1.1.2 Key issues in using English as a Lingua Franca

Transcript

Slide 1

Welcome to the 'Key issues in using English as a Lingua Franca' sub-section of the 'English as a Lingua Franca' section.

Slide 2

In this part, we will critically discuss several major issues when attempting to identify the fundamental characteristics of English as a Lingua Franca. In other words, what we talk about when we talk about ELF. Firstly, we will introduce the concept of identity construction of the user of English and the relationship between identity and English as a lingua franca. Secondly, we will explain the idea of ownership of English and how the concepts of identity and ownership are interconnected. Then, we will introduce the debate over Standard vs. Non-standard English. Next, mutual intelligibility and the use of communication strategies in linguaculturally diverse interactions in English will be examined. Afterwards, we will present some features of multilingual contexts of ELF and finally, the intercultural nature of ELF communicative interactions will be analysed.

Slide 3

Before we start exploring those key issues in using ELF, we would like you to consider your own experience as a teacher as well as a user of English so that you can answer the following questions. By reflecting upon the topics we propose, such as how you see yourself and your students as users of the language, you will be shaping your ideas for the following discussions. Pause the video to respond to the questions and click on the link below so you can share your points of view. Once you have finished, you may resume the video.

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The first key issue we would like to introduce is that of identity. Briefly, identity may be defined as someone's conceptual representation of him or herself. Several categories may be applied to identity. Basically, we can think of our personal characteristics, our qualities, our beliefs, our personality, that is, what makes us a unique individual, our personal identity. Also, we should consider our sense of who we are based on our group memberships, our social identity.

These two categories do not exist separately as they are deeply interconnected. Therefore, identity can involve an individual's subjective sense of self and his/her membership in social groups.

Manka Varghese and others provide a concise though efficient list of essential attributes of identity. For them, identity is constantly changing, is multiple and involves conflicting attributes. Identity is also influenced by the individual's social, cultural and political contexts. Finally, they observe that discourse is an essential factor in constructing, maintaining and negotiating the shifting nature of identity.

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One significant characteristic of identity construction is that it is in constant adjustment, so it is highly fluid and dynamic. Because identity is built upon how you understand and perceive the ways you connect with the world around you, this perception and understanding is transformed through time. According to Bonny Norton, one of the instruments used by an individual to organize and reorganize the sense of who they are and how they interact with the social environment is through language. Language is then a tool to engage "in identity construction and negotiation." Reinforcing this idea, Claire Kramsch proposes that using a foreign language is also part of someone's identity. In the process of learning the foreign language, learners will adopt as well as adapt the language based on their needs and interests, making it a marker of their identity.

Slide 6

An individual's identity will be influenced by a series of factors: the way you experience things, the choices you make, the way you perceive things and the way you feel about things. When using a foreign language, you are using it to express and engage with all those factors. You expect and are expected to fulfil the intrinsic communicative needs, whether you are a native or a non-native speaker. However, Manka Varghese and others point out that many non-native speakers of English have not been entirely satisfied with their language skills when they compare their competence with that of native speakers. Non-native speakers may want to be as linguistically competent as native speakers, according to Jennifer Jenkins. However, she also acknowledges those non-natives who are confident about their language skills because the way they use English represent their affiliation to a linguacultural local or international community, and not a failed attempt to sound like a native speaker.

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When addressing the issue of ownership of a language, it is unavoidable to approach the issue of identity as these two concepts are closely interrelated. Bonny Norton observes that in order to understand how ownership of a language is developed, and particularly in the case of English, you must consider

the power relations not only on a personal level, but also regarding the social relations of the many speakers involved in a variety of local and international contexts of language use. So, it is important to identify which identities are available to the native as well as non-native user of English.

