2.2. The content of ELF-aware teaching

Transcript

Slide 1

In this section of our course, we are going to discuss in more detail how we could integrate English as a Lingua Franca, i.e. ELF in multilingual classrooms. We are going to draw on issues discussed by Prof. Nicos Sifakis in the section "ELF-aware teaching" so, please, go through that section first, in case you haven't done so yet.

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More specifically, we are going to focus on the content of ELF-aware teaching, that is, on **what** exactly we could teach through this perspective, for instance, what kind of knowledge, skills, competences, values or attitudes we could promote in ELT, that is, English language teaching through activities which integrate insights gained from ELF. To this end, we are going to see how we could **enrich** our typical teaching and learning practices in our EFL classrooms and, of course, what this perspective implies as regards teaching grammar and vocabulary and the four language skills, that is, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Issues pertaining to the role and image of the native speaker in ELT are very important in this regard.

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Let's begin with Activity 1. Please, take your time to carry out this Activity before you go on with the rest of this video. It will help you clarify things raised before in this course regarding using, teaching and learning English in today's highly demanding multilingual world and raise your awareness of your own teaching practices.

So, think about your own experience as a teacher of English. Focus on what exactly you usually teach in your classrooms, or else, what exactly you want your learners to **acquire or develop** through your teaching and click the link under the video to share your responses at the Forum, if you haven't done so yet.

- What kinds of knowledge, skills, values and/or attitudes do you generally focus on promoting in your classrooms? Make a short list, starting from the items you feel are most important.

Then, think about the items you have included in your list. Several people, including teachers, argue that, in EFL classrooms, teaching practices generally aim at helping the learners acquire **native-like competence**. As they also argue, this is because the native speaker of English (for instance, a typical British or American person) represents an 'ideal' user of the language.

- To what extent would you say that your own teaching practices focus on the development of native-like competence? Are there any items in your list showing that you are trying to help your learners use English like a native speaker does?

- As a teacher and as a person, in general, to what extent do you agree with the argument that the native speaker of English is the 'ideal' user of the language? Why? What exactly has made you or helped you say that a native speaker is or is not an 'ideal' speaker of English?

These are very important questions so please think about them for a while and provide your responses at the Forum if you haven't done so yet. Then, continue with this video.

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Now, let us discuss these issues in more detail starting with what we teach in our classrooms. Speaking as a teacher myself, the obvious answer to the question 'what exactly do we teach?' is that we teach **English**. But what English exactly do we teach? As already discussed in previous sections of this course, the situation in English language use is quite complex. There is English as a native language or ENL, which, for example, British or American people speak. There is ESL, that is, English as a second or an additional language. There are the World Englishes or WE varieties that people use, for example, in former colonies of Great Britain – and of course, there is English as an international language and as a lingua franca, that is EIL and ELF, which we focus on in this course.

In our contexts where English is not employed as an official language of the country, we teach it, as we know, as a **foreign language** and, actually, we know how to do that quite well. There are, for instance, plenty of guide books helping us organize our teaching, we have specific curricula, syllabi and courseware specifying what exactly we could teach and in what order, and so forth. By and large, the varieties that we teach are those that are employed by native speakers, usually British or American English, this way attempting, somehow, to create a native-like or ENL environment inside the EFL classroom.

At the same time, in our contexts, people, including our learners, use English as a **lingua franca**, in their everyday lives, for international and inter-cultural or trans-cultural communication, namely to communicate with people with different first languages and cultures, and for intra-national communication, i.e.

within the borders, let's say, of their country, even with people who speak the same mother tongue. You may have seen for instance how teenagers and other people sometimes use English with each other. Now, as is illustrated in the sections of this course focusing on ELF, the problem is that ELF communication among non-native speakers especially is extremely unpredictable and variable. Things change from one interaction to another and we cannot possibly foresee all parameters that would make each interaction successful. This may depend on several issues, such as how well we know the person we are talking to and how well we know how to adapt or modify our English according to the situation.

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In essence, this means that ELF cannot possibly be taught the way that other varieties, like British or American English, can. This is **not a linguistic variety**, with very specific 'rules', let's say, that can be transferred to language teaching easily. It is a way of communication in which, though, the learners can indeed be trained so as to be more effective in their interactions.

