

A qualitative study of recent journal articles on English as a Lingua Franca

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A qualitative study of recent journal articles on English as a Lingua Franca

Eric Lynch

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) broadly operates under the same umbrella as World Englishes and English as an International language. This dissertation takes a selective sample of journal articles from 2008 to 2014 and qualitatively analyses to what extent the most common criticisms of ELF are valid. This study finds that claims that ELF researchers seek to establish a monolithic variety, or that there is insufficient empirical evidence for ELF are unfounded. Further, we find that much of these criticisms stem from older, dated research and that critics have failed to keep up with the pace of ELF scholarship.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to this study

Twenty-five years ago Henry Widdowson posed a question which continues to reverberate: Who owns English today? Widdowson argued that native speakers of English (NSs) no longer can be seen as the sole custodians owning English. Being an international language, English serves an enormous range of disparate communities and institutional requirements, meaning “standard English is no longer the preserve of a group of people living in an offshore European island, or even of larger groups living in continents elsewhere” (1994, p. 380).

By insisting on, for example, grammatical accuracy the NS imposes a choice on the

non-native speaker (NNS) of either conforming in order to become members of the English speaking community, primarily through education, or remaining on the periphery.

Rejecting the idea that without a conserved, preserved standard English “things will fall apart”, Widdowson posits the idea that English must be allowed to adapt and change to keep its relevance (p. 383).

Language adapts and changes to incorporate local or regional exigencies and for Widdowson all new Englishes are “examples of the entirely normal and necessary process of adaptation, a process which obviously depends on nonconformity to existing conventions or standards” and “the very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it” (p. 385).

Widdowson argues that once it is accepted that English serves the needs of different communities it naturally follows that the Englishes will be diverse, and that in terms of language learning a shift from teaching a prescriptive standard English to allowing NNSs a say in determining appropriate targets that fit within their own cultural contexts would simultaneously facilitate natural language learning, by freeing it from another’s ownership, and remove the privileged status of NSs (p. 387).

1.2 Research focus and thesis structure

The three paradigms, World Englishes (WE), English as an International Language (EIL), and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), have to a large extent, concerned themselves with this idea of ownership. They all broadly operate under the same umbrella, a situation which allows their overlap to at times spill over into a blurring of lines.

The scope of this literature review, however, is limited to exploring ELF, noting its

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positions and goals and locating where recent criticism is coming from, and to what extent it is justified.

Accordingly the data analysis will be drawn from published journal articles from 2008 to 2014, showing where the lines have been drawn in regards to ELF's positioning and its critical reaction.

The research questions look to what extent criticism of ELF is based on older, early research; whether claims ELF is intended as a monolithic variety are justified; and whether ELF is based on sufficient empirical evidence.

2. Literature review

2.1 English as a Lingua Franca

2.1.1 A note about criticisms of ELF

Though this review will focus on more recent criticisms of ELF in journals, it is useful to look at what criticisms have been levelled at ELF, in books and in journals prior to our sample of 2008 onwards.

ELF has proved controversial and hotly contested from the beginning. Seidlhofer, for example, writes how, when she first announced her intention to compile an ELF corpus, there was "much shaking of heads, shrugging of shoulders, even laughter" (Seidlhofer, 2009a, p. 37), while Jenkins gives lengthy and copious accounts of critiques of ELF in the first two chapters of her book (2007a).

As this study will show, ELF is simultaneously attacked for lacking empirical data, for being inadequately defined, and for being inconsistent. Jenkins sums up this dilemma in an interview:

We always feel we have to have the empirical evidence before we make any

claims, and so obviously things change, we change with new evidence, and then people keep saying ‘Oh, but 5 years ago you said that,’... I think it’s a sign of intelligence to change in line with the increasing evidence. (ESLbasics, 2012)

As the criticisms of ELF are at the core of this paper I have folded them into each relevant section.

2.1.2 Early ELF

Seidlhofer quotes a definition of “lingua franca” as “any lingual medium of communication between people of different mother tongues, for whom it is a second language” – a definition that applies to “local/regional lingua francas as they exist in many parts of the world” (2011, p. 7). While in the 1990s scholars like Firth in 1990 and 1996 and House in 1999 (cited in Jenkins, 2007a) were writing about lingua franca uses of English they were focusing exclusively on the interactions in English of non-native speakers. Firth’s interest, according to Jenkins, was in demonstrating English lingua franca communication that could be deemed successful though evidencing “deficiencies” and “unidiomaticity” in comparison to English native speaker use (2007, p. xii).