Commenting the articles on a special issue of TESOL Quarterly in 1997, Bonny Norton addresses the theme of ownership of English as an international language. Norton suggests that, implicitly or explicitly, those articles raise questions about whether English belongs to its native speakers, to speakers of Standard English, to White people, or to all of those who speak it, irrespective of their linguistic and sociocultural histories. However, rather than providing an answer to this question, Norton builds it through the reflection of four themes raised in the contributions to that issue of the journal: (1) the relationship between native and non-native ESL teachers; (2) the categorization of ESL learners; (3) the relationship between standard and non-standard speakers of English; and (4) the perpetration of Western cultural hegemony by TESOL educators. Although these issues can certainly contribute to the argument of language ownership, the absence of a straightforward answer to the question 'who owns English internationally?' shows how intricate and controversial this issue was and still is.

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In spite of the controversy and intricacy of the debate on ownership of English, Henry Widdowson attempts to provide a clear analysis of how the concept of language ownership can be approached. He suggests that the general assumption in ELT is that the English language belongs to the English, the speakers of proper and genuine English and those who control the language. Such an idea, he claims, is linked to an attitude of preservation of the language. Moreover, this preservation presupposes the authority of native speakers of Standard English. However, Widdowson stresses that Standard English serves to express the identity, the conventions and values of a particular community. In other words, it serves the communal or cultural purposes rather than the communicative functions of its community. But Widdowson recognizes that Standard English is an international language, no longer property of England or any other Inner Circle country as it "serves a whole range of different communities and their institutional purposes and these transcend traditional communal and cultural boundaries." In a sense, these communities, as language creators, are owners of the language.

Interestingly, as it is evident from more recent publications in the area of applied linguistics, Norton notes that debates on the ownership of English have now been focusing on the issues of multilingualism and transnationalism. Moreover, there has been a growing interest in English as a lingua franca and its implications for identity.

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Perhaps one of the most relevant and pivotal issues that has been the focus of the current debates on ownership of English and identity is how non-native English-speaking teachers have been dealing with and constructing their identity not only as teachers, but also as users of the language. Several applied linguists have called attention to how the label 'non-native English-speaking teacher' may propagate an idea of marginalization of the non-native speaker in terms of their accents, language competence and professional skills, regarding them as the 'Other', as opposed to native speakers of English. Essentially, this belief usually suggests an Anglo-centric approach to teaching and learning the English language and the cultures associated with it. As a result, the view of the native speaker as superior to non-native speakers may compel non-native English-speaking teachers to feel linguistically inadequate and professionally illegitimate.

In order to cope with such feeling of disempowerment, Ron Darvin and Bonny Norton propose a model of investment that develops a positive sense of identity among non-native English-speaking teachers. In essence, they stress that these teachers should claim the identity of bilingual/multilingual teachers who possess a wide range of linguistic skills therefore affirming their professional legitimacy and significance.

Norton also calls attention to the focus of recent research on identity that suggests that it is more beneficial to attend to classroom practices and student learning than the teacher's first language. In reality, what matters is the teacher's classroom practices which promote the learner's ownership of English and foster a range of learners' identities, no matter if those teachers are native or non-native speakers of English. To put it briefly, the legitimacy of the teachers will increase based on their pedagogy and not on their native language. Clearly, such belief will bring educational and practical implications for English language teacher education.

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As a result, Margaret Early and Bonny Norton call attention to significant teacher practices and beliefs which foster the debates on language ownership and identities. They believe teachers and teacher educators should pay more attention to the effects of approaching the local context of language learning and using. Also, teachers and teacher educators should recognize the learners' mother tongue as a resource to be employed in the classroom. Finally, teacher education programs and practicing teachers should deal with the English language as a linguistic system and a social practice, exploring its rich sociolinguistic diversity.

Slide 11

Before we present the next key issues, we would like you to attempt a definition of the four different terms on your screen. Think about how you would describe them and identify possible characteristics that may pertain to each of these terms. Once you are happy with your answers, pause the video and please share them by clicking the link under the video.

