

1.1.1 Defining English as a Lingua Franca

Transcript

Slide 1

Welcome to the 'Defining English as a Lingua Franca' sub-section of the 'English as a Lingua Franca' section.

Here you will come across different definitions of ELF so that you will reflect upon them and acquire a critical understanding of this concept.

Slide 2

To begin with, before we provide any definition of ELF, we would like you to think about your experience as a user of the English language and try and remember what was discussed in the 'English as a Lingua Franca' section of this course. Think about the ways you use English, when, with whom and where you use it. So, based on your own perception of ELF, make a list of key words or phrases that could be used to explain the role of English as a lingua franca. Try to come up with as many words or phrases as possible.

Slide 3

The first definition we would like you to examine is one provided by Alan Firth in 1996. As you read the short definition on screen try and identify the words or phrases that characterize the key concepts of the definition. They may be some of the key words or phrases you thought of a while ago or they may be new to you. Once you are done, move on to the next slide.

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Now, look at the words and phrases highlighted in the definition. Were they the same as those you identified? Among other important concepts that may be found in the definition, we believe that it is crucial to understand ELF as a language of contact between people. We would also like to emphasize the idea that English is the language of choice among people who need to communicate. On the whole, what Firth seems to underline is that English as a lingua franca is the language of choice for communication among people from different language and cultural backgrounds.

But before you read this definition, were you familiar with the concept of 'contact language'? Because we think it is a fundamental notion in order to comprehend ELF, move on to the next slide for a thorough definition of 'contact language'.

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According to the *Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, a contact language is a simplified variety of a language that serves as a tool of communication between people who do not share a common language, maintaining characteristics of the languages of the speakers involved in the communicative exchanges. Although it offers a definition based on historical facts, such definition may be undoubtedly applied to the current role of English as a language of communication among speakers who do not share a common language.

The second definition we would like you to examine belongs to Juliane House from 1999. As you read the short definition try and identify the words or phrases that characterize the key concepts of the definition. They may be some of the key words or phrases you thought of a while ago or they may be new. Once you are done, move on to the next slide.

Slide 6

Now, look at the words and phrases highlighted in the definition. Did you identify the same ones? In this definition the main idea is that ELF interactions take place among non-native speakers of English from different linguacultures. As you can see, similarly to Alan Firth, Juliane House also believes that ELF is used by those who do not have English as their mother tongue. The new concept though is of "linguaculture". Are you familiar with it? Move on to the next slide for a better understanding of what it means.

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Sometimes you may encounter linguaculture or languaculture, both terms can be used interchangeably. In either case, the word can be divided into two parts: language and culture. Both co-exist alongside each other and influence one another. In any communicative situation, for instance, it is not enough to simply say words and sentences; the discourse produced also needs to be taken into account. We must indicate to our listeners not only "who" we are, but also "what" we are doing, what action we want to achieve. In addition, the meaning of what is said also needs to be contemplated. In this case, it is not enough to just know the meaning of words, since discourse is closely linked with the participant's cultural background and experience. In view of this, when considering ELF interactions, participants need to be aware of how their interlocutors' linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as their own can influence communication.

Slide 8

There is another definition you need to consider before we move on. It was proposed by Jennifer Jenkins in 2013. Once again, please read the quotation on your screen and highlight the words or phrases you consider to be central to this definition. Move on to the following slide once you have completed this task.

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Now, look at the words and phrases highlighted in the definition. As you might have noticed, Jenkins also views ELF as a language of contact, but she stresses that it is the most widespread use of English of our times. What is interesting about this definition is that Jenkins has explicitly included NESs in her definition. This means ELF interactions can take place among anyone who chooses to use English as a medium of communication no matter what their mother tongue.

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Taking into account Jennifer Jenkins' definition on the previous slide, read carefully the following two questions and consider your own experience as both a user and teacher of English. How would you describe a native and non-native speaker? In your opinion, what are the similarities and differences between both? And what role do both have in teaching and learning English? Pause the video to think about these questions and click the link under the video to share your opinions.