Jenkins, whose research into ELF accents was being conducted around the same time (2007, p. xii), is, with Seidlhofer, largely responsible for shaping what is generally accepted as being ELF today: “an emerging English that exists in its *own right* and which is being described in its *own terms* rather than by comparison with ENL” (Jenkins, 2007a, p. 2; emphasis in original).

Additionally, researchers like Seidlhofer wanted to stretch the terms of English lingua franca interaction to include Inner or Outer circle members, recognising that an NS communicating with an NNS is engaging in ELF interaction (Seidlhofer, 2004, pp. 211-212). This inclusion of NSs is generally agreed and iterated upon by the more prominent

ELF scholars (Jenkins, 2007a, p. 3; Cogo, 2008, pp. 58-59; Baker, 2009, p. 569; Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7; House, 2014, p. 364), though with two important considerations.

Firstly, as ELF is not the same as ENL, it has to be acquired by a native English speaker too (Jenkins, 2012, pp. 486-487). As Jenkins sees it, the challenge for inner- and outer-circle English speakers engaging in ELF is that they will – along with expanding circle speakers – have to “adjust their legitimate local variety for international ... use” to facilitate their interactions (2007a, p. 11), as their NS pronunciations are “more likely to cause communication problems in ELF settings” (Cogo & Jenkins, 2010, pp. 276-277). Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey cite studies showing NNSs favourably comparing their non-native English against that of NSs, in terms of their ability to flexibly adapt their language for successful communication (2011, p. 307). The NSs, accustomed to being understood, and less-used to the need for flexibility, could find themselves struggling to communicate in ELF interactions. This is in fact borne out by research McNamara (2011) cites, where potentially dangerous misunderstandings occurred between Korean air traffic controllers and pilots, some of whom were NSs of English. The NSs “unnecessarily used ordinary conversational English with the Korean air traffic controllers in entirely routine and predictable situations, which sometimes resulted in miscommunication” (p. 508). Related to this, Jenkins reports how Korean Airlines opted for French speakers of English over British or American, as they were more intelligible (2009, p. 203).

Secondly, although Jenkins and Seidlhofer agree that native speakers should not be excluded from ELF, they feature minimally or not at all in data collection (the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) only allows a maximum of ten per cent of NS English, for example), as their inclusion of non-ELF forms would render the process of identifying ELF norms more difficult (Jenkins, 2007a, pp. 2-3). Their

focus is firmly on the ELF user's contribution to the development of the English language (Seidlhofer, 2011, pp. 18-19), with research primarily on Kachru's Expanding Circle (Seidlhofer, 2009b, p. 236). As Seidlhofer notes, "for the first time in history, a language has reached truly global dimensions ... and as a consequence, it is being shaped, in its international uses, at least as much by its non-native speakers as its native speakers" (2011, p. 7).

2.1.3 The Lingua Franca Core

The first major work carried out in ELF was Jenkins' *The Phonology of English as an International Language* (2000), in which, based on empirical data gleaned from a wide variety of L1s over several years, a phonological "Lingua Franca Core" was described, with the goal of assessing which phonological features are essential for intelligibility in ELF interactions. Features that caused problems for a different L1 interlocutor were incorporated into the LFC, and designated "core," or necessary for intelligibility. Thus, the core comprised, briefly, the consonant inventory; aspiration of word-initial voiceless stops /p/, /t/, and /k/; consonant clusters should have no omission of sounds in word-initial clusters; maintenance of the contrast between long and short vowels, such as the /ɪ/ and /i:/ in the words *live* and *leave* and the production and placement of nuclear (tonic) stress.

Phonological features that were considered non-core were the *th*-sounds /θ/ and /ð/ and the l allophone [ɫ]; vowel quality; weak forms; other features of connected speech such as assimilation; the direction of pitch movements signalling attitude or grammatical meaning; word stress placement and stress-timing (Jenkins, 2003, pp. 126-127).

Seidlhofer describes Jenkins' LFC as ground-breaking "in the genuine difference (rather than deficit) perspective she takes, divergences from native speaker realizations in the

non-core areas are regarded as perfectly acceptable instances of L2 sociolinguistic variation” (2004, p. 217). Jenkins writes of the many, however, that took exception to “the book’s call to legitimize expanding circle English accents along the lines of outer circle accents” along with the designation of core features to ensure mutual intelligibility (2007a, p. 25). Jenkins deals in depth with some of the misapprehensions (2007a, pp. 25-28) but, briefly, misinterpretations of the LFC include believing it is intended as a model for imitation, rather than being a core of pronunciation features that are found in successful NNS–NNS interactions. Others felt it was intended as a single variety or unchanging model, when the accommodation element of ELF actually allows for adjustment of core features to suit differing local needs. As shown later, this is a recurring criticism of ELF which is based on a misunderstanding: that ELF seeks to provide a fixed, unadaptable model.

