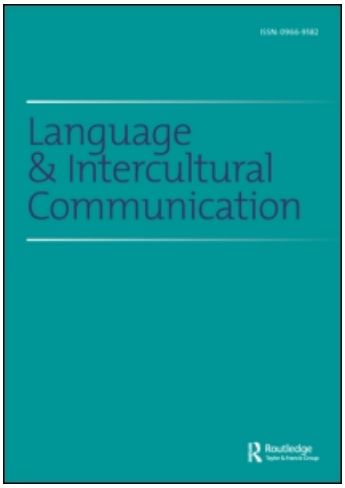

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Alan Maley[a]
[a] English Language Teaching Department, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, UK

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ELF: a teacher's perspective

Alan Maley*

English Language Teaching Department, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, UK

Much attention has been given to the concept of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in recent years. In this article, the premises on which the claims of ELF are based are examined. These claims are submitted to critical scrutiny, and it is suggested that they may well be both statistically and theoretically flawed. More importantly, the dilemmas which the global spread of English poses for teachers in institutional settings are examined. It is suggested that, rather than promoting ELF as an emerging/emergent new variety, it may be more helpful to focus on the interactive process of English used globally, and the raising of awareness of this among learners, while continuing to teach them something approaching a standard variety.

近些年*ELF*（英语作为通用语）的概念受到广泛重视。这篇文章将对*ELF*赖以存在的前提条件进行审视，*ELF*概念也将被严格的检查。并且，此概念无论从数据上还是理论上都可能存在缺陷。更重要的是，在教育机构中教师必须掌握英语的这一概念也将被重新审视。文章指出，与其宣传*ELF*是一个新兴形势，不如将英语作为一个全球互动语言更有帮助，要加强学习者对此意识，同时继续以标准化的方式教他们。

Keywords: English; global; lingua franca; teaching; critical

Introduction

One of the current concepts claiming the attention of both researchers and practitioners is what has come to be known as English as a lingua franca (ELF). Unfortunately, there seems to be more than one definition of what ELF is. On the one hand, there is the relatively 'strong' version, promoted somewhat energetically by Jenkins (2000, 2007) and Seidlhofer (2001), which tends to emphasise the notion of ELF as an 'emerging' or 'emergent' variety or varieties. On the other hand, the term seems to be used virtually interchangeably with English as an international language (EIL; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Rubdy & Saraceni, 2006a, 2006b), where the emphasis is placed more on the diversity and complexity of the process of using English internationally.

The ELF phenomenon arises from the reality, and the realisation, that English has become, for better or worse, the major language of international communication. Both in terms of number of speakers and in the expansion of contexts of use (geographical and functional), English far outstrips any potential rivals. It is widely claimed that there are now more non-native users of English in the world than there

*Email: yelamoo@yahoo.co.uk

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are natives, with all that implies for the loss of dominance by the metropolitan users of English.

The emergence of alternatives to standard metropolitan varieties of English in the post-colonial societies of Kachru's Outer Circle (Kachru, 1992) has long been recognised, of course, and the study of varieties of English in general is well-established (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 1997, 2006; Jenkins, 2003; McArthur, 1998; McKay, 2002). The proponents of the strong version of ELF claim additionally to discern the emergence of one or more distinctive new varieties of English in the Expanding Circle. This, they contend, should be accorded due recognition, so that non-standard usages in these contexts are not subject to negative prejudice or discrimination.

In this paper, I propose to examine a number of questions touching on ELF. I should make it clear that I am approaching the subject essentially from a teacher's point of view rather than as a member of the academic research discourse community, and that I am therefore aware that my views may not be universally acceptable.

In particular, I wish to seek answers to the following questions:

- What are the premises on which the ELF project is based?
- Do they stand up to scrutiny?
- How best can teachers cope with the diversity attendant on the global spread of English?

What are the premises on which English as a lingua franca (ELF) is based?

