ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA IN LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

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Abstract:
The widespread use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) necessitates changes in the way English is taught nowadays. In language pedagogy this implies a shift from predetermined monolingual contexts of use featuring idealised native speakers to the reality of online negotiation of meaning between non-native speakers of English from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Preparing learners for ELF interactions therefore entails a process- rather than product-oriented view of communication and the definition of competence in reference to the ability to handle the diversity, fluidity and unpredictability of ELF contexts. The task of ELT is then to create conditions where learning and using the language take place simultaneously through the learners’ engagement on their own terms. It is suggested that a use-in-order-to-learn methodology can, among other things, be realised through the reintroduction of two outcasts of communicative language teaching, literature and translation.

Key words: English as a lingua franca, communicative competence, product/process of language learning

1 Introduction

The unprecedented speed of the global spread of English has resulted in fundamental changes in the way English is used around the world. One of the consequences of the rapid global expansion is that English often functions as a lingua franca (ELF) in the communication of non-native speakers who come from a wide variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In fact, nowadays speakers whose first language is other than English constitute the majority of English language users and most non-native speakers communicate in English with other non-native speakers (Graddol, 1997; Llurda, 2004). According to a 1991 estimate, non-native speakers are involved in 80% of the exchanges conducted in English (Beneke as cited in Seidlhofer, 2004). Over the past 20 years this ratio must have risen considerably, and now English must be used even more widely by those whose mother tongue is not English.

If English language teaching (ELT) intends to keep up with the current developments in the use of English, it has to follow suit and implement changes in the way the language is taught. Given the fact that non-native speakers outnumber native speakers, when preparing learners for ELF communication, the target interlocutors should be those with whom learners are most likely to speak English outside the classroom, i.e., other non-native speakers. This then implies contexts of use where less shared knowledge (both linguistic and cultural) can be assumed between the interlocutors, and therefore it is more difficult to predict what kind of English other ELF speakers will be using and how. As a consequence, in ELF situations there is an increased need for flexibility and
awareness of diversity as well as for the ability to adjust to the changing circumstances of online negotiation of meaning. Since current ELT approaches aim to enable learners to function efficiently in acts of communication with native speakers, a shift of focus is necessary for ELT to meet the demands of the widespread international use of English.

In this paper I highlight why past and current approaches to ELT fail to provide conditions for an ELF-oriented language pedagogy and propose the reconsideration of some of the basic tenets of communicative language teaching. I will also argue for the reintroduction of two outlaws of communicative language teaching, literature and translation, by demonstrating how they can create conditions where learners have cope with challenges similar to the ones they face when they act as ELF users outside the classroom.

2 ELT approaches and methods: past and present

Approaches preceding communicative language teaching (CLT) aimed to develop learners’ competence, which entailed the knowledge of grammar. The target students were supposed to achieve was the grammatical knowledge of an idealised native speaker. This view of the notion of competence stemmed from Chomsky’s (1965) definition:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. (p. 3)

Grammatical correctness was therefore the main criterion against which learner performance in the foreign language was judged in pre-communicative approaches. What counted as correct or incorrect usage was determined in reference to the knowledge of grammar of Chomsky’s ideal native speaker-listener.

Dissatisfaction with the limitations of Chomsky’s notion of competence has given rise to an amended definition which has expanded the concept and included the “rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless” (Hymes, 1972, p. 60). The thus developed notion of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) served as one of the basic tenets of communicative language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Of the four components of communicative competence (see Appendix A), the one related to the context of use, i.e., appropriateness is the most relevant to CLT whose overall aim has been appropriate target language behaviour, including the knowledge of “when to
speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner” (Hymes, 1972, p. 60). As in the case of previous ELT approaches and methods, in CLT, too, native speaker norms serve as the yardstick against which the appropriateness of the learners’ use of English is measured. In other words, “communicative target behaviour refers to the target language of the native speaker community in contexts of language use” (Seidlhofer, 1999, p. 237).