ELF, in this sense, can be **integrated** in typical EFL teaching practices by **enriching** them in certain perspectives, to the extent of course, first, that one is willing and ready to do so and, second, that this is relevant to the local context. For example, if your learners currently do use English or plan to use it in the future with other non-native speakers for personal, professional and even academic purposes, even within a native-speaker environment, for instance, in a University in England where there are lots of foreign students as well as professors, then, the integration of ELF in your teaching might be a very good idea. In fact, ELF-aware teaching is all about further **improving our current practices**, **developing ourselves as teachers** and **helping our learners develop as competent users of the language**, in every communicative context they may find themselves in.

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Let us now return to the questions we posed at the beginning of this video. What do we teach and why? What kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes do we promote in our classrooms and for what purposes? To help our learners be able to do what exactly - to communicate with whom and where?

What we teach and why largely depends on what perspective we, as teachers, adopt when we answer these three major questions:

1. **Who is the 'ideal' model of language use**?
2. **What do we want the Ls to develop**?
3. **Why is it going to be useful to them**?

From a traditional EFL perspective, the answers to these questions are rather straightforward. The **'ideal' model of language use**, or else, the 'ideal' speaker of English, is a native speaker, and more precisely a very well-educated native speaker who has a perfect command, for instance, of grammatical structures, uses a range of complex idiomatic expressions, speaks with a perfect accent and so forth. In turn, in EFL teaching, we typically try to help our learners acquire a perfect command of the language – in terms of vocabulary, grammar and the four skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing – as well and use it like native speakers do, which will be highly useful to them - why? Because when they themselves have to communicate with native speakers, for instance, at work or at the University, then they, the learners, will need to ensure effective communication with them. We try, in other words, to help our learners develop what we talked about at the beginning of this video, that is, **'native-like competence'**, to the extent of course that this is possible – because even when a non-native speaker speaks perfect English like a native speaker does, he or she will still be a non-native speaker, his or her first language and culture will always be there one way or another.

Now, when **immersion** in a native-speaker environment and interaction primarily with native speakers is what the learners truly want, then this is perfectly OK. Nevertheless, typically, we want our learners to be able to communicate effectively with everyone and in every possible communicative situation. When, therefore, successful communication with non-native speakers, for whatever reason, is also included in the learners' needs, then we may need to go a little bit beyond 'native-like competence'. We need to move from a **traditional EFL** to a **Post-EFL perspective** or else an **ELF-aware perspective**, where we integrate ELF into EFL.

In terms of these three questions here, this in essence involves viewing the **competent ELF user** as the 'ideal' target model of language use rather than only the 'native speaker' and helping the learners develop the **competences** that are necessary in establishing successful communication in ELF interactions, which, of course, may involve both native and non-native speakers. Why is this going to be **useful** to the learners? Because, as we said earlier, they may need to communicate with everybody and will need to be able to adjust or accommodate their English according to the situation. This does not involve abandoning what we currently teach – rather, it involves enriching our current EFL practices. Let's see what these competences are in more detail.

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According to the original and the updated version with new descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages, in short, CEFR, which by and large determines the content of EFL curricula and syllabi across Europe, English language teaching needs to focus on promoting a range of competences.

You may have already identified several of them and included them in your list in Activity 1.

Let's start with the general ones, which refer to general knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, attitudes that may not be specific to language, but are necessary in any communicative situation. According to the taxonomy of the European Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations, or ESCO, of the European Commission – see the link to that website under the video – these **general competences** are also thought to be transversal, that is, relevant to a broad range of occupations and sections and are, therefore, often referred to as *core*, *basic* or *soft* skills.

