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From ELF communication to lingua franca pedagogy

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I first met Barbara Seidlhofer in September 2003 at the Annual Conference of the German Society of Applied Linguistics (GAL) at the University of Tübingen. Her enlightening plenary talk and the many discussions that were to follow opened a door for me and inspired my own excursions into ELF territory.

1 Communicative language teaching and ELF communication

The story of the evolution of lingua franca pedagogy needs to be told against the backdrop of the communicative turn in English language teaching since the early 1970s. Triggered by Dell Hymes' (1972) trail-blazing theory of communicative competence and seconded by advances in pragmatic and psycholinguistic studies on utterance comprehension, the English classroom came under the influence of communication. Learning objectives were changed to include a focus on communicative skills, and communication was advocated as the principal method of teaching and learning (Littlewood 1981). Task-based teaching (Willis and Willis 2007) and immersion approaches (Johnson and Swain 1997) further influenced and enriched the pedagogic spectrum of communicative language teaching, eventually culminating in various manifestations of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010), such as e.g. bilingual subject education (in English, French or Spanish) in German schools. And what is more, with the explicit reference to intercultural communication and English as a lingua franca, educational regulations for school curricula finally seem to answer to urgent learning needs resulting from changes in a world of global communication (Kultusministerkonferenz 2012).

However, while the communicative orientation in language teaching no doubt yields positive learning outcomes, far too many young people are leaving school today without being able to cope with the challenges of real English communication to their own satisfaction. They seem to feel communicatively less competent than desirable, notably less than could be expected after all those years of English in school. How to help learners improve their speaking skills is a recurring topic in online discussions about English language teaching (ELT). Top tips include increasing students' speaking time in class and avoiding corrections except serious ones: "Let them believe that they can communicate in English even if they make mistakes in pronunciation, grammar etc. Compliment students for speaking!"¹ But is this sufficient for making non-native speakers feel comfortable in real communicative interaction outside classroom contexts?

Descriptive ELF studies, urgently and persistently demanded by Barbara Seidlhofer and significantly influenced and shaped by empirical insights gained in her VOICE project², have sustainably changed our understanding of the characteristics and challenges of communication

¹ <http://eteachershub.com/2014/12/10/top-5-tips-improve-speaking-skills-esl-class/>

² <http://www.univie.ac.at/voice/>

under lingua franca conditions. Quite obviously, to ensure communicative success, non-native speakers need to resort to a rich array of communicative strategies including e.g. paraphrasing, accommodation, co-construction, negotiation of meaning, or resolving misunderstandings (Cogo and Dewey 2012; Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey 2011; Mauranen 2006; Pitzl 2010, 2005; Seidlhofer 2011). And what is more, in their endeavour to find appropriate expression for their communicative and communal needs and intentions, they creatively exploit and extend the English they were taught beyond mere correctness, thus appropriating and making the language their own (Seidlhofer 2011; Seidlhofer and Widdowson 2009). This is the bright side of the coin. Whether speakers always succeed with what they want to achieve is, however, a different issue and a matter of debate in ELF related research discussions (Kaur 2011; Albl-Mikasa 2013).

2 ELF-aware teacher education

How can these insights about ELF communication be used to improve the communicative force and validity of English language teaching? Dewey (2012) emphasizes the need for teachers to become aware of the strategic and creative qualities of successful ELF communication; he strongly argues for helping them to replace their typical focus on Standard English (SE) correctness by an overall post-normative orientation. In a similar vein, Hall et al. (2013) challenge the pedagogic validity of monolithic views of English; their online course “Changing Englishes”³ is designed for teachers to develop awareness of “the ‘plurilithic’ nature of English and of the multiple, locally-modulated outcomes of actual learning and teaching processes [. . .] and to become comfortable with the notion of locally-appropriate learning objectives and outcomes” (p. 3). Also compare Bayyurt and Sikakis (2015) and Sifakis (2014), who propose a transformative teacher education approach aiming to enable teachers to make insights from ELF communication research their own and, in doing so, eventually change their teaching practices.

