

# English as a Lingua Franca: An Immanent Critique

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Over the past 15 years or so there has developed a school of thought within English language education and applied linguistics globally which refers to the phenomenon and use of English as a lingua franca (ELF). The thinking of ELF movement researchers has placed their work at the centre of current debates about the form, function and legitimacy of the English that is used by speakers from diverse linguacultural backgrounds when they are in interaction with one another. In this article, I intervene in the arguments of the ELF movement from the perspectives of Marxism, globalization theory and poststructuralism by means of an immanent critique. This shows that in the articulation of its discourse the ELF movement reifies and hypostatizes 'ELF' as a seemingly stable form, that in its ideology it exhibits an idealist rationalism which blinkers it to the political economy and class stratification of English in a globalized world, and that in its theory it combines a rationalist, positivist and objectivist epistemology with a transformationalist, postmodern and poststructuralist sensibility which is both incommensurable and undertheorized.

## INTRODUCTION: THE ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA MOVEMENT

Over the past 15 years or so there has developed a school of thought within English language education globally which refers to the phenomenon and use of English as a lingua franca (e.g. Seidlhofer 2001, 2011, 2012; Jenkins 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2013; Mauranen and Ranta 2009; Jenkins *et al.* 2011; Cogo and Dewey 2012). The 'English as a lingua franca (henceforth ELF) movement' (cf. Elder and Davies 2006; Holliday 2008; Berns 2009, for this term), distinguishes itself from English as a foreign language teaching (or EFL) by locating itself within a Global Englishes paradigm in which, 'non-native speakers [...] and all English varieties, native or non-native, are accepted in their own right rather than evaluated against a NSE [Native Speaker English] benchmark' (Jenkins *et al.* 2011: 283–4). In this manner, 'ELF' is seen as, 'fluid, flexible, contingent, hybrid and deeply intercultural' (Dewey 2007; Jenkins *et al.* 2011: 284), and having far-reaching implications for English language education and pedagogy and its hitherto reliance on nativized varieties. Jenkins *et al.* (2011) argue that, 'The study of ELF should pay close attention to the intellectual discourse on globalization [because] ELF is simultaneously the consequence and principal

language medium of globalizing processes [and therefore] part of the texture and infrastructure of globalization' (p. 303; parentheses added). From whatever perspective one looks at this, the presence of English globally is highly apparent and, within applied linguistics and English language teaching (ELT), a significant literature exists describing this (e.g. Phillipson 1992; Pennycook 2001, 2007; Block and Cameron 2002; Fairclough 2006; Rubdy and Saraceni 2006; Canagarajah 2007, 2013; Jenkins 2007, 2009a, 2013; Blommaert 2010; Kirkpatrick 2010; Seidlhofer 2011; Block *et al.* 2012). English has penetrated societies and impacted upon the lives of individuals to an extent which has no parallel in human history—in education, tourism, business, trade, diplomacy, politics, development, finance, digital communications, fashion, culture and war. If the suggested estimates are to be believed (Jenkins 2013), then the Englishes spoken by native speakers in the Kachruvian inner circle (Kachru 1985) are a minority English globally, and that the number of speakers of English—of whatever kind—in the outer and expanding circles far exceeds them. To take this a step further, it is evident then that English as the *de facto* first language of globalization exists as a lingua franca in the world, and that it is used to mediate between speakers who do not share the same first language. This seems to accord, more or less, with the well known definitions of Firth (1996) and Seidlhofer (2001) for whom English used in this way is, 'an additionally acquired language system' or 'contact language' for communication across linguistic as well as cultural boundaries.

Despite recent strategic alignments with globalization theory (e.g. Dewey 2007; Dewey and Jenkins 2010; Jenkins *et al.* 2011; Seidlhofer 2012, Jenkins 2013) and with the postcolonial and poststructuralist 'plurilithic' perspectives of writers such as Pennycook (2001, 2009) and Canagarajah (2005, 2007, 2013), this article argues that the ELF movement is ideologically conservative, is inconsistent in its arguments and is lacking in theorization. Its purpose is to explain why, and to do this by subjecting 'ELF'—here understood as the movement of that name—to a theoretically grounded *immanent critique* of its major claims and ideological presuppositions. Immanent critique is closely associated with Frankfurt School critical theory (Jay 1973), although as a critical method in this tradition it may be traced back to Marx, and prior to that to Hegel. For Hegel (1969 [1812]), in any theoretical argument, 'The genuine refutation must penetrate the opponent's stronghold and meet him on his own ground; no advantage is gained by attacking him somewhere else and defeating him where he is not' (p. 581). Which is to say, that if a theoretical position is to be critiqued, it is necessary to attempt to do this on the basis of the grounds and assumptions which have already been established and set in train by the position which is your object of scrutiny. The historical context in which the theory or position subsists is also important. In the words of Paul Gray,

