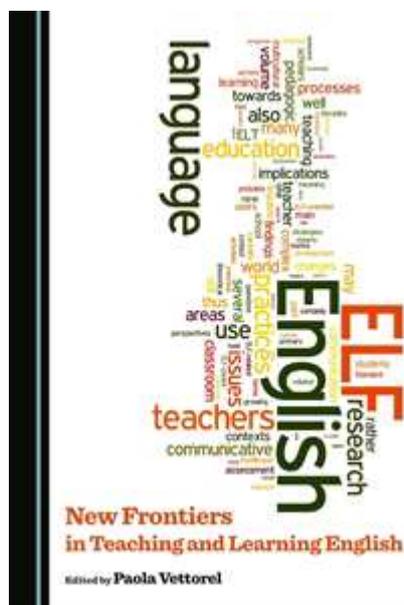




New Frontiers in Teaching and Learning English

Paola Vettorel (ed.)

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This volume originates from the International symposium “New Frontiers in Teaching and Learning English” held at the University of Verona in 2013 and attended by scholars active in ELF-related studies, well-known for their operational and practical work in the field. The various chapters provide valuable insights into different conceptualizations of ELF, as well as into the findings of innovative projects in teacher education involving pre- and in-service teachers, which pave the way for possible new routes into pluralistic, ELF-aware and ELF-oriented didactic perspectives.

In the *Introduction*, Paola Vettorel convincingly argues that the processes that are shaping ELF can act as a springboard for reflecting on the pedagogic aims of teaching English, and lead practitioners and teachers to realise that rather than insisting on “*how much* learners know the language” (Widdowson 2012, 23, emphasis in original), they should promote the development of a strategic ability which will allow learners to be aware of “*how* meaning potential encoded in English can be realised as a communicative resource” (Widdowson 2003, 177). This is especially true because our globalised era requires flexible plurilingual individuals who

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can accommodate and converge, “adapt to variability, [and] live with a more varied selection of English lects than has been customary for second-language users” (Mauranen 243).

Part I provides an up-to-date overview of recent research and its implications in broader educational terms. In Chapter one, “ELF-informed Pedagogy: from Code-fixation towards Communicative Awareness,” Barbara Seidlhofer challenges the traditional assumption that language has to be correct and well-formed in order to be communicatively effective. Traditionally, practitioners and teacher educators have always dismissed ELF as a threat, simply because it does not comply with the clearly-defined kind of ‘codified English’ which is used in most popular textbooks. However, when it comes to textbooks, Seidlhofer claims that they should be used as a prompt rather than a script, in order to raise the learners’ “conscious awareness of how English can be used as a communicative resource like their L1” (26). In this way learners would be encouraged to develop a capability for using linguistic resources strategically and knowingly, i.e. for languaging, rather than being compelled to conform to a prescribed competence, in spite of the fact that what they say is perfectly intelligible.

In Chapter Two, “What is Going on in Academic ELF? Findings and Implications,” Anna Mauranen focuses on academic ELF and the strategies adopted by ELF speakers to enhance mutual intelligibility. Relying on the ELFA corpus, she shows that at the very heart of ELF-induced changes in English there are multi-word units of meaning whose conventional structure is often disrupted in usage, as speakers tend to settle on different preferred patterns, without obstructing ELF communication (Pitzl; Seidlhofer 2009). The implications of these observable changes in English patterns and in the global uses of English cannot but bring about enormous challenges to language pedagogy, as it is not possible to fall back on the traditions of a British or US orientation, and the interlocutors that we meet and the target audience of our texts are not confined to any nationality or locality any longer and can qualify as active agents of language change.