These include **socio-cultural knowledge and skills**, that is, knowledge of the community where the target language is spoken and being able to relate to and act according to its socio-cultural norms, for example, social or behavioural conventions or norms related to tradition, religion, politics and so forth. What is this community, though, that a learner should relate to and act according to its inherent norms? From a traditional EFL perspective, this is of course a community comprising native speakers and, in this regard, we usually teach our learners, for example, about everyday life in the UK or the US, about public holidays, the meal times of people there, and other cultural elements of these communities as a whole. When it comes to real-life communication, though, the people who interact with each other also form another kind of community, a smaller one, which is influenced, among many others, by the socio-cultural norms of the country of origin of each person. We can't possibly teach the socio-cultural norms of each and every country in the world but we can expose our learners to the culture of as many communities as possible, thereby helping them become more aware of socio-cultural similarities and differences and of how they can relate to the person they are interacting with each time. More information about these aspects is provided in the section of the course entitled 'Large and small cultures in ELT'.

Now, these socio-cultural norms of each community are also reflected in the language that members of that community may use, including the way they use English as a lingua franca. This brings us to the next general competence, namely "**Language and communication awareness**". This refers to a person's understanding of how the language works and why in various real-life communicative situations and, in terms of the concept of ELF awareness which Prof. Sifakis discusses in the section "ELF-aware teaching", it is similar to the component "Awareness of language and language use". From a traditional EFL perspective, we teach the learners, for instance, how specific expressions may have certain connotations when used by or are addressed to native speakers – or how and why the language they use may differ from one situation to another in terms of formality or depending on whether communication is spoken or written. What we often forget, though, is how communication in English works in real life among non-native speakers. This is highly important when it comes to

enriching our practices through a post-EFL ELF-aware perspective. For example, how do they negotiate the meaning to achieve mutual understanding? Why do misunderstandings sometimes occur? What can either the speaker or the listener do to prevent them? What is the role of pronunciation? For your reference, such issues are discussed in the section of this course focusing on ELF discourse but they also need to be integrated in language teaching and learning if we want our learners to develop as competent users of English.

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Let us move on. What else do we generally focus on in our classrooms? We teach a wide range of **lifelong learning skills**, such as **metacognitive** ones, which refer to learning how we learn and thinking about how we think so that we raise our self-awareness, as well as various **beliefs, values and attitudes**, such as tolerance to linguistic and cultural diversity, open-mindedness, respect for other people, critical thinking and so forth, which could help the learners perform their roles in modern societies more effectively and efficiently and even become better individuals in general. In this respect, engaging them in reflecting as critically as possible on all these issues is, of course, more than important. From an ELF-aware perspective, such **reflection** could be expanded, let's say, to include issues related directly or indirectly to ELF. We could ask the learners, for example, to reflect on how and what exactly they learn while using English in their personal lives, like when playing video games on the internet, how they feel when they do so, what they think of others who use English and why – and, more importantly, what they think of themselves as users and learners of English and why.

Such questions are in fact crucial in that they may reveal certain **assumptions** the learners may have. Their responses may show, for instance, that perhaps they perceive native speakers as superior and themselves as inferior as users of English which, in turn, may make them feel embarrassed or even frightened when they have to use English – not only with native speakers but actually with everyone. Then, that would have certain implications as regards teaching and learning in the classroom as well. The teacher would need to try to find out how such assumptions were formed in the first place – for example have they resulted from specific teaching practices in the classroom? – and then see how and the extent to which such assumptions should change. This is precisely why fostering awareness of one's beliefs and attitudes through critical reflection is so important in ELF-aware teaching.

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To this end, reflecting critically on what **communicative language competences** we focus on developing in our classrooms is also highly significant. In EFL teaching, we typically place primary emphasis on the development of **linguistic and socio-linguistic competences**. We focus, that is,

fist, on the effective usage of vocabulary and grammatical and phonological structures, that is, on what is 'possible' to occur while using English and, then, on what is 'appropriate' to occur, depending on the social environment. We teach, for example, a range of grammar tenses or modal verbs, like 'can', 'may' or 'should' or idiomatic expressions, and then on how to use or respond to each of them in a socially appropriate way – how to use formal or informal conventions, let's say, how to understand humor, irony or implicit cultural references and so forth. As we highlighted earlier, this is perfectly OK and even necessary – as long as, of course, we do not promote the image of a 'linguistically or culturally superior native speaker' which the learners must try to imitate but will never be able to reach.