'[I]mmanent critique' uses historical context to invade the inner logic of an opponent's theory and demonstrates how, according to

its own standards, its self-described universal truth-claims are only a partial, one-sided, and self-contradictory reflection of conflicts inherent to the prevailing social conditions (Gray 2012: 203).

In this article both the theory of 'ELF' and the historical context for the claims of the ELF movement are closely examined with the purpose of showing not only how 'ELF', as presented by the ELF movement, is theoretically inadequate to its own concept but also how by allowing the social conditions of the historical context, that is globalized neoliberal capitalism, to 'invade the inner logic' of ELF theory, makes it possible to highlight several lacunae and problems within the ELF movement's theorization of English in a globalized world which are insoluble in its own terms.

In addition to an historico-social orientation, the immanent critique of the Frankfurt School had a textual orientation as well. Here, as in philosophy, the role of immanent critique is to, 'transform the concepts which it brings, as it were from the outside, into those which the object has of itself, into that which the object would, left to itself, like to be, and confront it with what it is' (Adorno 2000: 176–77). Immanent critique in this manner can be understood as a type of close reading whose purpose is to highlight the inconsistencies and contradictions issuing from the self-representations of an object of knowledge, and may take the form of a textual as well as philosophical interrogation of an object, whether as a philosophical argument, an ideology, a theoretical concept, a discourse, an individual text, or a combination of these. In the first part of this article it is the discourse and texts of the ELF movement which are placed under scrutiny. This reveals that in the articulation of its own project, the ELF movement is inconsistent and misleading in the claims that it makes and that it often falls into contradiction. In addition, it illustrates through the concept of 'lingua franca fetishism' (see below) how 'ELF' can be conceived as a type of 'false consciousness' to which the ELF movement adheres for it claims. Complementing and furthering the immanent critique of the first half, is an historico-social immanent critique in the second half of the ELF movement's appropriation of transformationalist, postmodern and poststructuralist sensibilities in relation to globalization and the global spread of English (e.g. Dewey 2007; Dewey and Jenkins 2010; Jenkins *et al.* 2011; Jenkins 2013). Here immanent critique is used to highlight the etiolated nature as well as datedness of the movement's approach to globalization theory, and consequent upon this, its lack of theoretical engagement in questions of ideology, discourse, power, truth and the nature of the real, as well as the relations between them, upon which transformationalist and poststructuralist perspectives rest. Further, it also reveals the incommensurable nature of ELF movement philosophy in its combination of positivist and objectivist epistemological positions on knowledge and truth with postmodern and poststructuralist positions on the same.

For the purposes of this immanent critique this article utilizes Marxist and Foucauldian theoretical perspectives in highlighting the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in the ELF project. These are evidently positions that

are not without tensions between them, but I consider this tension an immanently productive one. The Frankfurt School and Marx enable a specific critique of the ELF movement's utilization of the ELF concept, and poststructuralism and Foucault enable a specific critique of ideology, discourse, power, truth and the nature of the real as it applies to ELF philosophy. The key in all of this is that in making such a critique it is important to be aware of the tensions which exist, and if called upon, to be able to articulate a position which demonstrates familiarity with the theoretical problems which attend to—as well as between—the different perspectives. In these terms, this is not wholly a Marxist critique, even as it sets out from the standpoint of Marxism.