Part II deals with ELF and teacher awareness. In Chapter 3, “Developing an ELF-aware Pedagogy: Insights from a Self-Education Programme,” Yasemin Bayyurt and Nicos C. Sifakis discuss the preliminary findings of a project which aimed to make teachers critically reconsider and ultimately change their “established ways of thinking” (Widdowson 2012, 5), by raising their awareness of the plurilithic nature of English. Thanks to a framework which draws on the pioneering work of adult educator Jack Mezirow primary school teachers, secondary school and university instructors were sensitised towards their established convictions and were later on prompted to design a lesson inspired by their readings (Mezirow). By taking part in the ELF-Ted (ELF Teacher education project) participants were able to develop their self-awareness as non-native speakers of English and boost their self-confidence as teachers. The project made participants conclude that being non-native English teachers in the Turkish socio-cultural context may in fact be an advantage for their students and themselves, as they share a common language and culture and can therefore act as agents facilitating learning by mediating between the different languages and cultures through an appropriate pedagogy. However, even though all the teachers acknowledged the supremacy of intelligibility over accuracy, they unanimously agreed that the application of an ELF-aware pedagogy in their classes might clash with the parents’ and other stakeholders’ strong preference for a native-speaker based model of English language teaching.

In Chapter four, “Raising Trainee Teachers’ Awareness of Language Variation through Data-based Tasks,” Luciana Pedrazzini reports on a study carried out with a small group of trainees attending TFA (*Tirocinio Formativo Attivo*), an ELT teacher education programme started by Italian universities. She sets out to show how these teachers-to-be can be led to realise that in multilingual societies the NS-NNS (Native Speaker – Non Native Speaker) debate, often discussed in terms of a ‘dichotomy’, would be better referred to as the NS-NNS continuum, thus including the variety of individuals’ language backgrounds and their bi- or multilingualism. First and foremost, trainees were made to listen to audio-recorded data of speakers of English with different accents, transcripts of actual teachers’ interactions discussing issues of language variation, and transcripts from the VOICE corpus. Then they were asked to express their perceptions in terms of acceptability, correctness, familiarity and difficulty. The trainees seemed quite tolerant of language variation and showed their willingness to expose their future students to a plurality of accents. However, it emerged that they still considered the British and American varieties the best and safest for their teaching, in part because of the conservative orientation towards language variation found in textbooks (Buckledee;



Vettorel; Vettorel and Lopriore), reference works and examinations, which directly or indirectly shape teachers' beliefs and choices.

In Chapter 5, "Which English(es) to Teach? EFL Trainee Teachers to Make their Choices," Luisa Bozzo presents an example of a pre-service module. Its aim is to sensitise teachers-to-be towards the learning requirements of language learners in terms of socio-pragmatic communication, promote a good mastery of the tools they may choose to teach, and help them wade through the several existing orientations in teaching practices, ranging from hard-line prescriptivism to all-tolerant descriptivism. Since intelligibility is an interactional phenomenon depending on both speaker and listener, Bozzo warns that learners need to develop repair strategies and inference skills, as well as concentrate on the core phonological, intonational, lexical and communicative traits of English (Nelson 95). In order to elicit the trainees' active and responsible contribution to the learning process, Bozzo suggests the adoption of experiential learning, an approach oriented towards integrating theory and practice in a holistic vision of the learner (Kohonen).

In Chapter 6, "Primary School Teachers' Perceptions: Englishes, ELF and Classroom Practices – between 'Correctness' and 'Communicative Effectiveness,'" Paola Vettorel focuses on a project which explored teachers' perceptions in relation with the spread of English and how its current plurality can be taken into account in classroom practices. The sample of informants, who included Italian and non-Italian primary school teachers, were administered a questionnaire and were subsequently involved in a focus group and individual interviews. Several comments in the questionnaires highlight how communicative effectiveness and mutual intelligibility rather than correctness ought to be considered relevant in evaluating acceptability, in line with Seidlhofer (2007; 2011), and McKay. At the same time, however, the inherent variability of ELF seems an important factor in (dis)allowing its recognition in teaching practices, especially in that diversity and plurality "tend to be seen in a threatening light" (Dewey 161), as teachers are afraid of the 'contaminating' effect that the idea of variety could have on 'good English' and stress their 'duty' to provide learners with (standard) correct English, to prevent both fossilization and confusion. These two aspects appear to co-exist, pulling in two opposite directions and creating a sort of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde's syndrome, as acknowledged by one of the respondents themselves.

