

ELF AND TEACHER EDUCATION: ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

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The growing relevance of research in English as a lingua franca (ELF) for ELT has led to a need to rethink the way we approach English in the language classroom and to reassess how we configure knowledge about language in teacher education. This article reports on a joint project conducted at King's College London (UK) and the University of Málaga (Spain), exploring the value of perceptions towards language and ELF among language teachers. Our goal was to promote reflective attitudes towards linguistic diversity, language change and the potential impact of ELF on developments in ELT. A key objective underpinning our research is to encourage teachers to (re)examine existing beliefs and practices to help envisage alternative, more “ELF informed” perspectives on English and language learning. Our discussion will draw comparisons between both institutions, with a focus on attitudes and responses to ELF research and debate.

Introduction

The global reach of English and its subsequent linguistic developments (see Jenkins, Baker & Dewey 2018 for an extensive overview of the field) inevitably carry multiple pedagogic implications (as discussed in, among others, Bayyurt & Akcan 2015; Dewey 2012; Sifakis et al 2018). In this paper we aim to move beyond discussing implications to consider ELF in application, exploring what possibilities teachers might have to develop an ELF *informed* pedagogy. Other scholars favour the term “ELF-aware” pedagogy (see especially Bayyurt & Sifakis 2015); however, for our purposes we prefer “informed” (cf Dewey 2015) as we feel this better reflects the motive underlying our approach to ELF research: that we focus on promoting the application of an ELF way of thinking about language and communication. In short, while awareness of ELF is a fundamental starting point for a classroom response, awareness alone is not sufficient. After all, it is perfectly possible to be aware of a phenomenon but still not adopt any novel

practices as a result. Our concern is that practitioners may feel that being aware of ELF is an end in itself, and that therefore it is otherwise “business as usual” (see also Dewey 2012 on the take-up of ELF in a practical pedagogic sense). For us, awareness of ELF is a means towards adopting a more socioculturally informed pedagogy.

We also see incorporating ELF in teacher education as a transformative means of exposing language professionals to the current linguistic diversification the language is undergoing via its globalized role as a language of contact, reflecting on concomitant changes in teaching practices we believe this requires. We present below our analysis of an online survey (part of a larger ongoing project involving interviews and classroom observation) designed to explore how ELT practitioners’ attitudes are changing as the English language and professional practices evolve. Our subjects were pre-service (little or no previous teaching experience and no previous formal training) and in-service teachers across two diverse educational settings in Spain and the UK. We set out to answer the following question: As English changes, how do ELT practitioners’ attitudes towards language and language teaching (need to) change?

Background:

Our aim was to investigate course participants on parallel MA programs at King’s College London and the University of Málaga (henceforth KCL and UMA respectively), examining teachers’ perceptions of the relevance of ELF in Pedagogy in both contexts, particularly focusing on whether (if so, how?) they feel that learning about ELF research and theory is relevant to their teaching contexts.

MA in English Studies / MA in ELT for Secondary Education (UMA)

Both programmes are designed for ESP teachers, College/University lecturers, teachers in private language tuition, and teachers in secondary education. The timeline for our research was as follows: First we conducted two input sessions introducing basic ELF related concepts, focusing on both the theoretical arguments underpinning ELF as well as methodological issues, such as the use of corpora (VOICE, ELFA) to attest to the linguistic and communicative properties of ELF interactions. Our ultimate goal was to activate an impetus for adopting an ELF perspective in the classroom. Our immediate objective was to implement an ELF-informed approach in language teacher education, similar to what Sifakis and Bayyurt (2016) propose in the first stage of their ‘ELF Aware

Teacher Education' (ELFATE) framework. Subsequently, we created an online survey combining questions from prior tools (see Dewey 2015), along with questions adapted from recent research on practitioners' attitudes towards ELF (Grazzi 2015; Snow et al 2006).

MA Applied Linguistics & ELT/MA TESOL (KCL)

At KCL, there are two MA programmes: MA TESOL, intended for teachers with little to no previous experience; and MA Applied Linguistics & ELT, designed for experienced language teachers. Both MAs have a practical component, leading respectively to the Cambridge CELTA and Delta awards, with KCL working in collaboration with International House London, who provide the teaching practice supervision.

In the first semester of MA TESOL, one of the core modules includes a two-hour session in which students encounter ELF and Global Englishes, with some discussion of the implications of the globalization of English for our understanding of language competence and the selection of language models. In the case of MA Applied Linguistics & ELT, students first see ELF during a session on phonology that introduces students to Jenkins' (2000) Lingua Franca Core. Students are then given two sessions on a Sociolinguistics module, which is essentially an expanded version of the MA TESOL session, in which they discuss the impact of the global spread of English on language and language teaching.