### IMMANENT CRITIQUE AND THE HYPOSTATIZATION OF 'ELF'

Theodor Adorno, with Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and other members of the Frankfurt School, directed their studies towards an immanent critique of the principal tenets of capitalism, such as justice, equality and free exchange in the market (Marcuse 1968; Adorno 1973; Horkheimer 1989). The method of immanent critique is also more contemporarily employed in Critical Realism (Bhaskar 1998, 2008) and has parallels with deconstruction (Derrida 1976). Rather than discussing the structural linguistic merits or otherwise of lingua franca English (cf. Ferguson 2008; Saraceni 2008; Maley 2009; Jenks 2012; Park and Wee 2013), this article seeks to do something different, which is to confront the ELF movement with the contradictions and absences which its own texts reveal and, as part of this, to question its theoretical adequacy whilst also uncovering its ideological presuppositions. The immanent critique of this article can thus be understood as a critical as well as historico-social reading of ELF movement discourse and theory as this is presented in its own texts.

Having established these premises, I will begin by noting that ELF movement discourse is marked by slippage. It is common for example that references to *using* English as a lingua franca metamorphose into a more linguistically and conceptually reified formulation, so that the relativized conception of English which 'using English as a lingua franca' implies congeals and 'ELF' becomes a *thing-in-itself*. That is to say, users of English—of whatever stripe—in multicultural settings become speakers or users of an *hypostatized* 'ELF'; that is, one which projects 'ELF' into material existence, often by means of a noun phrase. Hypostatization is thus a form of reification in which abstract concepts are artificially concretized and made real. It is the hypostatization of English in the form of a lingua franca which makes it possible for writers identifying with an ELF programme to make references of the following sort regarding this area of study: 'This special issue [...] is written in ELF' (Mauranen and Metsä-Ketelä 2006: 6); 'The fact that the interactions examined in this article took place in ELF warrants a comment' (House 2012: 285); 'In the early 21st century, it seems clear that there are [...] English-using local, regional and global communities of practice communicating via ELF' (Seidlhofer 2009: 239); and, 'This leads us straight into a discussion of the English spoken by those who are

statistically in a majority for English language use, in other words, ELF' (Jenkins 2013: 19). The discursive hypostatization of 'ELF' as a seemingly bounded entity having stable forms is given added credence through the use of words such as 'emergent' and 'emerging' in relation to this nominalized form (cf. Ferguson 2008; Maley 2009; Park and Wee 2013, for similar criticisms), as well as in references to entities such as 'legitimate ELF variants'. Jenkins, for example, refers to 'ELF' as, 'an emerging English that exists in its own right' (Jenkins 2007: 2).

A related feature of the ELF movement's project is its attachment to positivist and objectivist modes of research enquiry as bases for establishing truth (Denzin and Lincoln 2008). Authors writing from within the movement are prone to take an uncritical stance towards epistemology and truth, as well as their data. They construct a world of free agents mutually engaged, 'in shared practices, taking part in some jointly negotiated "enterprise", and making use of members' "shared repertoire"' (Seidlhofer 2009: 238; quoted in Jenkins *et al.* 2011: 297). The given nature of empirical enquiry leading to objectivity is thus complemented ideologically by what is an unspoken acquiescence to and default acceptance of the neoliberal (and therefore capitalist) status quo. The rational-idealist specifics and contradictions of ELF movement ideology in respect of capitalist economic relations are delineated below.

Before turning to this, it seems right to record that ELF scholars are keen to point that many critiques of the ELF project have, in their view, centred upon somewhat dated positions which are no longer necessarily held, and that ELF enquiry has, 'moved on' (Jenkins *et al.* 2011: 308). For example, in their state-of-the-art article on ELF research, Jenkins *et al.* (2011) comment that, 'the focus of research has shifted from an orientation to features and the ultimate aim of some kind of codification [ . . . ] to an interest in the processes underlying and determining the choice of features used *in any given ELF interaction*' (p. 287; emphasis added). Certainly, a great deal of questioning has gone on, and it is possible that some critiques—concerning codification for example—could be out of date. However, if this is so, then it is strange to find in the same passage that codification is, 'an aim which, nevertheless, has not been dismissed out of hand' (Jenkins *et al.* 2011: 287). But there is a more subtle point to be made here, which is that the hypostatization of 'ELF' should not be thought of as simply a synonym for a codification argument, and nothing more. The argument for the codification of 'ELF' is a form of hypostatization, but it does not exhaust hypostatization's meaning. Hypostatization is about the way in which an abstraction 'ELF', in the discourse of the ELF movement, is made to *appear* already given, or 'real'—as in the phrase, 'in any given ELF interaction' above. That it is an 'ELF interaction' presents as an hypostatized given that the participants are interacting in 'ELF'; and this is notwithstanding the stated new focus on pragmalinguistic interactions or the repeated insistence upon 'ELF' variability and pluralism (see e.g. Jenkins *et al.* 2011; Cogo and Dewey 2012; Jenkins 2013, for this argument). In these terms, hypostatization may be understood as a type of 'performative contradiction' that virally contaminates