Slide 12

Let us set theoretical notions aside for a moment and focus on more practical usages of English. Have a look at the four images displayed on your screen. These images have been widely disseminated over popular media and you are probably familiar with most of them. Although they all allude to different things, there is a common link to every one of them. Can you pinpoint what it is?

Slide 13

As you probably guessed, the previous images all defied traditional notions of Standard English (SE) in terms of grammar or spelling. This leads us to our next key issues: the notions of Standard and Non-standard English and the differences between them.

Since the 1980s, the concept of SE has undergone careful scrutiny and consequently become an exceptionally controversial topic within linguistics. Finding a generally accepted definition of SE has been a task that has entertained a great number of linguists and, as a result, numerous definitions have been proposed. Claus Gnutzmann is the author of such a definition as you can see. In 2005 he stated that although it is not an easy concept to define, most people would agree that SE is what teachers rely on when teaching EFL or ESL. This belief has led to what is known as the Standard English ideology.

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However, back in 1992 Tom McArthur had already outlined his conceptualization of Standard English. He highlights the fact that it is closely linked to educated speakers of North America and Britain who follow a strict set of conventions, namely in terms of grammar and vocabulary. Accent is disregarded and, like Gnutzmann, he notes that SE is traditionally promoted through formal teaching.

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Some researchers have found it easier to define this tricky concept by stating exactly what it is not. In 1999, Peter Trudgill claimed that *SE is not a language* seeing that it is only one variety of English among many. Although it may be the most important variety of English and is associated with the education system in all the English-speaking countries in the world, it is not *the* English language, but simply a variety of it.

In this author's view, *SE is not an accent* and has nothing to do with pronunciation. It *is not a style* but can be spoken in formal, neutral and informal styles. Another point that he makes clear is that *SE is not a register* given that a speaker may acquire and employ technical registers without using SE and vice-versa, thus proving that there is no connection between the two. Finally, the author states that *SE is not a set of prescriptive rules*, meaning it can tolerate certain features which prescriptive grammarians do not consent to, just like the images you analysed in the previous slides.

Despite the effort of the linguistic community in trying to define a concept as complex as SE, there are others who have listed several main arguments against SE as a concept. Bent Preisler, for instance, claims that SE is obviously associated with the British and North American standards. This means that all the other Englishes used in the world are inevitably challenged. Consequently, Standard English is too culture specific and lacking in diversity.

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On the other side of the spectrum we have the concept of non-standard English (NSE). This feature of language has to do with any deviation from the standard English norms. There is not a single NSE but rather a number of NSE forms. Generally speaking, NSE forms do not interfere with intelligibility. Let us go back to those images on slide 12. Were you not able to understand the meanings entailed despite the non-standard usage of English?

At this point it is important to distinguish between good English and correct English. As Sidney Greenbaum so eloquently puts it, *good English* is sometimes equated with *correct English*, but the two concepts should be differentiated. Correct English is conformity to the norms of the standard language. Good English is good use of the resources available in the language. In that sense we can use a non-standard dialect well and can use the standard language badly. By good English we may mean language used effectively or aesthetically; language that conveys clearly and appropriately what is intended and language that is pleasing to the listener or the reader.

Slide 17

What we have been trying to point out in the last few slides is that effective communication can be achieved even when Standard English is not applied. We all know that communication takes place between two or more interlocutors who have individual experiences with the English language. They also have very specific attitudes towards English as well as with the different English speakers they encounter. On top of this, there are speakers' cultural norms which all together will inevitably influence the outcome of any given interaction. As Margie Berns puts it: Communication is a two-way street and both speaker and listener

have duties to ensure their interaction is mutually intelligible. In fact, mutual intelligibility is a central concern for ELF research, so let us try and understand how it can be achieved.

Slide 18

The increasing use of English as a global language, in particular its use as a means of communication among non-native speakers of English implies that models that privilege native varieties of English are no longer fully appropriate. In truth, these models are giving way to others that prioritise the development of communicative effectiveness or communicative competence. This competence enables ELF users to achieve understanding by building a common ground. This is carried out ingeniously by signalling and negotiating non-understanding with the intention of resolving any instances of miscommunication.