Evidence of the fact that learners of English are expected to conform to native speaker norms of appropriateness can be found in the literature. For example, in reference to reading, Ur (1996) observes that “ultimately we want our learners to be able to cope with the same kinds of reading that are encountered by native speakers of the target language” (p. 150). In addition and perhaps more importantly, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001), which provides guidelines for the assessment of foreign language proficiency, often judges foreign language learners’ ability to use the language appropriately in reference to the demands and norms of interaction with native speakers (see, for example, Appendix B).

Although Hymes’s (1972) intention was to replace Chomsky’s concept of the ideal native speaker-listener with real native-speaker language users and situate language “in the flux and pattern of communicative events” (Hymes, 1994, p. 12), the notion of communicative competence in CLT has retained the abstract and idealised nature of Chomsky’s construct (Illés, 2011; Widdowson, 2012). Even though priority is given to appropriateness rather than correctness, when using the foreign language appropriately, learners are still supposed to “emulate the idealized monolingual native speaker” (Kramsch, 1997). As a result, in CLT, students have to aim particularly high by trying to achieve the standards set by a non-existent native speaker “who knows its language perfectly” (Chomsky, 1965, p. 3). As a consequence, according to Alptekin (2002), the notion of communicative competence “with its standardized native speaker norms, is as utopian as the notion of the idealized native speaker-listener” (p. 59, italics in original).

Dubin (1989) sums up what happened during the transfer of the notion of communicative competence from research to language teaching as follows:

… it is apparent that over time there has been a shift away from an agenda for finding out what is happening in a community regarding language use to a set of statements about what an idealized curriculum for L2 learning/acquisition should entail . . . [The concept of communicative competence] has moved away from being a societally-grounded theory in terms of describing and dealing with actual events and practices of communication which take place within particular cultures. (p. 174)
What is then required of students in terms of appropriateness in foreign language use in CLT is a top-of-the-range product, similar to a Ferrari among cars, which can be approximated but never really obtained by a non-native speaker. Yet, the task of ELT professionals, who are predominantly non-native speakers themselves, is to prepare their students for communication with imagined native-speakers to whose idealised norms L2 speakers of English are expected to conform unilaterally.

The validity of a pedagogic model which is based on native speaker competence in abstracted target language settings, representing idealised rules of use (Alptekin, 2002) has been questioned by ELT educationalists recently. Their main argument is that such a model fails to reflect the sociolinguistic reality of the international use of English, and the lingua franca status of English in particular (Alptekin, 2002). Critics of the status quo point out that ELT has to take notice of the sociocultural and language changes that have taken place over the past couple of decades and should apply the insights gained by ELF research to the practice of English language teaching in a pedagogically appropriate manner. Such an endeavour then necessarily implies the re-examination and possibly the recast of the notion of communicative competence (Leung, 2005). The new definition of communicative competence has to include the concern with ELF contexts of use and the bi- or multilingual non-native speakers who use English as “as a convenient means for communicative interactions that cannot be conducted in their mother tongues” (VOICE, 2013).

3 Implications of ELF for English language teaching

As has been outlined above, the predominant use of English comprises exchanges where English functions as a lingua franca, which includes “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). The overwhelming majority of these speakers of English are non-native speakers who often use the language in settings where there is no native-speaker present (Beneke as cited in Seidlhofer, 2004). As a consequence of this, native speaker norms of correctness and appropriateness do not pertain to ELF contexts. In Alptekin’s (2007) words:

But ELF is not a local language with a local culture. It is an international language with the world as its culture. As a case in point, conventions of British politeness, both in cultural and linguistic terms, are chiefly irrelevant in the ELF world. (p. 268)
The contradiction in ELT stems from the gap between what is happening to and in English outside the classroom and the fact that English is still taught as a foreign language with native speakers as the model and target. While ELF communication involves the interaction of mainly non-native speakers representing a wide range of languages and a multiplicity of cultures, the classroom reflects a native-speaker oriented communication. The difference may be expressed as follows:

### 3.1 ELF communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-native speakers</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>Native and non-native speakers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variety of languages and cultures</td>
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<td>Variety of languages and cultures</td>
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</table>

### 3.2 Native speaker oriented communication in ELT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-native speakers</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>Idealised native speaker</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variety of languages and cultures</td>
<td></td>
<td>target language; stereotypical target language culture</td>
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**Figure 1:**

The difference between ELF communication and native-speaker oriented communication in ELT (based on Illés, 2011).

The task for ELT therefore is to bring the two realities – international and classroom use of English – into alignment by designing methods that create conditions which allow learners to prepare for the diversity, fluidity and unpredictability of ELF communication. This implies a change of perspective in at least two respects. One such shift should be regarding the local/global aspect of English language use and teaching. Widdowson (2003) points out that the kind of English which is taught globally is, in fact, the language of a small group of educated native speakers who use it locally in their speech communities. If, however, the concern is English as an international means of communication, the reverse should hold, and English “which is global in its use” (p. 159) should be “local in its learning” (p. 159). This means that English should be taught in a way that meets the particular requirements of specific local teaching contexts rather than accepting the current one-size-fits-all methodology.
Another change should involve moving the attention from the desired product of language teaching (i.e., appropriate native speaker behaviour) to the process of how meaning is created online in various contexts of use. In other words, ELT should focus on the assembly line and not the finished car. This then necessarily entails giving up the unrealistic target of producing native speaker clones who know the language perfectly.

A process-oriented approach can be implemented in the classroom if the classroom provides conditions where learners can acquire English through using the language, i.e., through being engaged in online negotiation of meaning on their own terms both linguistically and schematically. Applying a “use-in-order-to-learn” methodology (Grundy, 2007, p. 244) can ensure that learners do not need to adopt an idealised native speaker’s language and worldview but are encouraged to develop their own ELF speaker schemata and their own idiolect (which will necessarily display the influence of their first language). The language class should not, therefore, be the venue of rehearsing future exchanges with native speakers but, rather, the location where genuine communication takes place which bears a close resemblance to exchanges conducted in English outside the classroom. In other words, there should be a shift from the practice of teaching language for communication to teaching language as communication (Widdowson, 1978). Seidlhofer (2011) summarises this as follows:

What really matters is that the language should engage learners’ reality and activate the learning process. Any kind of language that is taught in order to achieve this effect is appropriate, and this will always be a matter of local decision. So what is crucial is not so much what language is presented as input but what learners make of it, and how they make use of it to develop the capability for languaging. (p.198, my emphasis)

The focus on the learning process and the learners instead of native speakers raises the question of whose norms should serve as the yardstick against which appropriateness in contexts where English functions as a lingua franca should be judged. Who provides the rules of correctness or of language use? Since the interlocutors come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, they bring with themselves different perceptions of what is considered correct or appropriate, and the rules emerge as a result of negotiation between the participants. In such contexts, the rules are not given in advance but are worked out by the interlocutors in relation to the characteristics and specific requirements of particular situations. This implies that interlocutors do not have to adopt pre-defined native speaker norms but have to learn to adapt new patterns of behaviour instead.
The linguistic forms and pragmatic norms created online as a result of ELF users’ cooperative effort involve “both common ground and local variation” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 201). The common ground is comprised of the norms that are shared as a result of the commonalities that prevail in ELT internationally, including the choice of a native speaker variety. This common ground also contains forms and norms that have emerged through the lingua franca use of English (see, for example, the VOICE corpus (2013) which provides data about how English is used by mainly non-native speakers) and through the influence of ELF speakers’ first and additional languages (Jenkins, 2009). Local variation, on the other hand, comes about as ELF users “adjust their speech in order to make it more intelligible and appropriate for their specific interlocutor(s)” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 201). Adjustment strategies include code-switching, paraphrasing and repetition as well as the avoidance of idioms (Jenkins, 2009). It must be noted, however, that these characteristics feature in all types of communication, not only ELF. What distinguishes ELF interactions in this regard is not the nature but the size of the area and the constituents of the common ground (i.e., shared knowledge) and the greater extent to which the lingua franca use of English requires accommodation and communicative strategies. Since participants in ELF interactions represent a wider variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, communication between them necessitates more overt negotiation of meaning and “an enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use” (Canagarajah, 2007, p. 924).