the discourse of the ELF movement (cf. Habermas 1987: 185). Other examples include phrases such as, ‘ELF settings’, ‘written ELF’, ‘spoken ELF’, ‘ELF speakers’ (all Jenkins *et al.* 2011: 302) and, ‘[I]t is the skill of converging appropriately that constitutes “correctness” in ELF’ (Jenkins 2013: 38). It is also not uncommon to find ambiguous references to ‘ELF use’ in circulation alongside such hypostatized forms (see Jenkins 2013 for many examples). So, while ELF movement researchers may argue that they have moved on, they nevertheless continue to work with an hypostatized conception of ‘ELF’, and so, arguably, they have not moved on at all. With this in mind, it is necessary to discuss how the hypostatization of ‘ELF’ initiates at the level of ideology what I refer to as ‘lingua franca fetishism’.

## LINGUA FRANCA FETISHISM AND IDEALIST RATIONALISM

Relevant to the point I wish to make here is the thinking of Marx concerning the nature of the commodity under capitalism. In *Capital* Volume 1 (1976 [1867]) Marx begins with the following lines, ‘The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails *appears* as an “immense collection of commodities”; the individual commodity *appears* as its elementary form. Our investigation therefore begins with an analysis of the commodity’ (p. 125; emphasis added). What follows is a dissection by Marx of the commodity (i.e. the ‘thing’ that is bought and sold in the market) as it appears under capitalism. The emphasis on how the commodity ‘appears’ is important because Marx wishes to reveal how the commodity is simply, “the form of appearance”, of a content that is distinguishable from it’ (p. 127), and which is therefore obscured. In other words, the commodity is the visible thing which *appears* to our senses in the marketplace, for example on the supermarket shelf, and the content which is distinguishable from it and obscured is that of commodities, ‘being products of labour’ (p. 128). This is to say, first, that the commodity as we see it (‘the form of appearance’) and the labour that was expended to produce it (the commodity’s content) can be differentiated; and secondly, that when we buy a commodity, this content and the real social relations which applied to its production (i.e. how, by whom and under what conditions) are obscured. All we see is the physical commodity; we do not see the rest, and so we are socialized into treating commodities as autonomous entities devoid of social investment. For Marx, this effect is a necessary consequence of the capitalist mode of production (Harvey 2010). However, this does not make the commodity an illusory construct; the commodity really is there as a ‘thing’, even as it obscures the social relations which produced it. Marx refers to the mysterious character of the commodity as being one of *fetishism* in which the physical commodity exists as a mystification of the *real* social relations which produced it, and from being the product of a definite social relation, the commodity becomes simply a ‘thing’ to be bought and sold (Marx 1976 [1867]: 165).