To educate teachers about the dynamics of English and the creative ways of ELF communication is certainly necessary for helping them to develop and implement ELF-aware learning and teaching approaches. But is this sufficient? In my own ELF-related seminars and workshop discussions with teacher students and in-service teachers, I frequently noticed a mismatch between readily understanding and acknowledging the strategic competence and creativity of ELF speakers and a persistent reluctance to open up to ELF-aware pedagogic views (also see Vettorel 2015). Further increasing awareness didn’t seem to help. A typical reply would be some variant of “I don’t want to teach incorrect English”. What held them back was not so much a lack of empirical insight into the nature of ELF communication but rather their negative evaluation of certain characteristics of ELF performance they judged as deviant from SE. Considering the prominent role of SE in ELT, this conflict between teachers’ SE orientation and their newly gained insights into ELF, nor their preference for a “resolution” in favour of the former were hardly surprising. Key areas of ELT thinking, from educational regulations to testing methodology to communicative language teaching approaches, are generally permeated with the unquestioned assumption that learning success critically depends on compliance with SE norms.

ELF research, however, clearly shows that successful communication in English does not necessarily require SE correctness (Seidlhofer 2011: chap. 5). On all levels of language from phonology to lexico-grammar to pragmatics, communicative interactions in real-life contexts are abundant with deviations from normative conventions. Reviewing and discussing the empirical

³ www.yorksj.ac.uk/changing-englishes

evidence from various angles, Seidlhofer (2011) emphasizes “that non-conformity of form does not at all preclude functional effectiveness but on the contrary can enhance it” (p. 127). The question thus remains whether SE and ELF communication are essentially in conflict with each other, or whether it is possible to harmonize speakers’ aspiration for SE correctness with successful ELF communication as two complementary instead of opposing pedagogic objectives. Barbara Seidlhofer’s own understanding of the pedagogic implications of ELF research prepares the ground for a reconciliatory solution which clearly leaves room for SE, as it does for any other target language model.

I am not advocating that descriptions of ELF should directly and uniquely determine what language is taught in the language classroom. [...] What really matters is that the language should engage the 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 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. The pedagogic significance of an ELF perspective is that it shifts the focus of attention to the learner and the learning process.

(Seidlhofer 2011: 198)

Complementary support comes from a social constructivist understanding of language learning. According to the “my language”/“my English” condition (Kohn 2011, 2015), learners/speakers acquire a language by collaboratively creating and developing their own version of it in their minds, hearts and behaviours. The individual and social construction processes involved operate on and are influenced by a number of shaping forces including in particular the learners’ native language(s), linguistic input manifestations, type of (communicative) exposure, linguistic target models and learning objectives, teaching and learning approach, motivation and effort, and others more. What gives these forces their impact, however, are not their external manifestations but rather the internal representations a learner happens to create of them. Such an internal view is not common in ELT thinking, in particular not with reference to linguistic target models based on Standard English or Native Speaker English. Throughout the history of ELT these concepts have generally been understood and discussed in relation to externally given pedagogic norms and conventions imposed upon the learner from the outside. Since ELF researchers have always emphasized an endonormative perspective, it is thus no wonder that learning objectives and assessment criteria referring to (native speaker) SE are a solid bone of contention between ELT and ELF.

A pedagogic reconciliation between ELT and ELF becomes possible through a social constructivist reconceptualization of SE and its pedagogic status and role. Besides being advocated (or rejected) as an *externally conceived and imposed* pedagogic norm, SE also has a *learner-internal manifestation* as the result of mediating perception processes and the individual, social and pedagogic factors by which these are influenced. Social construction processes of language learning begin with learners’ transformational perception of initially external norms and conventions, eventually resulting in their own creative representations. It is these internally modified versions of externally given target norms and conventions that actually guide and influence learning. Social construction continues with how learners (are allowed to) pursue their SE orientation. Are they required to closely follow the chosen SE model in as strict a fashion as possible? Or is there an open leeway for all the other shaping forces in the social constructivist concert of learning? It makes all the difference whether the social constructivist, learner-internal quality of SE is ignored and suppressed, as is commonly the case in ELT, or whether it is comfortably acknowledged and pedagogically

exploited from an ELF-aware perspective. Making teachers and learners aware of the need to reinterpret the status and role of SE in the light of an open, social constructivist understanding and to change their attitudes and pedagogic requirements accordingly are necessary steps in the process of implementing an ELF dimension within ELT.