The MA programs at both institutions have in common the following factors:

- they share a professional orientation, training participants to become ELT practitioners through a number of similar methodological courses.
- both programs are distinctly committed to teaching trainees about ELF research, ELF-informed Pedagogy and ELF related issues.
- They include a practicum module, in which participants could implement an ELF perspective to ELT if so they choose.

Questionnaire Survey

There were 14 items on the online questionnaire (see appendix), organized into several categories: personal and professional background (with questions on linguistic profile, level and type of teaching experience); awareness and understanding of ELF and related

concepts (with questions focusing on familiarity with key terms, including *ELF*, *Global Englishes*, *World Englishes* and *Standard English*, followed by a question asking them to describe what they understand by these terms and explain how they define the concept of “Good English”); teaching priorities with regard to methodology, language models, and teacher roles. Finally, respondents were asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow up interview. In total, 81 participants took part in the survey; but because not all questions were compulsory, the number of responses per questionnaire item varies (where percentages are reported below we indicate how many respondents there were).

Questionnaire, Section 1: Personal Background and Profile

In response to our first question, *What is/are your first language(s)?*, 80 participants gave an answer. Among the Málaga respondents, as expected, the majority of the participants indicated that their L1 was Spanish (54 out of 58), with the following languages all listed as L1 by one participant each: Arabic; Bulgarian; German; Polish; Portuguese; Russian. As was also expected, after adding the KCL responses to the analysis, there was a much higher rate of multilingual individuals and a wider variety of languages recorded. Altogether, the languages listed as L1 by respondents were as follows (number of speakers indicated in brackets): Spanish (57), English (8), Japanese (2), Mandarin (2), Italian (1), Korean (1), Thai (1), and ‘Chinese’ (1). There were also 11 respondents who identified as multilingual speakers, with the following language combinations each mentioned once: Javanese + Indonesian, Malay + Indonesian, Creole + French Turkish + Arabic, Hokkien + Indonesian, Mandarin + Cantonese, Marathi + English.

Although most participants responded with a single word answer, e.g. “Spanish”, for a number of respondents a much longer entry was required to capture the complexity of their linguistic profiles. For example, one respondent wrote the following.

I am a bilingual of Turkish and Arabic. Arabic was my home language while I was educated in Turkish and it was my daily language outside our house
(respondent #72)

Several participants provided similar responses, identifying two or more native languages, most often a ‘home language’ or ‘mother tongue’ and then a language used in education, professionally or in a wider community. This is a reflection of the inadequacy

of the term ‘first language’, or L1, which still appears to have quite widespread currency, and which admittedly we ourselves continue to use in this study, partly for ease of reference but also partly as a result of the extent to which the term has become so embedded in our thinking. However, we also see terms such as this as reflective of a fairly monolingual orientation to language in that they suggest languages are learned separately, in isolation from each other, in a linear fashion with a clear chronology, and that identifying a single ‘first’ language is straightforward. Such assumptions are wholly problematic in linguistically diverse communicative settings, especially in light of ELF research findings (see Canagarajah 2013).

In multilingual communities, speakers may have diverse and complex linguistic repertoires, with all manner of different competences in the languages available to them. In other words, identifying a single ‘native’ language may not be especially meaningful or appropriate. And given the global diffusion of English, the number of speakers for whom English has become a key language in their repertoires is continuing to expand (see especially Blommaert & Backus 2011 on the notion of ‘knowing language’ in the context of superdiversity). This includes settings in which most speakers would conventionally be considered and would self-identify as ‘monolingual’. As reported above, most of our Malaga participants indicated that Spanish was their first language. However, one participant included English as one of their native languages when responding to this item.

Spanish as I was born in Malaga, and English, as I have been learning it since I was a child and I think I can speak it in a good way.

(respondent #33)

We see this as an indication that we are in a period of transition in which traditional notions of language competence and what it means to be bilingual (conventionally seen as something that can only be claimed from birth) are giving way to new, more dynamic ideas about language and communicative repertoire. It is clear that respondent #33 is actively claiming some ownership of English here, describing herself as a speaker of English not a *learner*, which strongly suggests this teacher would have views that are compatible with an ELF perspective. This is indeed the case, as her responses to

questionnaire items relating to teaching beliefs and practices display what we describe as ‘ELF friendly responses’ (see below for further discussion).