Now, I wish to argue that the type of fetishism that attaches to the commodity in the capitalist mode of production finds its metaphorical equivalent in 'ELF'. Here too exists a world of appearances, where nothing is quite as it seems. 'ELF', like the commodity, is that mysterious thing, on this occasion here and yet not here, fluid and yet congealed, normative and yet hybrid—appearing to exist in some reified and yet simultaneously liminal space in the circulation of Englishes in the world. Rather than in its *real* form as Englishes of various kinds in contact, 'ELF' *appears* instead as an *irreal* and especial hypostatized form, so that—to play on Marx's words—in the fetishism of English as a lingua franca the linguistic pragmatic interactions of speakers of different first languages assume the nature of a fantastic relation between speakers of an hypostatized universal code. The fundamental distinction which can be made between commodity fetishism and what I am calling the lingua franca fetishism of the ELF movement is that where the commodity is a real entity in a 'fantastic' relation with other commodities, the obverse is true of 'ELF', which is only artificially made real through the hypostatization of an abstraction. Unlike the commodity, 'ELF' has no physical presence: you cannot point to it or pick it up, neither can you exchange it; nor for that matter is 'ELF' strictly speaking a product of labour (unless you count the labour expended by speakers of different L1s to acquire and speak English). The hypostatization and fetishism of 'ELF' as a *thing-in-itself* thus constitutes the *irreal* mystification, or projection, of a *real* content which is obscured, and so in a classical Marxist sense may be said to designate a 'false consciousness' or 'abstract objectivism' (Vološinov 1973: 52) in relation to the circulation of Englishes in the world; a point I will return to at a later stage in this article. The real content which is obscured by this 'false consciousness' is how speakers of English from different linguacultures, in addition to speaking L1 inflected English, may simply be displaying the types of variant forms which are common in the acquisition of any second language (Bruthiaux 2003; Elder and Davies 2006), rather than engaging in, 'systematic 'regularizations', similar to those found in ENL variation' (Dewey 2012: 151), or attempting to, 'manipulate the linguistic resources available to them in systematic, regular ways' (Jenkins *et al.* 2011: 288). It is the fetishism of 'ELF', which is consequent upon its hypostatization, that inexorably leads its supporters to claim that there is systematicity in non-native speaker (NNS) use and to uncover empirically grounded data that will support this conclusion. But in the fetishism of 'ELF' it is not only the *real* linguacultural relations of both learners and users which are obscured (I return to this distinction below); a further dimension also obscured is the historical-social one of how speakers in the world are possessed of various forms of capital—social, cultural, linguistic and economic (Bourdieu 1986, and see below)—which depending on their distribution, afford differential access to English and to its prestigious forms. The distinctions of class, race, gender and political economy are crucial here, but by their general neglect the ELF movement succeeds only in constituting 'ELF' as a mystical and universal

*thing-in-itself*, devoid of class character and free of the political economy of capital, as well as gender and race.

In relation to this last point, much has been made by the ELF movement of the nascent potentials of the VOICE (Vienna–Oxford International Corpus of English) and ELFA (*sic*) (English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings) corpora and the dynamic inventiveness of their recorded subjects, when both are clearly founded upon the usage of a narrow range of bilingual elites in globally rarefied international business, education, research, and leisure domains (see e.g. Kalocsai 2009; Kankaanranta and Planken 2010; Cogo and Dewey 2012; Mauranen 2012; as well as the corpora themselves). As Saraceni (2008) notes, it is doubtful whether speakers such as these, ‘are in any way representative of the population of speakers of English and the circumstances in which they actually use English on a global scale’ (p. 22). As I have suggested, such users are possessed of high quotients of capital—social, cultural, linguistic and very often economic—and as such constitute an unrepresentative minority of English language practitioners globally, most of whom have been introduced to English as a required subject at school, whether they liked it or not, and regardless of their possible prospects of use; very few of these ‘learners’ actually make the transition to become users (cf. Arango 2008; Matear 2008; Maley 2009).

Also of note, and central to the historico-social dimension, is what I consider to be the general myopia of the ELF movement concerning the responsibility of capitalism—particularly in the guise of neoliberalism—for generating global and national class stratifications and, as an ineluctable part of this, the social prejudices which are attached to the forms of English which circulate within them (cf. Bourdieu 1991; Phillipson 1992, 2008a, 2008b; Pennycook 1998; Blommaert 2010; Block *et al.* 2012; Block 2012a, 2013). Despite passing reference to the need, ‘to acknowledge the obvious imbalance of power and inequality in the share of the world’s resources’ (Dewey 2007: 335), it seems that in ELF movement research as a whole there is a profound disconnect between the desire to identify and promote ‘ELF’ features and functions and the practical necessity of dealing with the structural iniquities of a global capitalism which will by default always distribute economic and linguistic resources in a way which benefits the few over the many and which confers especial prestige upon selective language forms. As Phillipson (2008b) has noted, ‘Labelling English as a lingua franca, if this is understood as a culturally neutral medium that puts everyone on an equal footing, is simply false’ (p. 5). Hence although the ELF movement wishes to pretend that ‘ELF’ is ideology and culture free, in fact it is very much neoliberal-bound as well as geoculturally Eurocentric.<sup>1</sup> Related to this is the ELF movement’s idealist rationalism. ‘ELF’ is an ideologically conservative project due to the apparent reluctance of its advocates to critique—or even name—capitalism and its contemporary manifestation neoliberalism. The ELF movement has no purchase on what Marx would consider, ‘the material conditions of definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way’ (Marx and Engels 1998 [1845]: 41). Instead, the ELF