4 ELF in the practice of ELT

In order for an ELF-oriented pedagogy to be implemented, the task is to find ways which pose the challenges that ELF users encounter when they speak English with other non-native speakers. The difficulties of the implementation of such practice stem partly from the composition of the foreign language class where learners of English not only speak the same first language but share the same or similar cultural backgrounds as well. Methods aiming to replicate ELF language use, on the other hand, have to include the experience of otherness and diversity that ELF interactions entail. It seems that two outcasts of CLT can fit the bill in that they can offer alternative and often very different worldviews together with a bi- or multilingual context.

One of the two outlaws is literature, which, by its very nature, promotes individual engagement by presenting a new reality:

What is distinctive about literary texts [...] is that they provoke diversity by their very generic design in that they do not directly refer to social and institutionalized versions of reality but represent an alternative order that
can only be individually apprehended. They focus [...] not on the social contours but on personal meanings. (Widdowson, 2003, p. 135; original emphasis)

Because of its unconventional nature, literature poses problems which require the exploitation of many of the resources available to the reader. As a consequence, when trying to interpret literary texts, students, too, have to make more effort and activate not only their linguistic and schematic knowledge but various meaning-making strategies as well. It must be noted, however, that encouraging learner participation requires a kind of approach to literature teaching which does not impose the writer’s assumed or the teacher’s or other authorities’ interpretation but allows the students to actively authenticate the text in reference to their own experiences. As can be seen from Doris Lessing’s (1972) observation, allowing only one interpretation, in fact, defeats the object in the case of literature:

And from this kind of thought has emerged a new conclusion: which is that it is not only childish of a writer to want readers to see what he sees, to understand the shape and aim of a novel as he sees it – his wanting this means that he has not understood a most fundamental point. Which is that the book is alive and potent and fructifying and able to promote thought and discussion only when its plan and shape and intention are not understood, because that moment of seeing the shape and the plan and intention is also the moment when there isn’t anything more to get out of it (p. xx).

The teaching of literature not only allows for individual involvement and interpretations but can offer opportunities for local decision-making and a reversal of the current ‘local language, global teaching’ practice (Widdowson, 2003). In order to motivate learners to engage with a text both linguistically and schematically, teachers need to find pieces of literature which arouse their students’ interest and suit their immediate learning needs as well. What the teacher and students make of a text on a particular occasion should, too, be a matter of local decisions by the participants in a specific language classroom.

Literary texts used in the classroom do not have to be long or complicated. Even relatively simple ones, such as the poem in Appendix C, can serve as a starting point for discussion or the writing poetry by the students themselves. In addition, the linguistic creativity inherent in text messages can also be exploited for pedagogical purposes, and students can be encouraged to write their own pieces with deliberate flouting of the rules of spelling. Although the example in Appendix D was one of the entries in a competition for 5- to 12-year-olds in Tasmania (Crystal, 2008), learners of English, too, must be able to exploit the
regularities (or irregularities in relation to Standard English norms) in the formation of text messages in English.