In response to our second question *What other languages do you know?*, it is no surprise that most listed 2 or even 3 additional languages given that respondents were enrolled on MA programs related to language teaching and applied linguistics. Altogether, 77 participants listed English as their L2, with Spanish, French, Italian and German each listed by multiple respondents. Other additional languages were as follows: Chinese, Danish, Dutch, Gujarati, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, and Sambas (a dialect of Malay). Regarding language proficiency, participants used a number of means of describing this, but most (especially in relation to English as an additional language) made use of CEFR terms, such as C1/C/B2/B1. Other ways of describing language proficiency included: ‘academic learning’, ‘advanced’, ‘Escuela de Idiomas’ or ‘fluent.’

Regarding their professional background, 83% report having previous English language teaching experience, with 17% reporting no prior experience (but with most of these involved in a teaching practicum on their MA at the time of the survey). The range and type of experience also varied considerably, ranging from 6 months post initial qualification, up to 10+ years. The following countries were mentioned as previous teaching contexts: China, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Morocco, Myanmar, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland Thailand, Turkey, UK, and USA. In addition, a large number of participants report having previously taught subjects other than English (54% in total), with a wide array of other subjects mentioned, including unrelated subjects, such as Geography, History, Music, Maths, Philosophy, Sciences and even Sailing.

While we are not aiming to make strong claims about generalizability from our findings, we do consider the diversity of educational and professional environments to be a good representation of the exceptionally broad spectrum of English language teachers worldwide.

Questionnaire, Section 2: Types of English

Our objective in this series of questions was to investigate teachers’ awareness and understanding of the different contexts in which English is used globally. First, we asked

participants to state how familiar they are with a range of terms used to refer to different varieties/types of English, indicating on a scale from 0 (not at all familiar) to 5 (very familiar) how familiar each of the following is to them: *English as a Lingua Franca*, *Global Englishes*, *Indian English*, *Standard English*, *World Englishes*, and finally, but perhaps most tellingly *Good English*. Participants were then asked to indicate how confident they feel about the meaning of these terms, again using a scale from 0 to 5 (not at all confident to very confident). Finally, we asked participants to comment on what they understood in relation to three of these terms, *English as a Lingua Franca*, *Standard English*, *Good English*.

The question regarding familiarity was intended to determine to what extent practising teachers are aware of the globalization of English and the emerging diversity this brings about. Figure 1 shows the responses to each item, represented in gradually increasing shades for each category 0 to 5, where the darker the colour the greater the level of familiarity. As the chart illustrates, there is greatest familiarity with *English as a Lingua Franca* and *Standard English*, and least familiarity with *Singlish*. The terms *World Englishes* and *Global Englishes* enjoy similar levels of familiarity to each other – both considerably more than *Singlish*.

Figure 1.

[Insert Fig 1 here]

As anticipated, participants were generally more familiar with and more confident about *English as a Lingua Franca* and *Standard English*. In relation to the former this can be seen as a result of the input sessions on ELF (though in these sessions ample reference was also made to *World Englishes* and *Global Englishes*), while in relation to the latter this is most likely due to the widespread use of the term *Standard English* in ELT discourse; in other words, it is an established term that language teachers have as part of their professional register. Figure 2 shows the responses to the questionnaire item which addresses level of confidence regarding each term.

Figure 2.

[Insert Fig 2 here]

Following the questions on familiarity and confidence, participants were presented with an open ended question in which they were asked to provide a description of what they understood by three of these terms: *English as a Lingua Franca*, *Standard English* and *Good English*. Our reasons for selecting these particular terms were to gauge to what extent teachers are able to articulate their beliefs and understanding regarding ELF and Standard English. We also wanted to explore how teachers conceptualise the notion of ‘Good English’, which we anticipated they would either associate with Standard English or would define in terms of communicative effectiveness, thus disconnecting the concept from standardized norms.

English as a Lingua Franca

With respect to participants’ descriptions of *English as a Lingua Franca*, we can say with confidence that teachers generally have a very good understanding of the concept of ELF and what this entails. Responses varied considerably in length and detail, but most providing predominantly valid accounts of what lingua franca interaction is. The responses ranged from rather brief and quite succinct responses, as reflected in “The use of English language as a means of communication among speakers of different first languages” (#79), to longer and more detailed ones, as illustrated by “English used in context for communication where at least one speaker is a non-native”, with the respondent adding that “Communicative effectiveness is the focus rather than adherence to any particular local norms.” On the whole, respondents tended to highlight that ELF typically involved interaction among speakers of different language backgrounds, and context was highly relevant in communication.