(1) The claim is that there are now many more non-native users of English (NNS) than native users (NS). The assumption is then made that statistically there must be more NNS–NNS interactions than those between NS–NS. It is therefore on NNS–NNS interactions that we need to focus: 'my approach has been to collect extensive data from ELF interactions (always NNS–NNS from different L1s.)' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 36). NS influence is 'irrelevant': '(native speakers) have no say in the matter . . . they are irrelevant' (Widdowson, 1994). (Does this make Widdowson's views irrelevant too, given his NS status?)

(2) It is inevitable that, as more people adopt English for international interchange, so the more they will adapt it to serve their purposes. Many of these adapted features will be common across different NNS users. In researching actual usage in interactions exclusively between NNSs, Jenkins and Seidlhofer claim to have identified what they term 'Core' and 'non-Core' features in the area of phonology and lexico-grammar, respectively (Jenkins, 2000, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2001). Core features are those which are essential for efficient communication to take place. Non-Core features are those which can be accommodated without serious loss of communicative efficiency. We can therefore, according to this version of ELF, safely ignore them in teaching English for global purposes.

(3) It is claimed that the existence of 'non-Core' features across a wide variety of NNS–NNS interactions supports the idea that an 'ELF' variety is in process of

being born: '... ELF as it is now conceived, i.e. as an emerging English that exists in its own right...' (Jenkins, 2007, p. 2).

(4) If this is the case, it is suggested that administrators, linguists, sponsors and teachers of English should be taking account of this in drawing up language teaching programmes, in compiling materials, and in the way they teach and test English in classrooms:

> However, this development has not so far had much impact on English language attitudes, let alone English language teaching: users of English, NNS and NS, teacher, learner, applied linguist, world English scholar, and general public alike, are finding it difficult to make the conceptual leap needed in order to allow ELF a legitimate place alongside the Englishes of the inner and outer circles... (Jenkins, 2007, p. xi)

> It is my hope that the research findings in this book...will contribute towards a reappraisal that will enable ELF...to be offered as a pedagogical alternative to (but not necessarily a replacement for) traditional EFL. (Jenkins, 2007, p. xii)

Two important issues arise from these claims:

(1) The issue of reification. Does ELF refer to a thing (a variety) or a context of use?
(2) The issue of differences between the aims and purposes of applied linguists and of language teachers. Applied linguists have their own, quite proper, research and theoretical concerns. Teachers have to meet quite different demands (Ur, 2008b). It is therefore important to assess how relevant research-generated theory might be to the daily practice of teaching.

Do these premises stand up to scrutiny?

The statistical argument: there is more to global usage than NNS–NNS interaction

As we saw above, the argument for ELF as an emergent or emerging set of linguistic features is based on the assumption that a majority of these exchanges take place between NNS–NNSs.[1] To quote Seidlhofer (2006), 'Since roughly only one out of four users of English in the world is a native speaker of the language... most ELF interactions take place among "non-native" speakers of English'. Does this assumption logically follow? And is it useful in accounting for the occasions when NNSs are engaging with other categories of users (NSs, speakers of nativised varieties, etc.)?

I have no statistical proof of the percentages of interactions carried on between NNSs compared with other types of exchanges but neither, so far as I know, do the proponents of ELF. However, simply by setting out the many parameters of variability, I suggest that the reality of the situation is far more complex than that proposed by ELF as described above:

- A large number of NS–NS exchanges still take place. There are, after all, some 350–380 million NSs worldwide (Crystal, 2003).

- There is, presumably, a largish number of interactions between Outer Circle nativised users and Inner Circle NSs (e.g. between Indian speakers of English in call centres in India and NS clients in Inner Circle countries).
- There are, too, many exchanges between NS and Expanding Circle users (e.g. North Americans and Chinese).
- A large number of exchanges take place using nativised varieties of English (Kirkpatrick, 2007). In India alone, approximately 50 million people use English on a daily basis. Globally, some take place within the same overall variety (as in India, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, etc.), others between speakers of different varieties (e.g. Indians–Malaysians, Filipinos–Nigerians, etc.).
- There are largish numbers of interactions between Outer Circle users of nativised varieties and NNS users from the Expanding Circle (e.g. Koreans and Filipinos, Chinese and Ghanaians, Nigerians and Italians, etc.).