movement weds itself to the concept of 'ELF' and puts its faith in idealist reason, in the hope that, 'in time, [such appeals] will undermine the Anglophone-centric attitudes [...] and lead to a more equitable [...] discourse more suited to a globalized world' (Seidlhofer 2012: 406; parentheses added). Such beliefs seem to form the basis of much ELF movement thinking.

## GLOBALIZATION THEORY AND 'ELF'

Returning to the historico-social dimension, and how this can be made to 'invade' the inner logic of the ELF concept, two events in this century stand out as having had a major impact on the geo-politics and economics—the *geoculture*—of the capitalist world-system (Wallerstein 2004: 23). The first was the Islamist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001, and the second was the global financial crisis of 2008, with its epicentre in the USA. Both events have had seismic consequences, from the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the excessively dangerous ratcheting up of intra-national, inter-state and regional frictions, to the near total collapse of the global financial system. The two events together have made the world an extremely volatile and unpredictable place in which fashionable formulae for explaining how the world works appear increasingly anachronistic. The 2008 financial crisis also brought into sharp relief the quite literal bankruptcy of orthodox neoliberal thinking on how modern capitalist economies in a globalized world are supposed to develop and work (Krugman 2008; Mason 2010; Holborow 2012).

The ELF movement position on globalization is summarized in two articles (Dewey 2007; Dewey and Jenkins 2010) in which, 'ELF with its emphasis on hybridity, innovation and accommodation' is presented as being, 'particularly well placed to cope with the new "globalinguistic" [...] situation of the 21st century' (Dewey and Jenkins 2010: 76). The stall is thus set for how 'ELF' aligns with hybridized and transformationalist models of globalization. The particular model which is settled upon, of Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton, dates from 1999—that is prior to both 9/11 and the global financial crisis of 2008, and it is noticeable that despite the intervening events, the same model serves for both the 2007 and the 2010 articles, as well as a recent publication (Jenkins 2013). Three broad theoretical positions on globalization are outlined: *hyperglobalism*, *scepticism*, and *transformationalism*. Based on Dewey and Jenkins' (2010) own descriptions of these positions, hyperglobalists consider globalization to be a harbinger of fundamental change in which the influence of the nation state has withered away. Sceptics, for their part, view current levels of economic interdependence as simply an extension of long-standing processes of international interaction through different periods of history. Sceptics, according to Dewey and Jenkins, regard globalization as a myth, in which, 'current levels of economic integration have neither a profound or lasting effect on the structure and nature of societies, with little impact beyond economic activities' (Dewey and Jenkins 2010: 79). While clearly simplifications of more complex perspectives, both descriptions are

caricatures—as, indeed, are the classifications contained in Held *et al.* (1999). For example, the notion that sceptics consider globalization to be a myth is overstated both by Dewey and Jenkins and by Held *et al.*, as is the idea attached to hyperglobalism and transnationalism that, ‘the nation state has become redundant and inoperable’ (Dewey and Jenkins 2010: 79): it was, after all, nation states which saved the banks following the financial collapse of 2008. Dewey and Jenkins, following Held *et al.*, name only Hirst (1997) in the sceptic connection, although, Held and his colleagues mention Callinicos *et al.* (1994), Ruigrok and van Tulder (1995), and Hirst and Thompson (1996), amongst others. Given global events since 2001, one cannot help but notice how dated these references now appear, as are some of the key conceptions which inform them. To state that sceptics, for example, regard globalization as a myth is an oversimplification. In the Marxist sceptical tradition of which Callinicos, Hirst and Thompson are members, it is not so much that globalization is a myth, but that writers in this tradition, including Marx himself, ‘have been talking about globalization since long before the word was invented – not, however, as something new but as something which has been basic to the modern world-system ever since it began in the sixteenth century’ (Wallerstein 2004: x). Dewey and Jenkins thus repeat the oversimplification of Held and his colleagues and so theirs is a misinformed view.