3 Lingua franca communication practice through telecollaboration

Acceptance and adoption of a pedagogic social constructivist view is, however, only part of the solution and needs to be complemented with rich exposure to authentic lingua franca communication in English. Helping learners develop their ELF competence simply requires as much intercultural communicative practice as possible. The range of communicative challenges offered should be sufficiently wide and diversified to include opportunities for raising their awareness of unfamiliar characteristics and requirements of ELF communication, practising comprehension and production under ELF conditions, adapting and expanding their strategic sensitivity and skills, as well as exploring and ascertaining their non-native speaker creativity (Kohn 2014, 2015). What is thus required is intercultural contact and communicative interaction among speakers from different lingua-cultural backgrounds, who share a natural and urgent need for using English as a means of communication. This is arguably difficult, if not impossible, to implement in ordinary classroom settings.

Promising solutions emerge with the rise of web-based social media and communication technologies from asynchronous forum and blog tools to synchronous chat, videoconferencing and virtual world environments. These very same technologies that are increasingly being used by people around the world, including students and pupils, for everyday purposes of communication are also available for imbuing the foreign language classroom with intercultural and communicative authenticity (O'Dowd 2011). They offer no less than the possibility of exploiting the communication and socialising environments learners are familiar with in their real lives for intercultural communication and collaborative language learning in the school environment. Pedagogically motivated intercultural telecollaboration exchanges offer rich opportunities for natural and authentic lingua franca communication between pupils of different languages and cultural backgrounds. Strengthening foreign language communication outside and beyond the physical classroom through intercultural telecollaboration harbours the potential for an innovative revitalisation of the decades-old communicative language teaching approach (Kohn and Hoffstaedter 2015).

In the following, I will sketch out a pedagogic lingua franca approach designed, implemented and evaluated in the EU project TILA ("Telecollaboration for Intercultural Language Acquisition") from January 2013 until June 2015.⁴ The overall objective in TILA is to explore how virtual worlds and videoconferencing as well as chat, forum and blog can be used to facilitate spoken and written intercultural communication and learning between secondary school pupils across Europe (Hoffstaedter and Kohn 2014; also see Grazzi 2013; Vettorel 2013). Four target languages – English, Spanish, French and German – are addressed in two complementary pedagogic language constellations, tandem and lingua franca. The "tandem" constellation requires telecollaboration partner A's native language to be partner B's target language, and vice versa; it thus incorporates the native speaker preference of the common ELT approach. The "lingua franca" constellation, on the other hand, radically departs from this "ideal" in that both telecollaboration partners communicate in a shared non-native target language. Focus is on intercultural communicative exchanges between

⁴ www.tilaproject.eu

peers who are in the same language boat. Communication-related requirements, comprehension and production skills as well as interaction strategies come to the fore. In addition, being able to mirror oneself in the performance of other non-native speakers helps learners to adopt an open, social constructivist orientation towards their target language.

Since the lingua franca constellation may apply to any of the target languages offered in TILA, the pedagogic lingua franca approach is generalized and extended beyond English. The justification for this move is not so much reliant on the respective language being in use as an attested lingua franca (as is the case with English), but rather on the very nature of language learning as a social constructivist process of creation. From this perspective, *ELF* pedagogy is a special branch of *lingua franca* pedagogy, which itself should be conceived of as the consequential further development of communicative language teaching, reaching out beyond the confines of a traditional (and implicitly behaviourist) exonormative orientation towards native speaker norms of correctness and appropriateness. Lingua franca pedagogy incorporates Hymes' (1972) notion of communicative competence originally developed with reference to native speakers and extends it to apply to non-native speakers as well (Leung 2005; Widdowson 2012). Unlike Canale and Swain's (1980) exonormative adaptation of communicative competence for purposes of second language learning and testing, however, its social constructivist lingua franca reinterpretation keeps the endonormative quality inherent in Hymes' judgment dimensions of possibility, appropriateness, feasibility and probability. From a truly communicative perspective, non-native speakers in general, not only those of English, need to be granted creative agency in relation to their respective target orientation.

