

‘ELT for a Global World’

# Changing English in a changing world

## Unit 10

## Misconceptions of ELF Issues in ELF

Éva Illés and Tamás Eitler

Department of English Applied Linguistics

Supported by the Higher Education Restructuring Fund allocated to ELTE by the Hungarian Government



FSA  
2015

# Task

Home assignment: Ishikawa (2015) article

Discussion in groups of 3-4:

What weaknesses of ELF research have been criticised in the literature?

What is Ishikawa's response?

Which side presents more valid points?

# Task

Read Slides 4-8.

Class discussion:

Do you agree that the views presented on the slides represent misconceptions of ELF? Justify your view.

# Misconceptions of ELF

- ELF = “a distinct, monolithic variety for non-native English speakers” (Ishikawa, 2015, p. 39); “one bounded entity, appearing parallel, for example, with British English or Indian English” (p. 44)
- ELF = “an alternative model for the English classroom” (p. 39)

# Misconceptions of ELF

- “ELF research project”:

Researchers “attempt to identify core linguistic features of ELF through empirical, corpus-based approaches ... Aiming to introduce practical transformations into English language teaching, ... these researchers focus their effort on identifying key linguistic features that are crucial in facilitating intelligibility in ELF interaction, so that the teaching of English to non-native speakers may focus on those features instead of ones that do not affect intelligibility significantly. ” (Park and Wee, 2011, p. 361)

# Misconceptions of ELF

- Medgyes (2014, p.183):  
a “grammar of ELF” should be delineated
- Canagarajah (2014, p.769):  
Lingua Franca Core another variety “that multilingual students would switch to when they used English for contact purposes”

# Misconceptions of ELF

- ELF = deficient English

“... a broken weapon; a reduced form of ELF does not condemn L2-users to voicelessness, but risks bringing them stuttering onto the world stage of ELF, i.e. with reduced linguistic capital ...”

(Prodromou, 2008, p. 250)

# Misconceptions of ELF

“... the purpose of ELF research is precisely the empowerment of the non-native speaker”

(Park and Wee, 2011, p. 376)

Essentializing the studied group (Park and Wee, 2011, p. 368)



# Issues in ELF

- Descriptive/prescriptive approach

“... as soon as the language is used it cannot be kept under your control. People appropriate it.”

(Widdowson, 1997, p. 136)

“If object to what people are doing with English, your quarrel is with the people not the language.”

(Widdowson, 1997, p. 139)

# Issues in ELF

- ELF research: (should remain) descriptive  
What is it that people do when they speak it in international contexts of use?  
  
.. we need to adopt a considerably different conceptualization of language which is able to question monolithic views of language ... (Park and Wee, 2011, p. 365)

# Issues in ELF

- Language use (context)

“the **dynamic** and **complex** nature of human communication” (Baird et al. 2014, p. 173)

ELF: “**dynamic, pluralistic** manifestations of linguistic resources in an international setting” (Ishikawa, 2015, p. 39)

“**fluidity, variability, and dynamism** of ELF interactions” (Baird et al, 2014, p. 179)

# Issues in ELF

- Alternative approaches to the description of ELF interaction:
  - **Activity type** (Park and Wee, 2011)
  - **Complexity** (Baird, Baker and Kitazawa, 2014)

# Issues in ELF

- Complexity:

Holistic rather than confined “neat answers”

(Baird et al, 2014, p, 191)

Conceptualise ELF “without being reductive and acontextual” (Baird et al, 2014, p. 172)

# Issues in ELF

- Reductionist paradigm:

“To become an object of scientific investigation it is necessary that the object be delimited and have boundaries imposed upon it, but with such regulation comes the danger of partialism, of ignoring the holistic picture (albeit out of practical necessity) in favour of something more manageable.” (Seargeant, 2010, as cited in Baird et al. 2014, p. 174)

# Issues in ELF

- Baird et al. (2014):

“... any treatment of language that neglects the dynamic and contextual nature of communication is likely to misrepresent both the data gathered and the explanations for what is observed.”

(p. 177)

# Issues in ELF

- Baird et al (2014):

“offering instead conceptualisations of language that can embody the arbitrary, varied, and indefinite ways in which people endow communicative acts with various situational meanings”

(p. 175)



# Issues in ELF

- Baird et al. (2014)

“Complexity theory provides principles that embody non-fixity, incompleteness, and non-linearity within approaches that are held to be consistent with empirical enquiry of various kinds.”

(p. 177)

# Issues in ELF

- Baird et al. (2014)

“... we are utilising complexity theory as a metaphor rather than suggesting that ELF researchers should attempt to build complex system models of “ELF”, as for example, is done in modelling social systems.”