Part III deals with ELF and ELT practices. In chapter 7, "Young Learners in EFL Classrooms: a Shift in Perspective," Lucilla Lopriore deals with ELL (Early Language Learning), drawing upon the findings of a European transnational longitudinal research study (ELLiE) carried out in classes including migrant children with different mother tongues, where English acts *de facto* as a lingua franca. The evidence provided by the spoken tasks carried out in the ELLiE primary classrooms in Italy shows hybrid uses in code-switches in teacher talk and students' pair and group work, various aspects of lexicogrammar typical of ELF and creative ways of using the learners' multilingual and multicultural competences. The young learners' show a burning desire to communicate and resort to all available strategies: repetition, paraphrasing, use of the mother tongue, code-switching, lexical creativity in order to co-construct meaning (Seidlhofer 2009; Cogo and Dewey), trying out the language they are learning. The findings emerging from this study highlight the need in FL teacher education programmes and materials development to move from a view based on the L2 learner as a monolingual speaker to a potentially poly-lingual and multi-competent ELF speaker.

In chapter 8, "ELF and the Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence: an Italian-American Telecollaboration Project," Enrico Grazi reports on an Italian-American research project which integrates English as a Lingua Franca and network-based language teaching (NBLT) with a view to improving the students' intercultural competence, fostering their mutual understanding through the use of their L2s and supporting cooperative practices. During their interactions, participants were invited to provide selective corrective feedback and take into consideration especially those deviant forms which would affect the flow and the overall intelligibility of the messages. In this way the learners taking part in the project were stimulated to go beyond the traditional exonormative model of the NS standard language, to include critical reflection on their own sociolinguistic identity as successful L2 users, and acquire a deeper awareness and knowledge of the cultural values, beliefs and attitudes that inform their linguaculture. The study proves that thanks to telecollaboration, whenever the English classroom is connected to the Internet to let students carry out intercultural communicative tasks, the authentic environment in which participants interact transforms the closed context of schooling into an open virtual space, which consequently turns English from a foreign language and a school subject into a lingua franca that is socially constructed by its users.



In chapter 9, “Assessing ELF in European Universities: the Challenges ahead,” David Newbold reports on a research project to develop an entrance test of English for European university students (TEEUS). In language tests, in the absence of any clear definition or an alternative, by default the yardstick against which measurements are made is that of an idealized native-speaker standard. On the contrary, TEEUS starts from a needs analysis intended to identify the target language use (TLU) domains in which students would be required to use English, thus showing how testers may take up the call to engage with ELF by adopting a bottom-up task-based approach to meet specific local needs. The challenge lying ahead will of course be to make meaningful assessments on the basis of performance data from which it will be difficult to generalize since traditional yardsticks (such as accuracy and fluency) based on nearness to a hypothetical NS norm will no longer be appropriate. But in an ELF context, in which NNSs are presenting to NNSs, every interaction is a “one-off performance,” an exercise in communicating against the odds, whose success may depend less avoidance of unilateral idiomaticity) and recognizable pronunciation, possibly with a core phonology such as the one put forward by Jenkins.

This carefully selected collection makes a valuable contribution to the study of English as a Lingua Franca by providing stimulating insights into the pedagogic implications of ELF. It can prove a very useful resource for both researchers and practitioners who want to engage with ELF conceptualisations as well as its sociolinguistic and educational perspectives, as it raises the issues that have to be resolved to pave the way for the new frontier in teaching to be determined by the new frontier in learning.

As pointed out by Henry Widdowson in his *Afterword*, the variable ways in which English is now used as an international language should (in principle) and can (in practice) be taken into pedagogic account in the teaching of English. The tendency has always been to assume that descriptive linguistics provides the authority for pedagogic descriptions, so that the subject of language pedagogy should correspond with the object of linguistic description. Nowadays, on the contrary, rather than the learners being required to conform to what is taught, it will be the teachers who are required to adjust to how learners learn and so support the development of their capability for making communicative use of their linguistic resources, including those of their own language.

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