Some rejected the LFC believing it was being prescribed for all English learners, but, as intended by Jenkins, it was not meant to hold back learners striving for native speaker accents. For those mainly interacting with other NNSs, however, the LFC could prove more useful, by stripping out non-core features.

The LFC drew further criticism for removing items that were “unteachable or irrelevant for EIL” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 160). But rather than making the core easier to learn, it was intended to simplify and reduce the pedagogic task of pronunciation teaching by eliminating items that hindered intelligibility, though some interpreted it as meaning the former.

Following this early work, scholars moved from the identification of the kind of surface-level features listed in the LFC, to researching “the underlying processes that motivate the use of one or another form at any given moment in an interaction” (Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011, p. 296).

2.1.4 Defining and refining ELF and its goals

Defining ELF has been problematic, and is repeatedly acknowledged as being confusing and needing clarification in both its definition and aims, both by its proponents (Jenkins et al., 2011, p. 308; Ferguson, 2009, p. 131; Cogo, 2008, p. 60; Baker, Jenkins, & Baird, 2014, p.1; Jenkins, 2014, p. 24) and its detractors (e.g. Sowden, 2012, p. 90; Saraceni, 2008, p. 23; Prodromou, 2008, pp. 26-29), and this has doubtless led to much of the misinterpretations and criticisms.

The clearest definition of ELF, then, is Seidlhofer's: "*Any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option*" (2011, p. 7; emphasis in original). In her most recent work Jenkins repeats this definition (2014, p. 25), so I argue it is as close to definitive as we currently have.

Seidlhofer (2006) "attempts a characterisation" of ELF and notes that it is "indeed a characterisation rather than a strict definition – language varieties do not readily lend themselves to definition as such" (p. 41), and in attempting to characterise ELF she identifies and addresses five major misconceptions:

1. That ELF research ignores the polymorphous nature of the English language worldwide.
2. That ELF work denies tolerance for diversity and appropriacy of use in specific sociolinguistic contexts.
3. That ELF description aims at the accurate application of a set of prescribed rules.
4. That ELF researchers suggest there should be one monolithic variety.
5. That ELF researchers suggest that ELF should be taught to all L2 non-native speakers. (pp. 40-50)

To the first misconception, Seidlhofer offers corpora such as VOICE as evidence that ELF researchers are adding to the diversity of Englishes. Regarding the second, Seidlhofer distinguishes between core and non-core: core features should be conformed to as norms, while non-core phonemic elements should be considered not as errors but as “manifestations of (L2) regional variation” allowing speakers’ identities to “shine through while still ensuring mutual intelligibility” (p. 43). With the third misconception, Seidlhofer points out ELF research questions prescription and offers learners alternatives to prescriptive NS models.

On the fourth, Seidlhofer reiterates that neither she nor Jenkins “adhere to such a monolithic view” (p. 46), and nor is there a single variety called ELF. Rather she hopes that a “better understanding of general processes underlying this global use of English” will come from ELF research (pp. 47-48).

On the fifth misconception, Seidlhofer advocates autonomy on the part of learners and users of English to decide which kind of English they require, while also calling for awareness-raising of the global roles of English across all three circles (p. 48).

One of the striking points about Seidlhofer’s paper is that she mainly appears to be trying to placate and reassure WE scholars, writing how, along with Jenkins they “have always acknowledged the important work in World Englishes” (pp. 43-46)

And this in a volume ostensibly in defence of EIL, by editors who co-opt ELF as EIL while simultaneously misrepresenting ELF researchers’ position on the diversity of world Englishes (Jenkins, 2007a, p. 19). We will look closer at this blurring between ELF and EIL later, but it is here further indication of the tension between the three paradigms.