The third perspective which Dewey and Jenkins (2010) adumbrate is the transformationalist perspective, and this is the one they favour.

Those who subscribe to this view regard the processes of globalization, in common with the hyperglobalist perspective, as entirely without precedent, as a result of which societies across the globe are having to readjust to a transforming world [...] Far from signaling a trend towards increased homogenization, a fundamental consequence of interconnectedness is a blurring of the distinction between internal and external affairs, between the international and domestic and thus the local and the global [...] which leads on the contrary to an increased hybridity of cultures (Dewey and Jenkins 2010: 79).

Again, their treatment is somewhat dated. Of the authors which they cite as being associated with this tradition (e.g. Rosenau 1990, 1998; Giddens 1991, 2002; Appadurai and Stenou 2000; Arizpe *et al.* 2000), only one, Giddens (2002), is in relation to a publication which is post 9/11. None therefore, including Giddens—for whom, ‘the consequences of [9/11] we can only guess at’ (Giddens 2002: xvii)—are able to offer any kind of historical perspective on events since then. It is no coincidence that the transformationalist thesis evolved in an era of unbridled capitalist expansion and triumphalist post-cold war neoliberalism. Intellectual disillusionment with modernism, and the seeming ‘victory’ of capitalism over communism following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Fukuyama 1992), as well as the long boom of the 1990s and—in spite of 9/11—the 2000s, captured a mood in which pre-history

was dismissed, and ludicity, performativity, fluidity, flexibility and hybridity became the collective intellectual zeitgeist of the 'new' capitalist age.

An insightful overview linking globalization theory and applied linguistics may be found in Block (2012b). Block shows how researchers in applied linguistics have tended to orient themselves towards the cultural dimensions of globalization theory so that there is an emphasis on flows of people, language, music and identities around the world, as well as through cyberspace. For Block (2012b), 'All of this has meant that what has emerged in applied linguistics is a view of globalization which is almost exclusively about culture' (p. 61). He continues,

Yet it is a partial view of globalization, as it relegates political economy to a brief mention or even no mention at all. It has led to a certain fascination with – and often celebration of – notions associated with postmodernism, such as diaspora, interstices, heterogeneity, translation, flexibility, intertextuality, hybridity, fluidity, fragmentation, instability, liquidity, turbulence and so on (Block 2012b: 61).

This is precisely the foil in which the ELF movement wraps itself. It does so because it plays very well to its own idealist perceptions of what 'ELF' is and to the often celebratory way it wishes to imagine 'ELF' speakers are. In the words of Dewey and Jenkins (2010), 'What is different about the current situation is the unbounded nature of these phenomena – speakers from a multitude of linguacultural backgrounds regularly make use of the language in infinitely varied contexts and for unlimited functions' (p. 88); and, 'The heightened contact between communities results, in our view, not in a linguistic homogeneity, but in heterogeneity, as the English being spoken in these settings is not the English of the inner circle, but hybridized versions of the language that develop *in situ* as speakers accommodate to the co-constructing of their discourse (p. 79). Seidlhofer (2010) adds that amongst 'ELF' speakers there is a, 'more relaxed and flexible attitude towards the use of linguistic repertoires' (Seidlhofer 2010: 357, quoted in Jenkins *et al.* 2011: 307), and Cogo and Dewey (2012) emphasize how, 'The instances in which speakers [of 'ELF'] engage in the co-construction and negotiation of meaning making and the achievement of mutual understanding demonstrate the extent to which accomplished speakers are adept at exploiting the (multi)linguistic resources that are available to them' (p. 136). They each thus present a view of globalization that has brought about fluidity and hybridity in language and where in global communication flows everybody is accommodating to everybody else in a playful postmodern manner.