Quite compellingly, given our objective of raising the profile of ELF in ELT, a number of responses contrasted ELF with Standard English and/or language norms more generally. Other responses related ELF more explicitly to ELT, as in the following example.

The one used by people whose first language is not English, which is not necessarily the one found in textbooks on grammar, but which is understood anyway. (Respondent #25)

A number of respondents provided elaborate accounts of the functional and linguistic properties of ELF. This is reflected especially well in the following description – probably the most comprehensive response to this item.

...communications where English is used as a medium between speakers whose native languages are different, which needs the knowledge of English and the pragmatic activation of the knowledge (e.g. communicative strategies). So the communication is not the conforming to norms but exploration of possibilities of ‘on the fly’ negotiation of meaning.

(Respondent #78)

Out of 68 responses, only one participant expressed strong scepticism about the concept of ELF, stating that they were “Still not sure about it” and adding “I don’t really agree with what we have seen in class” (#54).

Standard English

With regard to *Standard English*, 69 respondents provided a definition, among which we can identify two main standpoints that reflect the teachers’ attitudes towards language, one characterized as more prescriptive and norm based, the other as more flexible and so more reflective of the functional role standard language can play in pedagogy. The following examples reflect a predominantly normative conception of *Standard English*, in which participants strongly associate it with “correct” forms of British and/or American English.

British and American English (#70)

Standard English refers to the Queen’s English (RP) (#67)

The variety of English which sounds more correct (#38)

The correct use of the English language (#5)

In short, these respondents express fairly conventional, quite restrictive views of what counts as Standard English. By contrast, a number of participants (the split between conventional/normative and more flexible/functional views is fairly even) expressed greater awareness of the diversity of English worldwide and seemed to hold a more elastic notion of ‘standard’, as can be seen in the following response.

Any variety of English that is treated as official for some group of speakers. West coast US English and Standard Southern British English are both very prestigious varieties. Also, Standard Scottish English as well as standards for Global Englishes. I'm not sure if it applies to the expanding circle and there is standard Singlish in Singapore, for example (#68)

Where respondents express a more flexible/functional view have referred to notions of correctness, this is generally described in relation to acceptance and prestige – seeing Standard English as a variety that has been assigned special status for social and political reasons, not for any supposed intrinsic properties. This can be seen in the following examples.

The form of English that is accepted as the correct form (#19)

It is the form of English which is widely accepted and used in more formal setting, such as at office or school (#80)

'Good English'

Regarding the concept 'Good English' we identify three quite distinct standpoints among our participants' responses: those who expressed more *traditional views*, closer to a normative approach to language, including those who equated 'Good English' with Standard English; those who held a position we describe as *'ELF compatible'*, in that respondents associated the concept not with a set of norms but rather with a notion of communicative effectiveness; and finally there were several participants who were *uncertain* about the concept of 'Good English', with responses such as "no idea" (four respondents), "no clue", "not sure", "I don't know". The following table contrasts normative descriptions with ELF compatible descriptions of 'Good English' that were provided.

Table 1

<Insert Table 1 here>

Traditional views vs ELF compatible views of "Good English"

In light of these results, we can say that teachers have quite mixed, sometimes ambivalent views when asked to comment on these three concepts (*Good English*, *Standard English* and *English as a Lingua Franca*). On the one hand, they express normative and native-centric views, particularly regarding ideas about what constitutes ‘good English’, but at the same time they express opinions much more in line with thinking prompted by ELF research.

Questionnaire, Section 3: English Language Teaching Priorities

In this series of questions, we explore to what extent the phenomena described in section 2 may be having an impact on teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding English language learning and teaching. Participants were first asked to signal their level of agreement with a set of statements about their approach to language in the classroom, again indicating this on a scale from 0 to 5 (respectively ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’). Statements fall loosely into one of two categories: statements that can be said to represent a broadly conventional approach; and statements that reflect a more transformative approach (c.f. Bayyurt & Sifakis 2015), which we see as having greater compatibility with an ELF perspective. We asked participants to state whether they agreed or disagreed with 10 statements altogether – 5 that are more conventional in approach and 5 that are more ELF compatible. (To illustrate this, here we group them according to whether we consider statements to be conventional or transformative; in the questionnaire itself they were presented in a single list and in a randomised order).

Statements reflecting a more conventional approach

- It is important for learners to use correct language forms when speaking English
- Teachers should correct learners’ errors in class because these tend to cause a breakdown in communication
- English language learners prefer to have NESTs

Statements reflecting a transformative, ELF compatible approach

- The students’ L1 and sociocultural identity are resources that can enrich English
Teachers should encourage students to experiment with new language forms to communicate meaning
- Developing communicative strategies is more important than learning to use correct grammar

- The main target in ELT should be to enable learners to be successful users of English, able to use multiple skills in different contexts while maintaining their sociocultural identity.