The pedagogic validity of the TILA lingua franca constellation is convincingly demonstrated by evaluation feedback gained from teachers and pupils after having participated in telecollaboration exchanges (also see Hoffstaedter and Kohn 2015). The exchanges were organized outside class hours as videoconferencing, virtual world (OpenSim) or forum exchanges in the school's computer lab or from pupils' home computers. Conversation topics were related to the pupils' own experience and opinions and included e.g. *Fashion and dress code in school* or *A day without mobile phone or computer*. The task was to communicate in speaking or writing depending on the affordances of the technological environment and to discuss one's opinions and prepare a summary account for a follow-up session in class. Most of the feedback comments referred to German lingua franca conversations between Dutch and French, and Dutch and British pupils, respectively. Initially, teachers were concerned about losing control over their pupils, in particular when interacting from home, and they also feared that some of them might be tempted to avoid speaking German and shift to English as a more familiar lingua franca. These worries were not confirmed. A teacher's comment: "Ich bin total zufrieden mit dem, was passiert ist" ["I am entirely happy with what happened."]. The pupils communicated in German, felt more comfortable and less inhibited to stretch their limits, saw more proficient peers as encouraging stimulation, and were ready to help each other. Communicating with non-native speakers was often experienced as less anxiety-inducing than with native speakers. Similar comments were made in connection with English encounters between German and Spanish pupils. One of the Spanish pupils mentioned the additional advantage of having exposure to international English accents, thus clearly showing awareness of the global lingua franca status of English.

4 Conclusion

This article aims at an ELF-aware transformation of ELT. A social constructivist understanding of language learning provides a basis for the reconciliation of ELT's orientation towards SE with ELF's

call for granting creative agency to non-native speakers. Developing teachers' awareness of the nature of ELF communication and exposure of learners to intercultural communicative interaction are identified as prime conditions for ELF-aware language learning and teaching. With reference to the European project TILA, telecollaboration tools and scenarios are described as a means to facilitate authenticated intercultural communication between pupils from different countries and thus to overcome the natural constraints of the common language classroom. Finally, TILA case studies demonstrate that the pedagogic lingua franca approach can be generalized and successfully extended to target languages other than English. All in all, in combination with telecollaboration, research on ELF communication and ELF pedagogy provides a fertile ground for opening the windows of the foreign language classroom to the breeze of real life communication.

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English as a Lingua Franca Dr Alessia Cogo University of Southampton In this session

- We conceptualize the spread of English in the world (Kachru's model)
- We explore the phenomenon of English as a Lingua Franca (Kachru's model)
- Kachru (1992: 356)
- Most useful and influential model
- World Englishes divided into three concentric circles: 1 Inner Circle: ENL countries, "norm-providing"
- 2 Outer. (Crystal, 2008) What is ELF?
- ELF constitutes a common means of communication for speakers of different first languages.
- ELF is currently the most common use of English world-wide. In English as a lingua franca (ELF) interactions, where English is used as a medium of communication among speakers of different first languages, the conformity to native English speaker norms is not as crucial for successful communication as teachers have traditionally thought (Seidlhofer 2011).
- 2 Communication strategies: Conceptualizations and pedagogy. In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), CSs have been regarded as production phenomena consciously used by learners to resolve communication problems. According to Ellis, CSs have been described as "cognitive processes involved in the use of the L2 in reception and production" (Ellis 2008: 502) as well as "discourse strategies that are evident in social interactions involving learners" (Ellis 2008: 502).