English as a Lingua Franca:
Creating a 'Model' Out of a 'Muddle'?

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Abstract

In the context of the stupendous growth of English the world over in recent times, and the important role that it is now playing among speakers of English from diverse first-language backgrounds, some academic researchers are now advocating the teaching of English as Lingua Franca (ELF). However, the very notion of ELF, with all its contradictions, comes across as a muddled one, out of which the creation of a model for the English language classroom at this point of time seems a remote possibility. This article discusses this and several other crucial issues related to ELF, and it took its present shape as a result of a series of discussions that I had with several colleagues, the prime among them being Prof Z N Patil, who recently retired from the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca, World Englishes, Expanding Circle, Model, Variety.

World Englishes

The spread and growth of English, "the native language of a relatively small island nation", across the world to become "the most widely taught, read, and spoken language that the world has ever known" (Kachru and Nelson, 2001: 9), has been nothing short of a miracle, setting in motion processes leading to the emergence of new varieties of English in different sociolinguistic contexts, now fashionably called 'World Englishes' (WEs), and turning topsy-turvy several hitherto sacrosanct notions in English Language Teaching (ELT) like, for instance, the notions of the standard and the model in the language classroom.

Numerous attempts have been made to systematise the complex picture arising out of this diffusion, resulting in the development of several models of Englishes like the ENL-ESL-EFL model developed by Quirk et al. (1972), the Three Circles model of Kachru (1985), the 'wheel model' of Tom McArthur (1987) and Görlach's model (1988). Of these, the Three

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Circles model of Kachru has been an epoch-making one, distinguishing between the inner circle (e.g. the UK and the USA), the outer circle (e.g. India and Singapore) and the expanding circle (e.g. Japan and France).

English as Lingua Franca, Native Speaker and Non-native Speaker

Without getting into a discussion on the merits or otherwise of the Three Circles model, and the associated terminological quagmire centring around the collocations of 'English' with 'world', 'international' and 'global' and so on, I would like to start by simply stating that in their analysis of the English as Lingua Franca (ELF) situation in the world, academic researchers like Jenkins (2006, 2007) and Seidlhofer (2004, 2011) et al., who could be regarded as the avant-gardists in ELF research, have usually taken into account only one kind of interaction, that between the different 'non-native speakers' (NNSs) of English in Kachru's Expanding Circle.

Here I must point out that I am aware of the value-loaded baggage that the terms 'native speaker' (NS) and 'non-native speaker' (NNS) carry, and elsewhere (for instance, Syam Choudhury 2014) I have argued about their inadequacy and, therefore, the need for their eradication, quite in line with the prevalent thinking within the World Englishes paradigm. However, in the context of a discussion on ELF, I find these terms difficult to do away with although my preferred terms, like Prodromou's (2007b), are 'L1-user' and 'L2-user'.

Problems with the "Pure Form of ELF"

Having said this, let me now return to the point I was trying to make regarding how Jenkins and Seidlhofer construe what they regard as the "pure" form of ELF which leaves out from its ambit users of both English as a first language and English as a second language (Jenkins 2006, p. 161). What happens as a result is that a large number of interactional situations involving English are ignored by the ELF researchers, making them susceptible to the charge of non-inclusiveness. For instance, as Maley (2010, p. 29) points out, a large number of exchanges take place using the nativized varieties (in Kachru's Outer Circle), some taking place within the overall variety (as in India, Singapore, etc.) while others taking place between the speakers of different varieties (e.g. Indians-Singaporeans).

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And what about the interactional exchanges between the Inner Circle 'native speakers' and the speakers of nativized varieties (e.g. Americans-Indians)? Not only are these types of interactional exchanges ignored by the ELF researchers, what is also ignored is the possibility of variation along "regional, social, occupational, generational and lectal lines" (Maley 2010, p. 29).

Contradictory Points of Views

In addition, what make matters further confusing are the often so contradictory points of view about the nature of ELF that these academic researchers seem to hold.

Jenkins (2007), for instance, defines ELF as "an emerging variety that exists in its *own right* and which is being described in its *own terms* rather than by comparison with ENL" (p. 2; emphasis in original). This definition suggests that Jenkins considers ELF to be one of the many varieties of English that are there in the world today. However, later on, Jenkins (2007) moves from the singular "variety" to the plural "varieties" while discussing ELF, pointing out that "ELF *varieties* are used internationally rather than intra-nationally and are born of international contact among their NNSs" (p. 17; emphasis added).

This use of the plural word "varieties" seems to be in line with Seidlhofer's view that we should prevent ourselves from regarding ELF as a "distinguishable, codified and unitary variety...which is certainly not the case" (Seidlhofer 2004, p. 211). However, Seidlhofer (2004) herself cannot be considered to be harbouring a consistent view of the plural nature of ELF for she opines that ELF "is *a natural language* and can thus be expected to undergo the same processes that affect other natural languages especially in contact situations" (p. 222; emphasis added), giving an impression that ELF is a kind of an "identifiable, discrete entity" (Sowden 2012, p. 91).

Again, there have been others like Dewey and Cogo (2007) who have argued that ELF should not be seen as "a uniform set of norms or practices but rather a set of linguistic resources which, while sharing common ground, is typically more variable than other language varieties" (p. 11).

From the foregoing discussion, it can be clearly inferred that there is some confusion with regard to what actually ELF is, for quite sometime it has been described as "an emerging variety", while on other occasions the plural word "varieties" has been juxtaposed with it.