At this point, it is worth observing that none of the above contexts is the subject of ELF inquiry, which, in the strong version of ELF focuses exclusively on NNS–NNS interactions between participants who do not otherwise share a common tongue. The assertion that the majority of interactions worldwide now take place between NNS–NNSs, seems to have underestimated the significance of the above types of interaction and their sheer complexity. What is more, within any of the above categories, including the NS–NS context, there is ample scope for variation along regional, social, occupational, generational and lectal lines. It seems unrealistic to try to isolate just one set of interactions (NNS–NNS). It is akin to attempting to separate out the yolk, the white of the egg and the milk from an omelette mix.

Learners, consumers or real users?

The premises also fail to make a further crucial distinction. Of the total of NNS, Expanding Circle 'knowers' of English, how many are still essentially *learners* rather than *users*? For example, many of China's English speakers are still encountering English exclusively in instructional settings. The same would be true of many of the estimated 1000 million non-native 'speakers' worldwide (Crystal, 2003).

How many of the remainder are simply *consumers* of English? By 'consumer', I mean a competent user of English whose main contact with the language is in receptive mode: through international TV news channels, films, popular entertainment, magazines, etc., rather than through interaction with another NNS from a different L1.

The case for considering learners or consumers of English as active contributors to the creation of an emerging or emergent new variety of ELF is weak, to say the least. The inclusion of learners at all levels as active contributors to the formation of a new variety would be to deny the existence of any concept of 'errors'. To include consumers would imply that such users of English could influence the direction of its development simply by listening to it or reading it.

There is also the question of how many are genuine *users* of English, in the sense that they actually engage in frequent, regular oral or written interaction with other NNSs from a different L1 background? Prodromou (2008) and Ur (2008a) have both insisted on the importance of basing judgements on 'proficient' NNS users. The more

proficient such users are, the fewer they are likely to be, and the less likely they are to need to create or to have recourse to an 'emergent' or 'emerging' new variety.

Even in this last group of proficient users, we need to ask how much of their time is likely to be spent in this kind of NNS–NNS ELF interaction, and how much in other types of linguistic interaction, for example, in their mother or other tongues or in mixed-code? There are also cultural factors which inhibit the use of English even by proficient users (Lee, 2003). Whereas NSs and even many Outer Circle users will be using English for a large part of every waking day, I think it unlikely that this is the normal case for the NNS user, as defined above. It would also be instructive to examine the range of content of NNS–NNS interactions to gauge what proportion of them were of the basic, formulaic type and which of a more complex type, both discoursally and propositionally (the difference between ordering a coffee and negotiating a contract, for example). It seems probable too, that those most likely to be using English internationally are those whose high level of proficiency in English renders them the least likely to need or to develop a new variety such as ELF, as defined under the 'strong' argument (see Mollin, 2007 on Euro-English, for example).

I would argue, therefore, that the number of NNS–NNS using English internationally is probably much smaller than that seems to be suggested. Even if Expanding Circle users of English number as many as 1000 million, there is no statistical information about the numbers who are real international *users* rather than *learners* or *consumers* of the language.

What is clear is that the sheer range of variability in the use of English is phenomenal, whoever the participants may be, NS or NNS or Outer Circle nativised users, in all possible permutations. In reality, users are faced with unpredictable variability which they must somehow make sense of. The only real justification for restricting ELF to NNS–NNS settings is a theoretical one: to isolate part of a phenomenon in order to observe it uncontaminated by contact with reality. It is perfectly justifiable, for the purposes of academic inquiry, to examine a relatively small sub-set of users, but that scarcely matters in dealing with the practical complexity we are faced with. It is certainly not helpful in the language teaching context (Ur, 2008b). It is in this sense that the ELF 'movement' is largely peripheral to the overall pattern of the global uses of English. I shall return to this later when I discuss alternatives to the ELF project.