Additionally, the fourth misconception remains persistent. In the same book that

Seidlhofer addresses ELF misconceptions, Rubdy and Saraceni (2006) brand ELF a “monomodel”, and ask “once the core features are established, are these likely to assume the character and force of a new dogma?” (pp. 10-11). Against this Seidlhofer cites work she did with Jenkins from 2003 where they label the idea of a “monolithic, uniform, unadaptable linguistic medium owned by its speakers” in Outer Circles as “naïve” and “contrary to facts” and deplore the fact that Expanding Circles have yet to be granted that independence and approval (2006, p. 46). However, as we will see later in the data analysis, the idea that ELF calls for a monolithic variety is a false criticism which continues to appear in journals.

Next I will look at how ELF scholars place their work, choosing from some of their more recent publications.

2.1.5 Recent ELF positioning

Positioning ELF as part of the Global Englishes paradigm, all English varieties are seen as valid and are accepted without being evaluated against a NS model (Jenkins et al., 2011, pp. 283-284). Further, ELF recognises the majority of English speakers are NNSs and have “the right to determine which type of English they wish to use” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 26).

By focusing on communication across nationalities, and across all three circles, ELF aims “to capture the pluricentricity of ongoing negotiated English” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 28).

ELF is an “entirely new, communication-focused way of approaching the notion of language”, where accommodation takes precedence over conformity to traditional forms. ELF scholars believe that in this age of mass-international travel and globalization the notion of “communities of practice” makes more sense – that is, where speakers of

diverse L2s come together they, by pooling their “shared repertoire” together negotiate and select the appropriate language for the relevant interaction (Jenkins, 2014, pp. 36-37).

Regarding errors, Cogo and Dewey believe determining what constitutes an error in ELF is “possibly not a particularly ELF-compatible way of thinking about language” (2012, p. 78). For ELF interaction involves deploying a speaker’s resources in an accommodative, adaptive way. Therefore errors can “no longer be defined in terms of departures from one particular set of norms” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 38). This has made some critics describe ELF as “a broken weapon” and its speakers as “stuttering onto the world stage” (Prodromou, 2007, p. 412) but if these features occur *repeatedly* Mauranen believes “we cannot dismiss repeated findings of non-standard forms as arbitrary mistakes” (2012, p. 123), and are rather further evidence of systematicity in ELF interaction.

2.1.6 The role of NSs in ELF

As we have seen above, although Jenkins includes NSs in her definition of ELF interaction now, this was not always the case. In her book *World Englishes* (2003) she wrote “English as an International Language – or English as a Lingua Franca (or ELF) – as it is increasingly being called *for communication involving no native speakers*, is a fact of life” (p. 35; emphasis added). Later she writes how, for some scholars, “in its purest form, ELF is defined as a contact language used only among non–mother tongue speakers” (2006a, p. 160)

More recently, Fernández–Polo writes how “ELF... designates the kind of English used in interactions *between non–native speakers* with different linguo–cultural backgrounds” (2014, p. 58; emphasis added).

Presumably it is this lack of consistency that allows critics like Modiano to fault ELF for being exclusive of NSs: “The idea that native speakers are ignored in a definition of English as a European lingua franca is counterproductive” (2009b, p. 61).

Modiano’s criticism uses very selective quoting of Jenkins to bolster his point for, in the same article, she writes “The majority of ELF researchers nevertheless accept that speakers of English from both inner and outer circles also participate in intercultural communication” (2006a, p. 161). Additionally, this critique was outdated when his piece was published in 2009 as Jenkins had already refined her definition to explicitly include NSs by 2007 (2007a, p. 3).

Prodromou (2007) is equally guilty of selective quoting on this point. In citing, amongst others, Leung and Siedlhofer he characterises their view of the native English speaker as being one who is intrusive, skulking, overbearing – even “malignant” (p. 410). For Jenkins, Prodromou was selective to the extent that “those who hold a perspective on ELF similar if not identical to my own have been quoted in ways that make the opposite appear to be the case” (2007b, p. 414).

2.1.7 The question of codification

Seidlhofer (2006) quotes Bamgbose on the importance of codification: “As long as non-native English norms remain uncoded, they cannot become a point of reference for usage and acceptance. Crucial to the entrenchment of innovations and non-native norms is codification” (p. 43). Jenkins speculates that it may only be possible to codify ELF with a newer kind of codification that can “represent a new and more dynamic kind of language use” (2014, p. 36).

The empirical work of Cogo and Dewey (2012) “aims to uncover, describe and make sense of the processes in operation in lingua franca talk” and again they are at pains to

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point out they are “not ... attempting to ‘fix’ the language, ... nor to identify the properties of ELF as a single variety, but rather to illustrate its hybrid, mutable nature” (p. 13).