(p. 179)

# Task

Class discussion:

Do you agree that a complexity approach is better suited for capturing the ELF context?

# Issues in ELF

- Complexity theory

the study of ELF = the study into the pragmatics of language variation (Widdowson, 2014)



the conceptual framework of ELF should include pragmatic theories as well

# Issues in ELF

- ELF as activity type (Park and Wee, 2011)

Practice-based perspective:

“... views language as social action, as a product that emerges out of our engagement with things, ideas, and other people in interaction, instead of a fixed structure with a set of rules that determine and delimit its form and patterns of usage.” (p. 365)

# Issues in ELF

- ELF as activity type

ELF: “is better construed as a dynamic context of use, since the notion of ELF would have to refer to an attempt to generalize over a multiplicity of specific contexts, where speakers coming from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds are attempting to use English as a shared means of communication” (p. 369)

# Issues in ELF

- Activity type:

“a fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded events with constraints on participants, setting, and so on, but above all, on the kinds of allowable contributions” (Levinson 1992 as cited in Park and Wee, 2011, p. 369)

# Issues in ELF

- Activity type

“... locates varying constraints on communication not in predefined structural configurations of social roles (...) but in the way in which participants constantly orient the ongoing talk and social action in local context. In this view, such constraints are always emergent and changing, fed by the participants’ recurring practices and subject to extension and experimentation in creative moments” (Park and Wee, 2014, p. 369)



# Issues in ELF

ELF interaction

“distinguished not by the participants, setting, or theme of the interaction (...)” BUT

“about how one could *negotiate* what constitutes allowable contributions”

(Park and Wee, 2011, p. 370)

# Task

Compare the complexity and the activity type approaches: identify the differences and similarities.

Which one provides a better framework for the description of ELF?

# Task

Discuss in groups and then feed back to class:

Apart from suggesting a different approach to the description of ELF, researchers have challenged the relevance and/or the current interpretation of such established concepts as *speech community*, *competence* and *language variety*. Revise what these notions entail and discuss why the ELF context of use may necessitate their replacement and/or reinterpretation.

Compare your ideas with those of the researchers on Slides 28-37.

# Issues in ELF

- Speech community

“this natural English is not the national English of its native speakers” (Seidlhofer, 2011a, p. 142)

ELF users from different linguacultural backgrounds → “the old notion of community based purely on frequent face-to-face contact among people living in close proximity to each other clearly does not hold any more” (Seidlhofer, 2009, p. 238)

# Issues in ELF

- Community of practice

“A much more appropriate concept is that of communities of practice characterized by ‘mutual engagement’ in shared practices, taking part in some jointly negotiated ‘enterprise’, and making use of members’ ‘shared repertoire’”

(Seidlhofer, 2009, p. 238)

# Issues in ELF

- Competence

“... equating competence with conformity to native speaker norms ...” (Widdowson, 2012, p, 16)

NB “the very concept of native speaker competence lacks any clear definition, there is plenty of evidence that it is irrelevant and that ELF users can get by very well without it anyway” (p. 16)

# Issues in ELF

- “The main impediment to an understanding of ELF is the assumption that the only relevant and legitimate construct is native speaker competence.” (Widdowson, 2012, p. 18)
- NS competence: from experience of primary socialization; NS reality, socio-cultural schemata



norms “determined by cultural and identity factors that no longer apply outside native-speaking communities”  
(Widdowson, 2012, p. 19)

# Issues in ELF

- ELF competence

different from NS competence

ELF users: “their construct of English typically has its origins in the classroom”

(Widdowson, 2012, p. 22)

“English taught monolingually but learnt bi- or multilingually” (p. 22)



# Issues in ELF

Widdowson (2012)

“I would suggest that, primed by the experience of their own language, learners quite naturally focus attention on what is functionally salient, give intuitive priority to what is feasible and appropriate, and filter out linguistic features that are surplus to communicative requirement. In short, they develop their own functional grammar.” (p. 22)

# Issues in ELF

- Language pedagogy:

Find out what learners know and how they know it → adjust teaching to it



“learner-centred approach”

(Widdowson, 2012, p. 24)

# Issues in ELF

- Variety:

abstraction, convenient (albeit necessary)  
fiction

“... there are no distinct languages or varieties of language that these communities speak until sociolinguists define them.” (Widdowson, 2012, p. 9)

# Issues in ELF

- Alternative notion of *similect*

“to conceptualise the fluid, contingent similarities and differences of English used as a lingua franca by those from the same first-language (L1) background” (Ishikawa, 2015, p. 39)

# Issues in ELF

- Similect

The shared features of ‘Finglish’ result from many speakers having the same language combination in their repertoire, and thereby similar transfer from their first language. We cannot simply equate the L1-based lects with dialects, but could speak of them instead as ‘similects’, because they arise in parallel, not in mutual interaction. In short, there is no community of similect speakers (Mauranen 2012: 29).