The emerging/emergent variety argument

Attention has been drawn to the lack of consistency with which the proponents of ELF have employed the terms 'emerging' (suggesting that there is a final destination in view), and 'emergent' (suggesting that the language is in a constant and unending state of flux). This ambiguous use of terminology is revealingly analysed by Prodromou (2008, pp. 15–37). These ambiguities and inconsistencies do not bear directly on my argument here however, which assumes that ELF is usually regarded by its proponents as a new variety or varieties on the threshold of existence.

No base in a speech community

The premise that ELF is an emerging or emergent new variety overlooks the fact that a new variety needs a base in a speech community. This is precisely what ELF lacks. The aggregate of NNS–NNS interactions globally does not add up to a speech

community. It is no more than an inchoate and disconnected agglomeration of instances of use. As Prodromou has pointed out, one 'cannot make a model from a muddle' (Prodromou, 2008, p. 255). According to Mollin (2007, p. 45):

> Crucially, ELF situations have the frequent attribute of occurring between ever new conversation partners, so that its speaker community is constantly in flux rather than remaining stable and fixed. A user of English as a lingua franca thus has to accommodate to different other speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds with different levels of competence in each speech situation. It is difficult to imagine how a negotiation towards a common standard in all of these ever-changing conversation situations would proceed. Common features in ELF would thus be rather surprising.

Sifakis (2006, p. 155) makes much the same point.

> Such variability in the communication between different NNSs renders any attempt at codifying the various uses of English in EIL situations difficult, since we would have to know in advance many things that are situation-specific and user-dependent.

Meiercord (2004, p. 115) suggests that, 'unlike dialect contact, ELF cannot be conceived as a permanent form of English, since its users do not constitute a stable community. Rather, it is a variety in constant flux, involving different constellations of speakers of diverse individual Englishes in every single interaction'.

And 'Gorlach (2002, p. 151) sees the possibility of certain recurrent features leading to *national* varieties of English, at least in certain domains', but 'it is difficult to pin down what is shared, stable and accepted enough to justify postulating an entity…' (Gorlach, 2002, p. 152, cited in MacKenzie forthcoming, 2009, p. 11).

Does a small number of common features constitute a new variety?

A further point relates to the relatively small list of features isolated by the ELF researchers in relation to Core, non-Core items. A handful of common new features hardly adds up to a new variety. In any case, many of the so-called Core and non-Core items are also shared by NS users and speakers of nativised varieties (e.g. substitution of /t/ for /th/, omission of third person singular -s). What is more, as pointed out above, any NNS–NNS interaction would 'certainly also contain a great number of dialectal idiosyncrasies not shared by others' (Gorlach, 2002, p. 152). While it is surely valuable to be aware of features which may lead to miscomprehension and those which may not, in the hurly-burly of real interactions, participants simply have to make the best sense they can of what they encounter. They are unlikely to be reflecting on whether what they are dealing with is Core or not.

Context more important than 'coreness'?

The basis for describing an item as Core or non-Core is also open to some question. As Littlewood (2007) has recently pointed out, context will play a major role in determining whether, for a given situation, an item is Core or not. In other words, what causes miscomprehension (the basis of diagnosing Core status) will vary considerably. The linguistic sophistication and sensitivity of participants will also bear on the issue.

Contextual features would include number of speakers, levels of circumambient noise, the predictability of the speech event, discoursal difficulty or the complexity of the event, degree of shared specialist knowledge, one-way or two-way communication channels, among others (Anderson & Lynch, 1988, pp. 46–60).