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While on some occasions ELF is regarded a monolithic variety in which is subsumed the core features of different local variations of English in Kachru's Expanding Circle contexts, on other occasions ELF is considered a field in which research is focused on describing and making sense "of the processes in operation in lingua franca talk and the strategies used by its speakers" (Cogo 2012, p. 99), and not uncovering any "core" features.

But then, hasn't setting out the *lingua franca core* (LFC) been a primary concern of Jenkins (2000), thereby opening "a debate on pronunciation targets and teaching priorities" (Dauer 2005, p. 549)? Moreover, if the focus of ELF research is on making sense of the processes in operation in lingua franca talk, does it mean then that by the term 'ELF' what is meant is not the form but the function that English performs in different situations across the world (Saraceni 2008, p.24)?

Apart from the apparent contradictions in the discourse on ELF mentioned above, Jenkins (2006) has often been guilty of sometimes separating ELF from the WEs, which she admits to viewing from a narrow perspective, in the sense of "new Englishes in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean" (p. 159), while on other occasions, as Prodromou (2007a) points out, conflating "ELF and indigenized varieties, sliding from one to the other as if the phenomena described were the same or comparable" (p. 409).

Other Related Issues

There are several other issues in the discourse on ELF which have contributed to the muddled state that it seems to be in at the present moment. For instance, while Jenkins's view regarding how there ought to be a "pluricentric rather than monocentric approach to the teaching of English" is appreciable, her assertion regarding raising learners' awareness of the diversity of English by exposing the "less proficient learners" to a range of ELF varieties seems problematic (Jenkins 2006, p. 173). For all Jenkins (2006, p. 170)) has on offer as the "salient features of ELF lexicogrammar" are some features like the following taken from Seidlhofer (2004, p. 220):

(i) Non-use of the third person present tense – s ("She look very sad"
(ii) Interchangeable use of the relative pronouns *who* and *which* ("a book who", "a person which")

A Broken Weapon

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In this regard, Prodromou (2007a, p. 410) points out quite rightly that describing "such forms in a non-judgemental way is a kind of descriptive linguistics and is a legitimate enterprise, but Jenkins occasionally conflates descriptive grammar and pedagogic grammar", and there precisely lies the problem.

If the examples mentioned above, based on the description of the language use of ELF users, are considered to constitute the common grammatical core of ELF, as has been done by Jenkins (2006) and Seidlhofer (2004), it must be said that from the point of classroom practice what these ELF researchers proffer is a linguistic code consisting of a set of highly restricted data which Prodromou (2007a) considers to be a kind of a "broken weapon" with which the ELF researchers want to bring the ELF users "stuttering onto the world stage" (p. 412).

Moreover, as Maley (2010, p.31) says, "a new variety needs a base in a speech community", and this is precisely what ELF lacks for it seems to be "no more than an inchoate and disconnected agglomeration of instances of use." It is because of this reason perhaps that Prodromou (2008, p. 255) sounds a little apprehensive when he says that one possibly "cannot make a model from a muddle" that ELF is, and unless we have a model, from the pedagogical point of view ELF will remain a chimera.

Patil's (2014) Proposal: Promoting Our Own Standardized Varieties

In this context, Patil's (2014) observation is noteworthy and applicable to both ELF and WEs contexts. Patil (2014), while acknowledging how the "formal proliferation and functional diversification" of English "has been spurring scholars to challenge the traditional models and constructs which have underpinned and informed the teaching of English for several decades", points out quite rightly that we should be promoting "our own respective *standardized varieties* of English as models for teaching and testing purposes...", reiterating further that "we should train our learners to be educated speakers of their respective *standardized regional variety*" (pp. 46-47).

To corroborate his claim, Patil (2014) refers to Honna et al.'s (2001) observation (cited in McMurray 2001) regarding how Japanese students (in what is a proper ELF context) were happy with a standard Japanese accent of English. Talking about the pedagogical

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implications of the lingua franca approach, especially for the language teachers, another researcher, Kirkpatrick (2012, p. 40), points out the following:

> As the goal of the lingua franca approach is not to produce native speaker clones, but to produce people who are able to use English successfully in multilingual settings, this means that local multilinguals who are highly proficient in English and are suitably trained make appropriate teachers. Such teachers not only represent *role* models for their students but also *linguistic* models. (emphasis as in original)

Functions of the Lingua Franca Approach

There are two important points that Kirkpatrick makes in the above observation. The first one is with regard to the goal of the lingua franca approach, which, he says, is to produce people who are able to use English successfully in multilingual settings. Few would have any disagreement with Kirkpatrick on this issue. However, it is the second point which he makes, as a kind of corollary to the first, which seems more interesting. Kirkpatrick points out that 'appropriate' teachers in a lingua franca context, those who are expected to represent 'role' and 'linguistic' models for their students, are those trained local multilinguals who are highly proficient in English. In the context of this assertion of Kirkpatrick, one might be tempted to ask a question (rather rhetorical though) like the following:

(i) Why should these 'appropriate' teachers in a lingua franca context, who are proficient users of English themselves, take recourse to Jenkins's 'emerging' or 'emergent' variety like ELF in their classrooms?

Non-viability of the "Pure Form" Approach

It is indeed important to stress here that the strong version of ELF, what is also often referred to as the "pure" form, which is promoted zealously by Jenkins and Seidlhofer et al. and which "tends to emphasise the notion of ELF as an 'emerging or 'emergent' variety or varieties" (Maley 2010, p. 25), does not seem to be pedagogically viable at all. From the point of view of the classroom practitioner, teaching a variety close to a 'standard' one is the only possible option. Of course, what should not be lost sight of in the classroom is the necessity on the part of the practitioner to make the learners aware of the variations in English that they would encounter in the world at large once they step out of the classroom.

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