Slide 19

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Slide 20

Intelligibility is no longer simply associated with exhibiting good command of pronunciation, lexis or grammar, but essentially with possessing a certain situational, social and cultural awareness that needs to be trained. We are now talking about another key issue: communication strategies. These strategies are essential for effective ELF communication if speakers are struggling to get their meaning across. By drawing on a specific set of strategies, speakers in ELF settings may then accurately solve potential misunderstandings.

Slide 21

When speakers in ELF settings engage in communication and fall back on communication strategies or accommodation skills, we are witnessing what is referred to as collaborative behaviour in interaction. This is a key feature of ELF communication and these strategies will be discussed in depth later on in this course. For the time being take a careful look at the list of strategies provided in this slide and the following. As the designations are self-explanatory, you should not have too much trouble understanding what they refer to.

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As we stated, we will come back to this topic but for the time being you must understand that all these communication strategies are an essential part of ELF interactions and as a teacher it is important you are informed of their existence. In fact, Paola Vettorel recently stated that ELT materials and pedagogical practices should actually take these communication strategies into account. This would help to raise awareness of the fundamental role that communication strategies play in successful ELF interactions.

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In order to illustrate what we have just explained, the following activity consists of a simple interaction among two non-native speakers of English to which you need to listen carefully. All you need to do is click on the icon that resembles a loudspeaker.

Can you identify which CS are being employed by the speakers? How do you feel about the way these women are using these English? And would you ever consider using a listening excerpt such as this one in your classroom? Why or why not?

Feel free to go back to the list of CS presented earlier. If you have any trouble understanding the conversation, the following slide includes the full transcript. As usual, click the link under the video to carry out this Activity and share your views.

Slide 24

From this transcript it is plain to see that even though this interaction does not follow the norms of Standard English, the conversation is successful. Note how both interlocutors signalled and negotiated non-understanding with the intention of resolving any instances of miscommunication. With this in mind, and having read the transcript, you may listen to the conversation once again if you find it useful.

Slide 25

Another key issue of ELF is its multilinguistic nature. But why do we consider multilingualism to be the norm in ELF communication? The reality is that the spread of English throughout the world has contributed to the language being learned and used by bilingual and multilingual users, whose other languages will necessarily always be present and influence their English.

Suresh Canagarajah highlights this very fact. Every speaker will speak their own form of English that will be shaped by their own mother tongue, many times even code-switching between English and their L1. If each person has their own English, you may be thinking - how are they able to communicate then? The answer is simple. To achieve successful ELF communication, participants do not need to adhere to a single linguistic variety, but should instead be open to adapt their discourse to be as intelligible as possible so both parts could mutually negotiate meaning.

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Because ELF interactions are inherently multilingual, speakers may draw on their diverse linguistic backgrounds to find a common ground and shared repertoire. In this sense, each language is not seen as a separate entity with a set of prescriptive norms. Instead, ELF users are viewed as multicompetent, drawing on their multiple linguistic backgrounds to use and adapt language creatively to get their message across. The ability to resort to other languages and code-switch between them, is therefore seen as an essential tool to not only negotiate and enhance meaning, but also to build and sustain relationships as well as explore identity and build group memberships. From this perspective, the creative, hybrid and multilinguistic nature of ELF is considered a sign of innovation that may ease communication between different people.

For a more in-depth understanding of the various features of multilingualism in diverse contexts, please go to the video specifically focusing on the concept.

Slide 27

The last key feature of this video is intercultural communication. There are other features that could have been mentioned, but we believe these are some of the most crucial one's for you to get a comprehensive understanding of what ELF is.