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This brings us to the development of two other kinds of competences which, in EFL teaching, we sometimes overlook but are really very important when it comes to helping the learners become competent users of English in today's multilingual and multicultural world. **Pragmatic competences** refer to actually using the language effectively according each time to the particular communicative context and employing a variety of communication strategies in order to negotiate the meaning during an interaction and achieve mutual understanding. In other words, these competences refer to how we interact with other people while using English, and include, for instance, turn-taking and ensuring cohesion and coherence. However, when it comes to communication in English as a lingua franca, and more specifically, to communication among non-native speakers, pragmatic competence goes beyond these aspects to include using the language in a flexible and creative way and employing various negotiation strategies, like accommodation. These are discussed in detail in the sections of this course focusing on ELF.

The development of **plurilingual and pluricultural competence** is also more than significant and often overlooked in English language teaching. This refers to a person's ability to exploit and, if necessary, blend and combine efficiently and effectively all linguistic codes, that is, all languages at his or her disposal, irrespective of level of proficiency, as well as elements of the cultures that he or she may be affiliated with. These issues are also discussed in the sections of this course focusing on ELF, for instance, as regards translanguaging.

What does the development of the pragmatic and plurilingual and pluricultural competences imply, though, as regards enriching our teaching through an ELF-aware perspective? In this respect, we could use, for example, authentic videos and involve our learners in noticing how these competences work in real-life communication among not only native-speakers, as we usually do, but also, and perhaps more importantly, among competent non-native speakers. Moreover, we could also engage them, the learners, in communication with each other and

other non-native speakers, like children of the same age from other countries. This way, they could see for themselves and, of course, reflect on, for example:
- how pronunciation may affect intelligibility,
- or how people sometimes create on the spot their own idiomatic expressions, which may mean nothing in another context but in that particular interaction may be extremely helpful
- or, in terms of accommodation, how sometimes using on purpose a grammatical form which deviates from the native speakers' Standard English, that is, a so-called linguistic 'error', facilitates rather than impedes communication,
- or, in terms of the plurilingual competences, how translanguaging works and how the rest of the languages a person may speak, even a little, may actually be very helpful.

In this regard, drawing on the learners' own experience in using English and engaging them in reflecting on that experience and on their own views, beliefs and attitudes is, obviously, very important.

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At this point, let us focus on Activity 2. Based on your own experience in teaching English and what we have discussed so far in this video, in what ways would you say our **typical EFL practices** could be **enriched** through an **ELF-aware perspective**?

Please, pause the video now and click the link under the video to access this Activity. There, you will see 10 statements or sentences summarizing some of the key points we have discussed so far. What perspective, the typical EFL or the post-EFL ELF-aware one, does each of these statements refer to? When thinking about this, don't forget the three very significant questions we talked about earlier:
 - Who is the 'ideal' model of language use?
- What do we want the Ls to develop?
- Why is it going to be useful to them?
The answers to these questions will essentially determine what perspective is being adopted each time.

When you finish, please return to this video.

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Let us briefly summarise the issues presented in Activity 2. As we have already highlighted, ELF-aware teaching essentially involves, first, taking into account the **needs of the learners**. When they need to communicate effectively and appropriately both with native and non-native speakers, then the content of our teaching could be enriched in terms of both the language the learners are

exposed to, that is the input of our activities, and the language they are expected to produce, that is the output. Exposure to language produced both by native and non-native speakers, rather than by native ones only, and engagement in real life communication are, as we noted earlier, very important in terms of helping the learners see for themselves how they can accommodate their English to the needs of the people they are talking to each time, rather than only how to adapt it, sometimes in a rather passive way, to native speakers' discourse.

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In practice, as Prof. Sifakis has also highlighted in the section "ELF-aware teaching", this means that we, as teachers, need to modify in a way the activities we currently use in our classrooms, for instance those that are already included in our courseware, or perhaps design new supplementary ones.