The disclaimers are important, for as we have seen, suspicions linger that ELF codification is preparatory to the introduction of a single ELF variety.

Even when acknowledging that Jenkins “disclaims” the existence of a monolithic variety of ELF, Prodromou counters that she nonetheless “seems to believe there is a non-monolithic ‘variety’, with widely used forms” (2008, p. 28). These forms are, according to Prodromou

treated as ‘monolithic’ in so far as ELF users ‘have to’ adapt their discourse to conform to these ‘core’ items ... Thus, while denying that ELF is a monolithic model, Jenkins argues as if ELF were a variety with prescriptive norms of its own. (p. 28)

But this is selective again on the part of Prodromou, as she was citing the views of ELF researchers on how NSs may ‘have to’ accommodate ELF communication rather than expect NNSs to conform to NS models. Jenkins has repeatedly stated ELF is “a matter of learner choice” (2007a, p. 21) and that she knows of no ELF researchers who seek to prescribe it (2007a, p. 26).

2.1.8 ELF and World Englishes

Seidlhofer believes ELF is “entirely compatible with the WE paradigm” (2009b, p. 236), noting that although ELF research is primarily focused on the Expanding Circle, ELF interaction frequently occurs across each of the three circles. Jenkins in 2005 wrote ELF “has already gained recognition as a serious research area within World Englishes” (cited in Berns, 2008, p. 327). She believes “the past 15 years has undoubtedly seen

some progress in terms of an emerging consensus both among WEs and ELF researchers” (2006a, p. 173). Breiteneder imagines there can be “a genuine and mutually beneficial collaboration between researchers in ELF and WEs” (2009, p. 257).

Kirkpatrick, a WE scholar, (2011) accepts the distinction between WE and ELF and lists the things that make them distinct, though he perhaps underestimates the likelihood of code-switching in ELF, adhering very strictly to the definition of it as involving people from different linguistic backgrounds (p. 219), and overlooking the fact that an ELF interaction between, say, five people could have two from the same L1, and some code-switching could be part of the accommodation necessary to facilitate meaning.

There are, however, dissenting voices. Jenkins (2006a, p. 162) cites Kachru as being against the “notion of ELF on the basis that the term is not being used in its original sense, and that it is ‘loaded’” but she thinks he inadequately explains why.

Jenkins feels Crystal, a WE scholar, deliberately snubs ELF by making no mention of it or ELF research in his 2003 book *English as a Global Language* (2007a, pp. 37-39).

Additionally, we have previously seen Seidlhofer’s attempts to make peace with WE scholars and later, in the data analysis, we will see further WE issues with ELF.

2.1.9 ELF and EIL

While we have seen ELF and WE as being broadly compatible, ELF and EIL share an uneasy overlap.

Jenkins tells how, when writing *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, ELF was not well-known, so she opted to use the term EIL. For Jenkins ELF and EIL are “one and the same phenomenon and that both refer to lingua franca uses of English primarily among its non-mother tongue speakers” (2007a, p. xi) and ELF research was

sometimes simultaneously characterised as EIL (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 160; Jenkins et al., 2011, p. 282). In some research interviews she used the term EIL over ELF “as those participants who had any familiarity with the concept tended to know it as EIL” (2007a, p. 234), while in “English as a lingua franca in the Expanding Circle: What it isn’t” Seidlhofer uses ELF and EIL “interchangeably” (2006, pp. 40-50).

In a 2012 interview Jenkins said “We called it EIL originally even though we would rather have called it ELF” (ESLbasics).

Modiano (2009a) may be one of these people fighting to name ELF back to EIL when he wonders “if ELF is a broad vision of L2 English around the world, it would be of interest to know how ELF differs from EIL” (p. 210).

From as early as 2003, however, Jenkins felt the balance was shifting towards favouring ELF: “English as an International Language – or English as a Lingua Franca (or ELF) – as it is increasingly being called for communication involving no native speakers, is a fact of life” (2003, p. 35), and she seems convinced that ELF has clearly emerged as the more dominant of the two, being now the term most often employed “usually in preference to EIL ... by academics who are not themselves engaged in ELF research” (2007a, p. 3).

Presumably this does not sit well with EIL scholars such as Alsagoff, Sharifian or Matsuda, who continue to research and publish in their field. But they contribute to the confusion when, for example, in a book co-edited by Alsagoff, Leung and Street say ELF is “closely related” to EIL (2012, p. 85). Indeed, in the same book Gu seems to be writing about ELF, citing research by Seidlhofer and Jenkins, and echoes the ideas of ELF scholars mentioned above that NSs will need to adjust their English for successful international communication – but resolutely uses the term EIL, even to the extent of

writing “EIL as the lingua franca” (2012, p. 322). Further, in a book he edited on EIL, Sharifian writes how Jenkins’ and Seidlhofer’s ELF research “can broadly be associated with the EIL paradigm” (2009, p. 6).