As we have discussed in this section, ELF interactions are characterized for their fluid, multilinguistic and international nature, making them interculturally diverse, especially since most interactions take place among non-native speakers of the language. As a result, the English taught in schools should also contemplate this reality, as it is not enough to just learn British or American English to communicate with the British or Americans. Therefore, in addition to considering AmE and BrE, Enric Llurda believes it is important educators also focus on teaching a language for intercultural communication, allowing their learners to communicate with people worldwide.

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When thinking about intercultural communication three key issues are considered: communication, identity and culture. However, since most ELF

interactions are characterized for their fluid and dynamic nature, there is no single identity or clearly distinguishable L1 culture participants may identify with or refer to. Because of this, depending on each communicative situation, participants will construct, negotiate and adapt their discourse according to the person in front of them. This may be done through several strategies.

Communication strategies, for instance, which we have discussed previously in this video, play a key role in intercultural communication since they have a highly relevant function in the process of negotiation and co-construction of meaning in ELF communication. For a more in-depth explanation of communication strategies, also visit the "strategies" video in the ELF section.

Secondly, alongside accommodation and communication strategies, pragmatic strategies on how speakers construct and negotiate understanding, and how they solve miscommunication problems are also fundamental. Negotiation strategies like repetition or paraphrasing, for example, are usually performed after a trouble in communication or before a signal of non-understanding has been given in conversation. Interactional elements, such as discourse markers and back-channelling also help manage successful discourse. For instance, *yeah* may be used as a presentation marker at the beginning or end of a turn, and other short verbal and non-verbal signals, such as *yeah*, *ok*, *mhm mhm*, may likewise indicate interlocutors to continue speaking. Moreover, resorting to multilingual resources, most often the speakers' L1 or other common language(s), is another option, which allows speakers to adapt their resources for communicative effectiveness and safeguard sensitivity to others' cultural backgrounds and linguistic repertoires. By doing so, they do not only share a sense of non-nativeness, but they also construct meaning in collaboration, which creates a sense of intercultural identity or community-membership.

Lastly, linguistic awareness, Intercultural Communicative Competence, also known as ICC, and Intercultural Awareness also need to be contemplated when considering intercultural communication through ELF. According to Michael Byram (1997), ICC is the knowledge about one's own and other cultures and communities, and how communication is influenced by this. In order to achieve ICC, speakers acquire not only linguistic awareness, but also the willingness to explore and accept differences in communication; the ability to relativize values and practices; the ability to mediate between different cultural groups and communicative practices; as well as adapt a critical approach to cultural and communicative characterizations. However, while ICC focuses predominantly on national conceptions of culture and language, Will Baker (2015) suggests that in intercultural communication it is necessary to take a step further and foment learners' Intercultural Awareness. According to him, intercultural communication is viewed as a process in which Intercultural Awareness is employed in a flexible and situationally relevant way. Being interculturally aware means then understanding the fluid, complex and emergent nature of the relationship between language and culture in each communicative scenario. However, since it

is impossible to foresee every situation, a list of features on what ICA is cannot be provided. Will Baker proposes instead that different levels of awareness be developed, ranging from a general or basic awareness of communication as a cultural practice, to a more critical awareness of varied intercultural communicative practices, and finally an advanced level of intercultural awareness where flexibility, dynamism and complexity are the norm.

In this sense, as we mentioned in the beginning, since language, culture and identity are always open concepts, so too is the notion of successful intercultural communication, especially since it can only ever be considered in relation to individual interactions. For more information of Intercultural Communication and Intercultural Awareness, visit the "Large and small cultures in ELT" video in the "Teaching English" section.

Slide 29

This leads us to our last activity. Please, click on the link to watch Sakis Rouvas, a Greek singer, be interviewed by a reporter from Malta before the 2009 Eurovision Song Contest. While watching, consider the following questions. First, in your opinion, are the speakers competent users of English? Why or why not? Second, considering your own understanding of what is "good English", to what extent is it illustrated in this video? Third, would you use a video similar to this one in your own class? Why or Why not? After watching and reflecting on these questions, click on the link under the video to share your thoughts in the forum.