These could focus on promoting the learners' **metalinguistic awareness**, which involves noticing and reflecting on features of language and language use in real-life communication in ELF and learning how to employ them in various socio-cultural contexts. In such an activity the learners could, for instance, be asked to notice how exactly the speakers use specific communication strategies, like repetition and clarification requests, and discuss how significant they are, whether they also use them in their interactions and why and so forth. Lots of examples of metalinguistic questions that could be addressed to the learners are included in the section "ELF-aware teaching".

Another significant parameter refers to '**authenticity of purpose'**, that is, in engaging the learners in using the language for real life communication inside or outside the class. As we have highlighted before, this is important in order for them to see for themselves how ELF communication works and why. In this sense, we are helping them create authentic ELF communities of practice and participate in them according to the demands of the small, that is, context-specific, cultures that are established each time between them and whoever it is they are communicating with.

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Enriching our practices with activities fostering **metacognitive awareness** is just as important. In short, this involves engaging the learners in reflecting on and monitoring the way they think and learn and deepening their understanding of their own attitudes and experiences and the ways in which they may influence their future development. Questions asking, 'why do you think that', for instance, 'why do you think your English is not good', and 'what has made you think that' are crucial to this end. Lots of examples of such questions as well are included in the section "ELF-aware teaching", highlighting, once again, that this is not a matter of removing or replacing elements but rather a matter of making

appropriate modifications so as to help our learners develop their competences and gain a deeper sense of themselves as users and learners of the language.

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For your reference, here are some very **useful tools and resources** which could help you take your first steps in ELF-aware teaching, especially as regards finding videos and other materials illustrating authentic communication in ELF. YouTube is very well-known and popular among both learners and teachers. Lots of videos can be found there but, perhaps, if this is your first time in addressing these issues, you could start from the materials included in the Backbone Project. This project was carried out a few years ago and it includes various corpora of English language use, including English as a Lingua Franca. The corpus of ELF, in fact, contains several authentic interviews in English with people coming from various countries which you might find useful. The Project "Promoting authentic language acquisition in multilingual contexts", in short, PALM, has lots of equally useful materials produced, this time, by the learners themselves, including very interesting videos. When you have time, you could also access the outputs of other projects, as well, funded by the European Commission, at the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform. You can find all these links on our Moodle, under this video. Other useful tools and resources are discussed in the section of the course focusing on Information and Communication Technologies, as well as in the section entitled "Useful videos".

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Before ending this section, let us focus on Activity 3, which is very important in terms of helping you take those first steps in ELF-aware teaching and also preparing you for your final activities of this course.

Based on the information provided in this video, as well as your own knowledge and experience as a teacher of English, what advantages and/or disadvantages can there be in enriching your teaching through an ELF-aware perspective? Moreover, what obstacles or challenges could there be and how could you overcome them?

Please click the link of this Activity under the video to share your views at the Forum. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers – you know the characteristics and requirements of your teaching situation better than anyone else and, therefore, you are in the best position to decide whether and the extent to which ELF-aware teaching can be implemented in it. Your views may indeed prove very helpful for other participants as well in their own endeavours.

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In conclusion, in this section we have focused on the content of ELF-aware teaching and on the ways in which our typical EFL practices can be enriched to address the very complex needs of language learners nowadays. To this end, we have discussed a range of competences which the learners need to develop, including the linguistic, socio-linguistic, pragmatic and plurilingual and pluricultural competences, and what each of them may involve as regards: first, the 'ideal' or target model of language use and, then, the language input and output our ELT activities may entail. To this end, we have highlighted that ELF-aware teaching primarily involves **raising the learners' metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness, while exposing and engaging them in authentic, real-life communication**.

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The following sections of this course draw on these issues and discuss particular practical aspects of the content of ELF-aware teaching. More specifically, the section on "Language skills" focuses on listening, speaking, reading and writing, while the section "Large and small cultures in ELT" revolves around the significant cultural aspect of teaching and learning. Don't miss the sections focusing on methods and approaches in ELF-aware teaching as well, which highlight how Task-based learning, Content Integrated Language Learning, Information & Communication Technologies and language corpora may be useful in implementing ELF-aware teaching in the classroom.

What we always need to remember is that ELF awareness is about development – developing ourselves as teachers and helping our learners develop as competent and self-confident users of the language.