Clearly, then, it can be seen that there is a significant amount of jostling between the two camps, with the obvious overlap taking on the feel of encroachment.

2.2 Addressing the gap between ELF and its critics

Having seen how ELF is defined by its scholars, and looked at its goals and research I will now move to the data analysis of recent journal articles and look to what extent the criticisms are accurately based on the stated aims and position of ELF. I will attempt to verify how justified Jenkins is when she opines ‘scholarly opposition to ELF seems to be based not so much on rational argument as on irrational prejudice’ (2007a, p. 12).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Qualitative design

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. In order to draw a realistic border around the sample I am drawing from the journals with a focus on applied linguistics and teaching that have the highest impact factor, and are thus most-likely to be read.

Accordingly, I list below the journals I am sampling from with – where available – their 5-year impact factor, or their current impact factor, as listed on their respective homepages.

Applied Linguistics (5-year impact factor 2.591); *TESOL Quarterly* (5-year impact factor 1.35); *ELT Journal* (5-year impact factor 0.759); *Language Teaching* (1.795); *World Englishes* (0.694) and *English Today* (0.192).

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Additionally, the sampling is confined to articles written between the years 2008 to 2014, as we are concerned with how much the fields have changed over the years, and with what the modern take is on ELF. In particular the sample will allow us to see how, in the published research, ELF is actually being positioned, as opposed to what some claim it is being positioned as.

3.2 Data analysis

The journal articles are coded according to the research questions: the criticism that ELF is trying to codify a monolithic, single variety of English; that there is a lack of empirical evidence for ELF and to what extent criticism of ELF focuses on older, dated research.

3.3 Findings

The journal analysis results will be presented according to the broad categories in which the data were coded.

3.3.1 ELF as a monolithic, single variety of English

We have already seen in the literature review how there has been persistent efforts on behalf of ELF scholars, prior to 2008, to make clear their goal is not to establish a single lingua franca norm, or monolithic variety.

Saraceni, an EIL scholar, expresses his worry that ELF was attempting to “replace one model with another”, that of a “one-size-fits-all model of English” (2008, p. 22). As a corollary of this idea Matsuda and Friedrich – also EIL scholars – though acknowledging Jenkins and Seidlhofer’s research is “descriptive rather than prescriptive” nonetheless foresee their work as being “likely to serve as the basis for the establishment of a

“teachable” international English variety to be used in the classroom” (2011, p. 334). They go on to fault this, concerned “one or a limited set of specialized varieties of English for international use does not reflect the reality of the use of EIL or the nature of language change” (p. 334). For them, having this kind of teachable, mainstream international English could “lead to the birth of a super-national variety, which seems inappropriate and unpractical”, one that by being teachable or institutional could thereby lock out those without access to it, generating “greater inequity among speakers of different Englishes” (p. 335). Again – it is worth repeating – that their goal of implementing a teachable established variety is that of EIL scholars, not ELF, and their faulting of something which has not been suggested by Seidlhofer or Jenkins is unfair and could even be seen as traducing them by stating it would be unrealistic to try “enforcing” (p. 335) it, as if that were ELF intention.

Sowden (2012) exploits what he sees an inconsistency in aims of ELF scholars to suggest that, despite what Jenkins (2007, p. 41) or Dewey and Cogo (2007, p. 11) say, ELF may yet come to be codified “as an identifiable, discrete entity” (pp. 90-91). Sowden believes the way “some academics have been urging the teaching of English as a Lingua Franca” (p. 89) is problematic and cites Kachru’s cautionary words on taking a monomodal approach to non-native English, where “attempts to subsume different local variations within a common version are doomed to failure because the functional roles assigned to English and the contexts in which these apply differ from one place to another” (p. 91).

Against these criticisms, and in addition to the ones cited in the literature review, ELF scholars continue to refute this claim of ELF being monolithic. Cogo (2008), responding to Saraceni, builds on Seidlhofer to aver that “ELF is not a single, unified variety of English, but language in use in situations where bilingual or multilingual speakers of

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English are involved” (p. 58).