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Now that you spent some time thinking about the concepts of 'native' and 'non-native speakers' based on your experience as a user as well as a teacher of English, compare your definition of a native speaker with the definition provided by the Merriam Webster online dictionary. To put it briefly, this dictionary suggests that you are a native speaker of the language you learn in the place where you were born. By contrast, this definition implies that a non-native speaker of a language would be one who learned it as a foreign language. Do you think this definition is complete and clearly describes what a native speaker is? What if you consider the current role of English as an international lingua franca? Is it relevant to think about the dichotomy native and non-native speakers? Read the quotation by Brutt-Griffler and Samimy. Do you agree with it? According to them, categorizing the current users of English as an international language by their national identities, that is, their sense of belonging to one nation or one state, is contradictory and unreliable.

You will be able to work up on these ideas when you explore the concepts of identity and ownership of English and the concepts of native and non-native speakers in the 'Key Issues' subsection of the 'English as a Lingua Franca' section in this course.

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The fourth and last definition we would like you to examine is the most recent one from 2018, and belongs to Anna Mauranen. As you read this longer definition, try to identify the words or phrases that characterize the key concepts of the definition. They may include some key words or phrases you have already identified, or they may be new. Once you are finished, move on to the next slide.

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Now, look at the words and phrases highlighted in the definition. Are they the same ones you identified? Because this is a longer and more comprehensive definition, there are several key ideas that stand out. First of all, the notion of English being a contact language is once more highlighted, and similarly to Jennifer Jenkins' definition, both native and non-native speakers are included. Because ELF can take place with whomever and wherever, Anna Mauranen describes it as a "non-local lingua franca" that can be used by anyone anywhere for any given purpose.

If you notice, she likewise refers to ELF use not only in established domains like politics, business, academia and tourism, but also among migrant workers and asylum seekers who use English as the common language of communication to interact with each other as well as locals.

Last but not least, for the first time in a definition of ELF, reference is made to digital media. Think about your daily internet use and that of your students. Most of us come across English online on a daily basis through social media, e-commerce (e.g. Amazon), YouTube videos, online gaming, newspapers and magazines, among other areas. As you can see, in comparison to the previous definitions, this one is a bit more inclusive, focusing not only on person-to-person contact, but also on virtual communication through English.

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According to Jenkins, the way we think about ELF has followed three distinct phases. ELF 1, which covers the period from the late 1990s to early 2000s, focused on codifying individual ELF varieties within boundaries, such as German English, Chinese English and so on. This was done with the aim of legitimising ELF and, eventually, rendering it teachable.

From the mid-2000s to early-2010s, ELF 2 shifted the focus from ELF use to ELF users. This meant departing from a description of the observable features of ELF interactions (although these never ceased to be the object of study) to the processes underlying ELF users' use of functions and structures. This resulted in understanding ELF as a more fluid, flexible and unbounded means of communication that, according to Jenkins 'transcends boundaries, and that is therefore beyond description'. It also reflects the influence of other languages that the speaker knows and the influence of other people in a conversation.

However, current thinking about ELF has moved on and the more recent research into ELF, known as ELF 3, views English as a multilingual lingua franca. As a result, ELF is all about multilingual communication in which English is available as a contact language of choice, but it is not necessarily chosen. In other words, although English is always potentially available to everyone in a given communicative interaction, the interlocutors may choose not to use it or if need be, they may occasionally slip into it. Multilingualism is the norm in ELF use whereas monolingualism is the exception. This means NEs are seen at a disadvantage in ELF communication.

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Having been presented to many central aspects of research into ELF, it is perhaps best to take some time and reflect on how these relate to you. As you can see, there is a set of three questions on your screen which you need to read carefully. Think about the answers you would like to provide and share them at the Forum by clicking the link under the video.

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To sum up, it is important to keep in mind the changes in the way we think about ELF. We discussed the notion of contact language, which is central to many of the definitions provided. As you recall, the cultural dimensions of language or linguaculture are also a key concept in defining ELF. ELF also challenges the traditional roles of native and non-native speakers of English and we pointed out that the former may in fact be at a disadvantage when it comes to ELF interactions. Additionally, we discussed who uses ELF, where they use it and for what purposes. Ultimately, this discussion has led us to conclude that there have been three distinct phases in the development of the ELF construct. Hopefully, you will now have a clear idea of what ELF is and all it entails.