In summary, we see a more conventional orientation to language to be characterized by a NS model, with a strong focus on grammatical accuracy according to Standard English, and where the influence of L1 linguistic forms and culture are largely seen in a negative light. By contrast, a more transformative, and thus ELF informed orientation can be characterized by a less norm-based approach to language, where effective communication is more important than accuracy, where L1 linguistic and cultural forms are resources that can be usefully drawn on, and where experimenting with language is seen in a positive light.

Key Findings

Responses to these statements were quite mixed, with no particularly strong trends emerging. For a number of statements there was a fairly even spread across all of the 6 possible ratings. Despite a pattern of fairly mixed responses to items relating to pedagogic approach, there are nevertheless several traceable tendencies. Encouragingly from our perspective as proponents of an ELF orientation, the statements receiving strongest agreement were those representing a transformative, non-conventional approach; by contrast those that received the strongest level of disagreement were statements representing a more traditional view.

We now present a series of charts that show the 3 statements receiving the strongest agreement ratings. The first of these (figure 3) illustrates responses to the notion that the main goal for English language learning should be oriented towards enabling successful communication, rather than being focused on linguistic form and NS sociocultural norms. This item scored a mean rating of 4.07 (out of 5), the highest of all the statements, which strongly implies that our respondents are very open to the idea of basing learning objectives on something other than a NS model.

Figure 3

<insert figure 3 here>

Following this, the next highest rated statement is ‘The students L1 and sociocultural identity are resources that can enrich English’, which scored a mean rating of 3.88. The graph in figure 4 shows that more than 70% of participants (52 out of 73 responses) agreed either strongly or quite strongly that students’ L1 and sociocultural identities can be seen as resources rather than as a hindrance.

Figure 4

<insert figure 4 here>

Finally, and congruent with the two statements discussed above, in figure 5 we can also see a high level of agreement (mean rating 3.85) that teachers should encourage experimentation with language rather than promote adherence to a fixed set of language forms.

Figure 5

<insert figure 5 here>

All three of these statements represent some departure from a conventional perspective on learning goals in ELT, which had until relatively recently been wholly characterized by adherence to a NS linguistic model and NS sociocultural norms.

The responses to our survey suggest clearly that teachers are beginning to move away from traditional assumptions about the goal of second language learning in English and the role of NS models and norms. This is also attested in the relatively high level of disagreement with a number of statements designed to reflect conventional thinking with regard to learning objectives and approaches in ELT. In direct contrast to the item reported in figure 5, for instance, the following statement, ‘the students’ L1 and sociocultural identity lead to negative transfer and can interrupt progress in learning English’ received the lowest mean score (1.85), with more than 65% of participants (48 out of 73 responses) disagreeing with this idea. In summary, while there is still some degree of ambivalence about the relevance of ELF, there are reasons to be cautiously optimistic about the prospect of moving beyond a more conventional norm based approach and adopting alternative practices.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, there appears to be some ambivalence emerging from our questionnaire responses. Our findings strongly suggest that teachers' understanding of how ELF might be relevant to professional practice is intricately bound up with different, sometimes competing notions of what counts as good practice in language teaching, what constitutes "good" English, and finally how teachers identify with English, both professionally and personally. On the one hand, a large proportion of participating teachers, both novice and experienced, expressed awareness and understanding of the role of ELF, and some willingness to accept linguistic diversity and change as valuable for communication. However, many teachers are still understandably attached to the notion of correctness as determined by relatively fixed standard language norms (bearing in mind of course that for many teachers this is in fact a fairly vague, unarticulated concept).

We have found that respondents often navigate between different personal and professional identifications with English: as teachers, as learners and (less often) as users of English. Similar conclusions have already been traced in different ELF oriented teacher education contexts, particularly by Bayyurt and Sifakis (2015), Sifakis et al (2018) and Llurda (2016). What really coincides with our original research question "As English changes, how do ELT practitioners' attitudes towards language and language teaching (need to) change?" is that our respondents sound ambivalent because they are undergoing a complex and gradual process of change, in which their professionally inherited perspectives on language are beginning to give way to a more progressive orientation. This process entails teachers becoming informed about how English is changing globally and then beginning to consider how their own teaching practices might evolve accordingly in response to what has become a more dynamic landscape.

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