In response to Sowden, Cogo rejects his implication “that ELF has been *designed* with a precise and planned aim in mind” (2012, p. 101; emphasis in original). For ELF scholars like Cogo the fact that ELF communication can show characteristics that localize it is balanced by the instances where it is “fluid and realized in transnational, or international, networks, and movements. Therefore, what is certain is that ELF is not monolithic or a single variety because cultural and linguistic resources are inevitably transformed as they are locally appropriated” (2012, p. 98).

3.3.2 Lack of empirical data for ELF

Saraceni is sceptical about Seidlhofer’s claims that

ELF speakers were ‘not primarily concerned with emulating the way native speakers use their mother tongue within their own communities’ but were only interested in ‘efficiency, relevance and economy in language learning and language use’ Considering that they were made within a discourse which elected empirical research as the sole credible way forward in the field, we were somewhat baffled by these kinds of statements, which were at once confidently conclusive and altogether data-free. (2008, p. 22)

Cogo counters this, saying ELF research is “entirely empirically based, not invented by academics”, citing the corpus projects of VOICE, ELFA and ASEAN English (2008, p. 59). In a response to Sowden she supplies sample data of ELF interaction showing utterance completions, latching and backchannelling (2012, p. 100). However, Sewell (2013) finds this data unconvincing. Drawing from the literature on Conversation Analysis, he argues these features are ubiquitous in general interaction, and therefore not special to ELF (p. 6). Regarding the claims of ELF scholars that NSs can cause

communication problems with their pronunciation, he feels there is little more than anecdotal evidence for this (p. 7). Sewell also feels there is insufficient ELF research into what degree of accommodation is possible for ELF speakers whose repertoire is not of a level to allow them to change their speech patterns to aid intelligibility (p. 8).

This lack of research with its attendant “overgeneralizations about both native and non-native speakers of English and their accompanying ‘varieties’” (p. 6) is symptomatic of what Sewell sees as a tendency to reify ELF in the absence of empirical data and O’Regan (2014) makes similar claims about ELF being a reified “thing-in-itself” (p. 4). As seen in the literature review, however, there is research to back this up, as cited by McNamara (2011), though perhaps not a sufficient amount as yet to satisfy critics. Sifakis (2009) offers an insight into what an ELF curriculum might look like as one that would concentrate on skills like “making repairs, paraphrasing, rephrasing, or even allowing for linguistic errors that might facilitate communication” (p. 231).

Murray (2012), however, concedes empirical ELF studies remain “relatively few in number” but feels that the emergence of databases like VOICE, the Asian Corpus of English (ACE), and the Helsinki ELFA Corpus will increasingly address the shortcoming (p. 319). He suggests three strategies to develop the pragmatic competence of learners to prepare them for ELF communication:

Firstly, empirically based strategies based on studies on pragmatic aspects of ELF interactions to allow a filtering of elements into more or less useful. Secondly, inductive, bottom-up strategies to raise learner awareness of principles that facilitate effective communication, sourced from L1s and multilingual classes. And thirdly, deductive top-down strategies that will allow learners to fine-tune their “hybrid pragmatics” through a negotiated process of agreed-upon general linguistic principles that come from repeated ELF interaction (p. 321).

Sowden and Sewell both appear unaware of the data presented in books like Mauranen and Ranta's (2009), or Archibald, Cogo and Jenkins' (2011), which document how ELF speakers deploy strategies like paraphrasing, clarification, repetition and self-repair. In Mauranen and Ranta's volume Hulmbauer produces data showing that accommodation in ELF includes a focus on form as well as meaning (p. 333), while plurilingual resources such as code-switching are used as necessary to facilitate understanding.

3.3.3 Criticisms based on dated research

A common complaint by ELF scholars is that, although their field is developing and expanding quickly, much of the criticism it faces is taking aim at the past (within our sample of 2008 to 2014 see Cogo, 2008, p. 58; Jenkins et al., 2011, p. 308; Cogo, 2012, p. 104; Dewey, 2013, p. 348; Baker, Jenkins & Baird, 2014, p. 2), and this section looks in detail at this.

Saraceni's characterisation of ELF as "one size-size-fits-all model of English" (2008, p. 22) mentioned above is one example of criticism that has failed to keep pace, making him appear ignorant of – or unconvinced by – the extensive efforts ELF scholars have gone to, to dispel this fallacy.