In situations where speakers share knowledge of the topic field, this will set up expectations which enable them to override the relatively trivial matter of phonology and grammar. We tend to hear what we expect to hear. As Crystal (2008, p. 52) points out, 'It is a basic principle of discourse analysis that the meaning of words cannot be grasped in isolation, but must take into account the whole situation in which the words are used'.

Counter evidence

There is at least some evidence which runs counter to the view that there are emerging or emergent ELF varieties. Mollin's study of interactions among users of English in the European Union (EU), based on a corpus of 400,000 words, showed that:

> speakers stick to native-speaker standard usage and make individual 'errors', if one wishes to name them so, depending on mother tongue and English competence generally. There were hardly any common features that united lingua franca speakers, even in a context such as the EU, where speakers use English frequently interact with each other and do have the opportunity to negotiate a common standard. (Mollin, 2007, p. 48)

Others have also produced evidence not in line with the ELF as new variety contention:

> Meiercord (2004) in a study of university students from outer and expanding circle countries in Britain, found that 94% of the utterances by outer circle speakers, and 95% of the utterances by expanding circle speakers were syntactically regular according to NS norms. (Cited in MacKenzie, forthcoming, 2009)

These findings are hardly supportive of Jenkins' claim that 'ELF…is self-determining and independent of Anglo-American English' (Jenkins, 2007, p. 35) and as MacKenzie points out:

> Even if expanding circle Englishes, like outer circle Englishes, are 'norm-developing' rather than 'norm-dependent', they have still largely appropriated the grammatical core of ENL, at least in their written forms, and there is clearly also a great deal of lexis, not to mention pragmatic functions, common to many varieties, including ELF. (MacKenzie, forthcoming, 2009, p. 12)

All of the foregoing suggests that the attempt to find common features in a putative new variety may be a futile and misguided endeavour. We may more profitably focus on the complexity of the totality of communication in English. Perhaps, Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblances' might provide a more fruitful metaphor? In Philosophical Investigations 66 and 67 he suggests, when trying to define the complex concept of 'games':

> […] we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail… And we extend our concept…as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread

> does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres. (Wittgenstein, 1963, p. 32)

There will clearly be many instances where we recognise the language as English ('the overlapping of many fibres') without requiring that all the linguistic features ('one fibre running through its length') be present. In short, the ELF project seems simply to add to the concepts competing for our attention without greatly contributing to the central question of international intelligibility in its entirety.

The issue of teachers and teaching

Although the proponents of ELF frequently protest that they do not expect ELF to provide an alternative model for curricular and syllabus design and materials production, their protestations are sometimes less than convincing. Every so often, it becomes clear that this is precisely what they do hope, for example, when discussing 'ELF as a potential provider of norms for English language teaching' (Jenkins, 2007, p. xii). If that were not so, what would be the point of it all? To stand any chance of widespread adoption as a teaching norm, ELF needs to be accepted in educational circles, particularly in publishing and in test design. There is little sign that this will happen any time soon, and for very compelling practical and financial reasons. Neither ELT publishers nor examination boards can see any profit in killing the goose that lays the golden eggs, namely a standard variety of English, in favour of installing a fledgling ugly duckling with dubious public support among learners, teachers or sponsors.

Learner opinion

There have been relatively few investigations into learner opinions, but those which have been conducted tend to show that learners prefer to be taught what they perceive as a standard variety.

Timmis' survey of teachers and students of English showed that a majority of learners preferred to be taught a standard form. He concludes that, 'While it is clearly inappropriate to foist native-speaker norms on students who neither want nor need them, it is scarcely more appropriate to offer students a target which manifestly does not meet their aspirations' (Timmis, 2002, pp. 240–249). Prodromou's study of the opinions of Greek students of English showed a similar preference for a native-speaker variety (Prodromou, 1992). Jenkins survey, reported in her 2007 book, also showed that there was an overall preference for a standard variety, which to her credit, and notwithstanding her own preferences, she admits, though she does not accept it: 'the fact that participants in studies [. . .] rate NS accents more highly than NNS ones, or express a desire to sound "nativelike" is not of itself reason to condone their position' (Jenkins, 2007, p. 115).