Even though the currently dominant monolingual language pedagogy (Widdowson, 2003) has banished the use of the learners’ mother tongue and with it translation, there are several reasons why translation should feature in an ELF-oriented language teaching practice. First of all, both ELF and translation form a link between languages and cultures, and necessarily imply bi- and multilingualism. Both ELF and translation studies reflect a shift of attention from an idealised product to the process of online meaning making (N.B. This feature is less markedly present in translation theory). As Cook (2012) observes:

The implications of translation studies for translation practice are mirrored by those arising from ELF for language teaching and testing. Reflecting the rejection of abstract models of good translation by translation studies, ELF too is less concerned with any disembodied idealisations of English than with what works for actual speakers in specific circumstances. (p. 246)

As a result of a change in perspective, both ELF and translation studies have done away with static rule-based models featuring one-to-one correspondences and have adopted dynamic models which are concerned with immanent use and the actual discourse of real rather than idealised participants (Cook, 2012). Throughout, the emphasis is on the choices ELF users and translators have and the decisions they make rather than the pursuit of perfect ideals.

Translation, especially covert translation which is geared towards the needs of the target language audience (House, 2006), necessitates a careful consideration of the target audience’s background knowledge so that the translation can fulfil the function of the original text. Rendering a tourist brochure written for Hungarians in English, for instance, includes the task of gauging how much and what kind of shared knowledge can be assumed with the future readers of the brochure who come from all over the world and the majority of whom are non-native ELF speakers. Learners need to take the perspective of the target audience and modify the source text accordingly. For example, they have to make decisions about what to include and what not, what they think is relevant for an international audience, what needs to be omitted because of being too culture-specific, etc. In so doing, learners need to be made aware of the fact that the process of translation consists of a series of decisions regarding many different levels of equivalence, including both semantics and pragmatics (Cook, 2010).

5 Conclusions

The main aim of the present paper was to investigate what changes have become necessary in ELT as a result of the widespread use of English as a lingua franca.
The findings suggest that some of the basic tenets of ELT, including key notions such as communicative competence, have to be reconsidered in order to enable learners to cope with the challenges interaction with speakers from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds presents.

First of all, in an ELF-oriented teaching of English the target has to be redefined and as a consequence, native speaker competence has to be replaced with the competence of a bi- or multilingual user who can successfully cope with the demands of ELF communication. In addition, the attention should focus on real language users with the diversity and individual needs that they represent rather than on idealised speakers who are assumed to be able to speak the language perfectly. Second, learners of English have to be prepared for communication with speakers of English who, very much like themselves, are users of English as a lingua franca. Since the parameters of future contexts of language use cannot be determined in advance as in the case of interaction with idealised native speakers, the teaching of English has to focus on the process of communication rather than the product, i.e., what is seen as correct and appropriate native speaker language use. Third, it follows from the previous point that the rule-governed approach currently applied in ELT has to be replaced with a problem-focused practice where learners work out what is correct and appropriate in relation to the requirements of particular situations.

It has been suggested that in order to adopt an ELF-oriented approach, two outcasts of mainstream communicative language teaching should be reinstated as they, with some updating and adaptation, can create conditions which provide the kind of challenges that learners of English are likely to face in ELF exchanges. It must be borne in mind, however, that my intention in this paper has been to put forward proposals, knowing all too well that the final decisions always lie with those who work at the chalkface.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Hymes (1972) Communicative competence

I would suggest, then, that for language and for other forms of communication (culture), four questions arise:

1. Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;
2. Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available;
3. Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
4. Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails. (p. 63)

APPENDIX B

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment

1 Common Reference Levels
1.1 Global scale

B2 Independent user

Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

(Council of Europe, 2001, p. 5)
APPENDIX C

London Airport

Last night in London Airport
I saw a wooden bin
Labelled UNWANTED LITERATURE
IS TO BE PLACED HEREIN.
So I wrote a poem
and popped it in.
(Christopher Logue; http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/london-airport/)

APPENDIX D

Quik hurry-up & txt me
Tell me u luv me
Tell me how much u want me
Tell me im da 1
Oops wrong person
i sent it 2 my mum

(Crystal, 2008, p. 75)