Sowden's (2012) critique, previously mentioned above, similarly draws from ELF research which, at the time of his writing, was between four to eleven years old, leading Cogo to bemoan it as "a pity that the ELF readings Sowden is referring to are rather dated, as, in a relatively new and highly dynamic field like ELF, things develop fast and a lot of new research findings have been published since the early 2000s, which show that the field has moved on, and earlier questions/issues have already been answered or taken on a different shape" (2012, p. 104).

In a 2008 paper Berns finds the "ELF movement's identification with World Englishes –

whether self-proclaimed or conferred – is tenuous at best” and that “more ELF positions conflict with the world Englishes paradigm than are in concert” (p. 333). However, the bulk of Berns’ critique is based on Jenkins’ LFC from 2000, some eight years prior, while the only Seidlhofer she cites is from 2001. In a later paper Berns finds that “by taking the construct “lingua franca” and adopting it as the name for a variety of language with unique formal properties, rather than a use, its theoretical validity is called into question” (2009, p. 198). She further repeats the claims that ELF is a variety of English and that ELF moved away from using the term EIL because it “includes native speakers” (p. 256). Jenkins et al. note that “it is disappointing that positions taken by ELF scholars, say, ten years ago (which is a lifetime in ELF terms), are not infrequently cited as if they are still tenaciously held, when the ELF scholar in question has long since moved on” (2011, p. 308).

Kirkpatrick, comparing WE and ELF, distinguishes them by suggesting “world Englishes are primarily about the expression of identity and the reflection of local culture(s), while English as a lingua franca is more concerned with communication” (2011, p. 129). He makes clear he is not saying speakers *cannot* express their identity through ELF, but arguably overlooks how, for example, someone who is confident in their intelligibility in their own accent, engaged in ELF interaction, is expressing their identity (for example, see Jenkins, 2009, p. 204; Jenkins, 2012, p. 490; Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 51). Holliday (2008) tells of his unease when he feels “the Centre” – in this case well-meaning, Western ELF researchers – tries to speak for “the Periphery”, here personified by a Taiwanese teacher he cites (p. 124). Holliday worries the ELF movement might fall into the trap of feeling it has a mandate to fix the Periphery, even as the code it establishes might look “undesirable to [the] group of people for whom it is designed” (p. 125). Holliday’s use of “design” indicates what appears to be a serious misreading of

ELF, as if he believes in the myth of a monolithic ELF variety. At the very least, by failing to cite any of the more recent ELF research he seems behind the times, failing to recognise that “ELF is a natural language, not an attempt at linguistic engineering” (Cogo, 2012, p. 103).

Finally, O’Regan claims the ELF movement has been “silent” on issues such as ideology, discourse, and power structures associated with neo-liberalism, class, and globalization (2014, p. 14), but Baker et al. counter by citing ELF work that deals with “questions of standard language ideology, native speaker ideology, and indeed the ideology of ELF scholars” (2014, p. 2).

4. Conclusion

4.1 Summary of research questions

The idea that ELF seeks to impose one monolithic variety has been denied at least as far back as 2003, and in our sample every accusation that this is an ELF goal can be soundly refuted.

On the question of empirical data ELF appears at this moment delicately balanced; there is a growing body of data, but it is unclear to what extent it has been read or assimilated, and there is an acceptance that more is needed.

ELF scholars’ complaint that they regularly face critiques based on older, dated research appears well-founded, with the data analysis showing many instances of recent work unexplored by critics, while early work like Jenkins’ LFC still clearly attracts controversy and debate some fourteen years later.

4.2 Future research

As we have seen, ELF is gaining in size and momentum. The existing corpora are

welcome, go some way to silencing the scepticism and doubt, and will continue to grow, but more are needed to help with descriptive accounts of how ELF interactions occur. In particular, and of special interest to me as a language teacher, is in seeing how ELF will be treated in classrooms by learners and teachers. Although we are seeing early signs of how ELF research may impact classrooms and curricula there is scope for much more to be done to document this incorporation, and the attendant change in attitudes it requires.

Additionally, it remains to be seen how ELF can be usefully treated in writing, and if and how ELF research can be taken into consideration by traditional ELT examinations.

4.3 Conclusion

To return to Widdowson's question about who owns English, it seems to me that the tension between the WE, EIL and ELF paradigms comes in part over each wanting to be seen as *the* custodian of this question, that perhaps there is a land grab underway, a territorial staking out of primacy on this issue. Through my undertaking of this study I find ELF the more energetic, the more nimble and suasive of the three, gaining ground at an ever-accelerating pace, and I suggest this is why so much of the criticism has missed its mark, or struck where ELF no longer is.

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