF scenarios and encourage their critical thinking about language, culture, and identity in reference to their own experiences and in reference to extracts from published research.

EMF awareness frames English communicative competence within multilingualism and requires it to move towards symbolic (Kramsch, 2009) and performative (Canagarajah, 2013) competence. Precisely, in the light of empirical data from EMF awareness (Ishikawa, 2020a) and study-abroad teacher training programmes (Suzuki, 2021), this competence may be conceptualised as follows (Baker & Ishikawa, 2021).

- Conscious understanding of linguistic and cultural roles and effects on interaction as well as meaning-making modes, both linguistic and non-linguistic,
- Flexible, situationally appropriate interactional practice based on this understanding, and
- Motivated attitudes or positive feelings and curiosity towards different communicative practices and ‘others’.

4. TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH FROM ‘TRANS-’ PERSPECTIVES

Translanguaging investigates how individuals bring in particular linguistic resources to create and interpret meaning in defiance of the historical and political distinction between named national languages (e.g., Li, 2018). It often associates multilinguals’ creative communicative practice as a way of pursuing social equity, reflecting its roots in researching speakers of minority languages (e.g., García, 2009).

Translanguaging also positions language as embedded in wider meaning-making

resources, and the notion of transmodal communication directly pays attention to how our communication meshes multiple modes (e.g., colour, layout, music, gesture) as if they are inseparable (e.g., Newfield, 2014). Related to translanguaging and transmodal communication is transcultural communication. Given the complexity and fluidity of culture, it is often unclear what specific cultures we are in-between in global encounters. Transcultural communication eschews describing how interactants mix elements of presupposed cultures and instead takes the nebulous, overlapping nature of cultural categories, similarities, and differences as the starting point of investigation (e.g., Pennycook, 2007). In line with ‘trans-’ theories, the ELF field seeks to take a holistic approach to global communication, and precisely, to comprehend how English users make use of multilingual, multicultural, and multimodal resources by transgressing and transcending ideological boundaries, linguistic or otherwise, in order to create new social spaces, practices, and identities (Baker & Ishikawa, 2021).

The ‘trans-’ theories of translanguaging, transmodal, and transcultural communication (or better put, translanguing, transmodal, and transcultural communication) feature the pragmatic side of the aforementioned notion of EMF and EMF awareness. They focus on processes of communication and adaptable use of meaning-making resources and modes. Likewise, the ELF field has observed the cruciality of linguistic accommodation as an overarching pragmatic strategy for mutual understanding. Taken together, it seems that there is a further scope for ELF researchers and educators to conceptualise accommodation broadly as follows (Ishikawa, 2021).

- Adjusting and adapting the way of using language flexibly and creatively (i.e., translanguing accommodation),
- Appropriating available meaning-making modes in an integrated manner (i.e., transmodal accommodation), and
- Adjusting and adapting the way of creating and interpreting meaning beyond cultural stereotypes or generalisations (i.e., transcultural accommodation).

5. TEACHING STANDARD ENGLISH IN ELT AS AN EXAMPLE

Globally commodified Standard English emanates from an ‘imagined’ Anglophone speech community of affluent monolingual speakers in a certain period of time. Fundamentally, it often relies on the intuitions of materials writers who are typically ‘white’, middle-class Anglophones, and is different from the English they use for themselves (e.g., Leung, 2005). Certainly, Standard English in ELT satisfies practicality in the classroom by prescribing and applying one-size-fits-all linguistic rules. However, ELF research, in reference to complexity theory, “sees communicative norms as always contextually embedded and subjectively mediated, and therefore as emergent rather than predetermined” (Ishikawa, 2020b, p. 104).

The crux of the argument would be that ELT ought not to conflate English in its entirety with the ‘convenient fiction’ (e.g., Widdowson, 2015) of Standard English. Given that most English learners are exposed to Standard English models, and that

Anglophones become familiar with a similar ‘standard’ variety through schooling (Hall, 2018), ELF-aware language teaching would not completely reject Standard English in ELT, but would heed its idealised nature and teach its linguistic usage, along with associated cultural interpretation, as discrete samples rather than de-contextualised norms. Students would be encouraged to explore and adapt these and other samples in and out of the classroom for the sake of their own communication, “with all knowledge provisional and continually open to reflection and revision” (Baker & Ishikawa, 2021, p. 296). Similarly, internationally commercialised English standardised tests seem to have limited efficacy against the unexpectedness and unpredictability of transnational milieux. In fact, in keeping with observations made by Jenkins and Leung (2019) about the need for institutionally contextualised self-assessment, Tamagawa University no longer places new students based on their Standard English test scores. Instead, it encourages their self-regulation by having them examine demonstration videos and reading materials at different levels of classes and self-assess their readiness for class communication.

6. GUIDELINES PROPOSAL

ELF-aware language teaching at CELF, and potentially at other institutions, may want to facilitate teaching and learning English within multilingualism and from ‘trans-’ perspectives, thereby recasting Standard English in ELT as an example rather than a pre-determined linguistic ‘object’. This endeavour is not reducible to a single teaching methodology or an acontextual generalisation, but is likely to be made possible through the following broad guidelines.

- **Guideline 1:** Examine instances of linguistic usage and cultural interpretation, including Standard English in ELT, as discrete samples rather than de-contextualised norms.
- **Guideline 2:** Take a critical approach to communication that challenges dominant essentialist, nationalist discourses through EMF awareness: (1) providing students with experiences of EMF scenarios, and (2) encouraging their critical thinking about language, culture, and identity in reference to their experiences and in reference to extracts from published research.
- **Guideline 3:** Move towards EMF-aware symbolic, performative competence, that is, the competence to embody (1) sensitivity to linguistic, cultural, and modal resources, (2) flexible practice according to the situation (i.e., accommodation), and (3) tenacious interest in individual diversity.
- **Guideline 4:** Focus on processes of communication and adaptable use of communicative resources, in other words, translingual, transmodal,

and transcultural accommodation, that is, adjusting and adapting (1) language flexibly and creatively, (2) meaning-making modes in an integrated manner, and (3) cultural interpretation beyond stereotypes or generalisations.

- **Guideline 5:** Appropriate teaching to local contexts by recognising how Guidelines 1 to 4 are implemented will be variable depending on their relevance to local conditions, cultures, and needs.

The above guidelines are still work in progress, and to be developed in future studies at CELF and elsewhere. It is even possible that a rising tide of EMF-aware pedagogical research challenges the epistemological and institutional structures that place the English language itself as a core part of ELT (Ishikawa, in press).

7. CONCLUSION

ELF-aware language teaching may not be about pursuing something revolutionary. It may be about pursuing good language teaching practice in general, as per the evolution of the ELF field, and potentially through the aforementioned five guidelines (Section 6). As articulated by van Lier (2007):

The learner is a whole person, not an input-processing brain that happens to be located inside a body that should preferably sit still while the input is transmitted, received and computed by the brain. The learner is a person with a social, embodied mind, with dreams, worries and beliefs, and in need of forging productive identities that link the personal self to the new worldly demands presented by the new language. (p. 62)

To help students make meaningful connections with the globalised world, I sincerely hope that CELF continues centring human agency and action in its education, and teaching English as their own lingua franca for this multilingual world.

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