These results are hardly surprising. Learners' aspirations are not unnaturally focussed on what they perceive to be the best they can achieve. As Ur points out in characteristically forthright fashion, 'Learners have a right to be taught the most useful, acceptable, and important forms used for ELF [*in the sense of EIL – my gloss*] worldwide' (Ur, 2008b). To offer less, in the form of an ELF variety which allows non-Core features to pass uncorrected, is to short-change them.

Teacher factors

Although Jenkins finds their attitude misguided, she does acknowledge that a majority of teachers worldwide also still appear to be in support of the status quo (Jenkins, 2007, p. 205). This is hardly surprising either, given that teachers have invested enormous amounts of time, energy and self-esteem in teaching the very models of English that are under assault from ELF. Teachers tend to be prescriptive (and proscriptive) and conservative. Moreover, there are no substantive models or materials available to offer them a viable alternative, were they to wish to change in the direction of ELF. Even were they broadly supportive of the ELF concept, what precisely would the practical implications be for their teaching, other than a vaguely formulated, more tolerant attitude towards learner 'errors'?

A major issue is how teachers in their day-to-day work can deal simultaneously with teaching a standard variety of English to satisfy curricular and examination requirements within an educational bureaucracy, while also preparing their students in some measure for the bewildering variety of English usage they will certainly encounter in the outside world. There is no simple answer to that question – no magic formula, no *open sesame*! Teachers are faced with an impossible task. They are expected to square the circle. With limited time, institutional constraints of syllabus and examinations, they are additionally expected to raise awareness of the reality of the variability which their students will face, if ever they have to use English internationally. The best they can do, in my opinion, is to make students aware that, although they are learning a 'standard' variety of English, they will inevitably meet many other varieties in the outside world. Widdowson's distinction between 'competence' which can, sometimes, be achieved in classrooms, and 'capability', which is the ability to operate in the world outside the classroom, is a useful one, in this context. This may mean exposing them to some of these varieties in comprehension mode, wherever this can be managed, while making it clear that they are not expected to produce such varieties. It may also mean introducing some strategies for dealing with situations where what is to be comprehended is not immediately transparent. For example, some instruction in repair and accommodation strategies would be highly valuable and not that difficult to introduce.

The fact is that ELF is not on most teachers' radar screens at all. Most teachers worldwide are, I suspect, far more concerned with improving their level of communicative effectiveness in English and of finding more effective ways of teaching it than with issues like ELF. It is also true that teachers teach what they are able to teach. For the most part, they do not completely control their own accents or even their own syntax, which will be heavily influenced by their mother-tongue speech community. Though they may assert that they are teaching 'British' or 'American' English, what they are actually doing is attempting to teach a standard variety with whatever accent or grammatical form of English they happen to have, be it Chinese, Brazilian, Spanish, Italian or whatever. And this is perfectly acceptable. Indeed, it is difficult to see what else they might be doing. They would do exactly the same in the unlikely event of a new ELF model coming along too. In this context I find Kirkpatrick's observation about Chinese teachers refreshingly commonsensical: 'local Chinese English teachers have no option but to teach the model they themselves have learned' (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 192).