# Task

Class discussion:

The native (NS) – non-native speaker (NNS) dichotomy has been one of the most problematic issues in the research of the use of English.

1. Has the role and status of NSs and-NNSs changed with the lingua franca use of English?
2. Will the NS-NNS dichotomy remain a viable distinction/terminology or are changes to be expected in the (near) future?

# Issues in ELF

- Notion of non-native speaker (Seidlhofer, 2011b)

Elusive to define

Negation implies deficit; native positive associations

Alternatives by Jenkins (2009)

# Issues in ELF

- Native/non-native speaker dichotomy

ELF: bound to lead to a shake-up of traditional ideas



NS/NNS terms: the problem will actually resolve itself in that new and appropriate words will emerge. It may well be that in the not too distant future we will be wondering why we ever thought that we needed these terms at all. (Seidlhofer, 2011b, p. 6)



# Issues in ELF

- Graddol (2006)

The advent of new technology has helped applied linguists understand much better the complexity – and **grammatical untidiness – of authentic native-speaker usage**. The myth of a pedagogically tidy model is much more difficult to sustain now that many dictionaries and grammars are based on corpus research. Native-speaker reference books may be developing as better guides to native-speaker usage, but are less useful as models for learners. (pp. 114-5)

# Issues in ELF

- Graddol (2006)

This is not just because non-native speakers are intimidated by the presence of a native speaker. Increasingly, the problem may be that few native speakers belong to the community of practice which is developing amongst lingua franca users. **Their presence hinders communication.** (p. 115)

# Issues in ELF

- Graddol (2006)

... this is not English as we have known it, and have taught it in the past as a foreign language. It is a new phenomenon, and if it represents any kind of triumph it is probably not a cause of celebration by native speakers.

(p. 11)

# Issues in ELF

- Graddol (2006)
  1. Anyone who believes that native speakers of English remain in control of these developments will be very troubled. This book suggests that it is native speakers who, perhaps, should be the most concerned. (p. 12)
  2. Monolingual English speakers face a bleak economic future, and the barriers preventing them from learning other languages are rising rapidly. (p. 14)

# Task

Class discussion:

1. Do you share Graddol's bleak forecast regarding the role and status of native-speakers?
2. How do the issues raised in this session affect the teaching of English? What changes may ELF necessitate in English language teaching?

# Task

## Task for Unit 11

Read Jenkins' article (2006) on testing.

# References

- Baird, R., Baker, W., & Kitazawa, M. (2014). The complexity of ELF. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 3(1), 171-196.
- Canagarajah, S. (2014). In search of a new paradigm for teaching English as an international language. *TESOL Journal*, 5(4), 767-785.
- Graddol, D. (2006). *English next*. London: British Council.
- Ishikawa, T. (2015). Academic rigour in criticising English as a lingua franca. *Englishes in Practice*, 2(2), 39-48.
- Jenkins, J. (2009). *World Englishes* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Jenkins, J. (2006). The spread of EIL: A testing time for testers. *ELT Journal*, 60(1), 42-50.

# References

- Mauranen, A. (2012). *Exploring ELF: Academic English shaped by non-native speakers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Medgyes, P. (2014). The native/non-native conundrum revisited. In J. Horváth & P. Medgyes (Eds.), *Studies in honour of Marianne Nikolov* (pp.176–185). Pécs: Lingua Franca Csoport.
- Park, J. S., & Wee, L. (2011). A practice-based critique of English as a lingua franca. *World Englishes*, 30(3), 360-374.
- Prodromou, L. (2008). *English as a lingua franca*. London/New York: Continuum.
- Seidlhofer, B. (2009). Common ground and different realities: World Englishes and English as a lingua franca. *World Englishes*, 28(2), 236-245.



# References

Seidlhofer, B. (2011). Conceptualizing 'English' for a multilingual Europe. In A. DeHouwer & A. Wilton (Eds.), *English in Europe today: Sociocultural and educational perspectives* (pp. 133-146). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a lingua franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Widdowson, H. G. (1997). EIL, ESL, EFL: Global issues and local interests. *World Englishes*, 16(1), 135-146.

Widdowson, H. G. (2012). ELF and the inconvenience of established concepts. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 1(1), 5-26.

Widdowson, H. (2014). *ELF and the pragmatics of language variation*. Paper given at the 7th International Conference of ELF, Athens, Greece.