The notion that ELF could be incorporated into teachers' practice and thereby affect the nascent English of learners worldwide is only an example of some of the

larger delusions which applied linguists and educationists in general suffer from. Firstly, that what is prescribed is what is actually learned. Secondly, that the pronouncements they make on the basis of research or policy decisions are valid for classroom practitioners. As I have pointed out, most teachers of English are sublimely unaware of the ELF debate, which for the most part takes place among a very small group of researchers. Even those who are aware of it, even if they sympathise, live in a very different reality from that of the researchers. Researchers are concerned with discovering new truths by empirical inquiry. Teachers are committed to promoting effective learning among their students. The world of theory and research has rarely had much direct impact on what teachers do in classrooms, and it is unrealistic to suppose it should. However, applied linguists, who exercise power through their ready access to publication, often assume their impact to be more significant and widespread than in fact it is. A far wiser and more realistic take on this issue is encapsulated in the title of a plenary lecture given recently by Prabhu, 'Teaching is, at the most, hoping for the best' (Prabhu, 1999).

In summary, to quote from Mollin (2007), p. 52) again:

> [. . .] while it is certainly true that teachers and producers of teaching materials should do their best to make English teaching as relevant to the students as possible, the perspective that ELF is no stable variety as such would make it a bad teaching standard. . .Furthermore. . .the needs of learners of English should not be presupposed by us linguists.

What is to be done?

Work with what we have

I suggest that, rather than inventing a new variety, we should concentrate on working with the varieties already in existence. There are well-established nativised varieties in many parts of the world; the Indian sub-continent, Malaysia/Singapore, the Philippines, West Africa, South Africa, the Caribbean, etc. In the Expanding Circle too, I would argue that there are recognisable varieties in Brazil, most of the Spanish-speaking world, Scandinavia, China, Russia, the Gulf/Arab world and in most European countries. Teachers in these areas will usually have the aspiration to achieve something approaching a standard variety, but will inevitably teach what they know. This will, in the best case, lead to a perfectly comprehensible variety of English with a more, or less, marked local flavour: and will help to produce proficient users of English, rather than native-sounding ones. This will be perfectly adequate for interaction with any other users of English, be they NSs, users of nativised varieties or NNSs from the Extended Circle, without any need to postulate an ELF variety. This polycentric model should, of course be characterised by a respect for local variation and a willingness to engage in the mutual pursuit of comprehensibility. To quote Canagarajah, 'Creating an appreciation of differences and a readiness to negotiate diversity will see to it that this hybrid system of World Englishes bridges communities rather than fragments them' (cited in Rubdy & Saraceni, 2006a, p. 209).

Such a polycentric approach is likely to be more acceptable to local users than a mythical new variety imported from elsewhere. It would be more teachable – it is what is being taught anyhow – more readily comprehensible between communities and more respectful of local identity. To adopt such an approach would be to acknowledge that, for the learning of the language, there has to be some sort of

model or standard, however vaguely defined. This could be a local or a metropolitan model, depending on the local context.

From product to process

I suggest that, in terms of teaching, we need to move away from a product-based to a process-based approach. Rather than attempting to incorporate the Core features into our teaching, we should be inducting students into an awareness of diversity and of strategies for dealing with it (and this is something which could also profitably be extended to NSs!). There is no way we can teach all the diverse varieties students will meet. What students need is some firm basis from which they can confidently reach out. As in art or music, we need to master the fundamentals before experimenting with variations. What we are able to teach is how to deal with diversity, through developing a respect for difference and a positive attitude to accommodation. These qualities will be the key to survival in the world of English outside the classroom. In other words, we will always be faced with a degree of unpredictability, so that it makes better sense to prepare students for this than to equip them with a codified system which will fail to meet their needs. It is the skills of accommodation which are needed, not another codified system. As Canagarajah points out:

> We know from studies in speech accommodation that speakers make mutual modifications in their speech to facilitate intelligibility. We also know from conversation analysis that speakers skilfully employ strategies of repair, clarification and paralinguistic interpretation (that includes gestures, tone and other cues) to negotiate differences. (Cited in Rubdy & Saraceni, 2006a, pp. 208 and 209)

In adopting this approach, we would be more concerned with the use of the language rather than the teaching of a model: with the user rather than the code.

Learning out of class

The limited amount of exposure to English which students receive in classrooms is a key issue. I suggest that we need to expand the opportunities and incentives for students to encounter and engage with English outside the classroom. That is, after all, where most of us learn what is useful to us in the real world. Given the massive expansion of multi-media and electronic communication, getting an education outside school is now a far easier task than it once was. Through popular songs, rap, E-mail, the www, blogging, texting, DVDs, TV and the abundance of reading materials now available, learners have the opportunity to acquire aspects of English we have no way of teaching in the classroom. They are already primed and motivated to do this. Our role is to encourage, rather than to discourage it. But we also have the responsibility for trying to develop a sense of appropriacy through our classroom teaching. Anything goes, up to a point... but not all the time and in every situation. Learners need clear-cut and authoritative guidance. It is our responsibility to help our learners navigate the troubled waters of convention.

Conclusion

Those who have presumed to criticise or disagree with the ELF position adopted by Jenkins and Seidlhofer, or worse still, to have ignored it, have generally been accused

of entertaining misconceptions about it, and of supporting an entrenched, politically incorrect position relative to the native speaker issue (Jenkins, 2007, p. 31). I do not believe that I have misconstrued the ELF position. Neither do I belong to the intolerant minority of those who rally to the defence of the native speaker fortress. I feel that it is unfortunate that 'standard English' has so often been equated with 'native speaker English'. To suggest that learners should acquire a standard form of English to the best of their ability is not to suggest that they thereby aim to become 'native speakers', but is it to suggest that 'native speakers rule, OK!'. Native speakers are frequently among the most non-standard of users, and a large number of non-native speakers use standard English with far greater skill and accuracy. In this context, it is unfortunate that Kachru's three circles model has become so ingrained in our belief system about English in the world, since it tends to reinforce the idea that competence derives from provenance, whereas they are so clearly separate in reality. A better model, based upon competence de-linked from provenance is provided by Svartvik and Leech (2006). With this in mind, I shall summarise my criticisms of the ELF position in its 'strong' form.

I have suggested that the ELF concept is flawed in a number of ways:

(1) It is statistically unreliable. There is no proven basis for the claim that a majority of interactions by volume are between NNS–NNS participants. There is no distinction made between NNS learners, consumers and users. The lower frequency of regular daily use of English among NNSs is also not factored in.
(2) It is theoretically untenable. A comprehensive model of Global English would have to be inclusive, dealing with the whole gamut of interaction types: NS–NS, NS-Nativised variety, NNS-Nativised variety, NNS–NS and NNS–NNS. There also appears to be no linguistic speech community which could form the basis for a new variety. 'Core' features are few in number and insufficient to support the notion of a new variety. They are also heavily dependent on context. Furthermore, there is evidence which runs counter to the notion of ELF as an emerging variety.
(3) It is practically unworkable. The attitudes and vested interests of sponsors, the views of learners and teachers, and the practical difficulties of classroom implementation all render the ELF project inoperable in practice.
(4) What we can do is to teach something as close to a 'standard' variety as possible, while at the same time raising learners' awareness of and respect for the variability they will encounter the moment they leave the safe haven of the classroom.

Note on contributor

Alan Maley has been involved with the teaching of English as a foreign language for 45 years. He worked for the British Council in Jugoslavia, Ghana, Italy, France, China and India (1962–1988), before taking up the post of Director-General, Bell Educational Trust, Cambridge (1988–1993). He was Senior Fellow in the National University of Singapore (1993–1998), then set up the MA programme in ELT at Assumption University, Bangkok (1999–2003). He was series Editor for the Oxford Resource Books for Teachers from 1984 to 2009, and has published over 30 books and numerous articles. He is currently Visiting Professor at Leeds Metropolitan University, and a freelance author and consultant.

Note

1. I am aware of the polemicised, politically correct debate about the inadequacy of the term native and non-native Speaker. The terms still seem difficult to eradicate, and serve as useful shorthand when used without value-loaded baggage.

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