## THE POVERTY OF ELF PHILOSOPHY

There is something troubling about a philosophy which appears to have little understanding of the thinking from which its supposed contemporary world

view is derived. The ELF movement aligns itself with transformationalism in globalization and, by extension, with ‘pluricentrism’ and post-performative ‘plurilithism’ in World Englishes (WE) (e.g. Canagarajah 2005, 2007, 2013; Pennycook 2007, 2009; see also, Rajagopalan 2004, 2012; Kumaravadivelu 2005, 2008; Blommaert 2010)—‘ELF, with its built-in scope for variability, is similar to [Pennycook’s] (2006) (*sic*) notion of plurilithic Englishes’ (Jenkins *et al.* 2011: 284; parentheses added)—but displays a lack of familiarity with the theoretical fundamentals of what it means to occupy such a space. There are five key conceptions about which it is necessary to have formed an opinion prior to being able to claim that one is working from within (or against) a transformationalist, plurilithic, poststructuralist or postmodern position. These are ideology, discourse, power, truth and the nature of the real—and, particularly, the relations between them. Discussion of these relations is a notable absence in the writings of the ELF movement. Instead, terms such as ideology, discourse and power are dealt with in a largely superficial and everyday way. That is, ideology is primarily discussed as a point of view or set of (often illusory; i.e. antithetical to ‘ELF’) beliefs, discourse as a way of speaking about something, and power as form of coercion or domination. For example, in an article dealing with the differences between ‘ELF’ and second language acquisition (SLA), Jenkins (2006) criticizes what she refers to as the native speaker (NS) ideology of SLA.

The NS language ideology underpinning SLA research bears a heavy responsibility for the professed desire of many NNSs of English to sound as ‘native-like’ as possible. Learner choice is, of course, essential, and I would not wish to patronize anyone by saying otherwise. However, the choice needs to be made in full knowledge of the sociolinguistic facts and without pressure from the dominant NS community [...]. (Jenkins 2006: 154–55).

It is implied here that NNSs hold illusory beliefs about what counts as good English pronunciation, and this is because they associate good pronunciation with native speaker norms (see also, Jenkins 2013, for further discussion of ideology in this vein). A principal reason for this is the NS language ideology of SLA. This is a reasonable point in itself, but the conception of ideology as false consciousness which is intimated here is not explored or debated. Indeed, in the world of ‘ELF’ it never is; and for good reason. As has been shown, the promotion of ‘ELF’ to an hypostatized and fetishized *thing-in-itself* which obscures the real relations of linguacultures and capitals arguably leads the ELF movement into the blind alley of a classically Marxist ‘false consciousness’ or, in Vološinov’s words, ‘abstract objectivism’ concerning its object of knowledge (Vološinov 1973: 48). To borrow a phrase, hypostatized ‘ELF’ is the ‘stationary rainbow’ arched over the stream of Englishes in the world (Vološinov 1973: 52), as well as over the ELF project itself. Continuing with this thought, the ideological ‘false consciousness’ which is attendant upon the hypostatized *thing-in-itself* could be said to be essential to the ELF movement because

without it there would not be any purported 'systematic regularizations' to research, and the project would founder. Now, it is necessary to tread carefully here, because while it is possible to identify something about the ELF movement position which in a classical Marxist sense might be described as a 'false consciousness' (although a term not used by Marx), this notion is a highly controversial one, and I invoke it here principally in the interests of this immanent critique, that is, in order to highlight a range of theoretical contradictions and lacunae which are attendant upon the ELF concept. The reason why the notion of ideology as false consciousness is a controversial one is due to the implication on the part of those who profess its existence of a privileged access to truth (Foucault 1980; Pennycook 2001).

There are many perspectives on ideology (e.g. Althusser 1971; Larrain 1979; Thompson 1984; Bourdieu 1991; Eagleton 1991) but for the purposes of this discussion I will follow Williams (1977: 56) for whom there are three main positions:

- (i) a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group;
- (ii) a system of illusory beliefs – false ideas or false consciousness – which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge;
- (iii) the general process of the production of meanings and ideas.

In the ELF movement, ideology often corresponds to the first and second positions listed here. In the passage above, Jenkins implies that if NNSs are apprised of true knowledge in the form 'the sociolinguistic facts' of English, they might not think about English in the way that many of them do. Whether they would or not is of secondary interest to the juxtaposition of false ideas to true knowledge which is present here, and in 'ELF' is frequently implied may be attained through empirical research (e.g. Seidlhofer 2001, 2004; Seidlhofer and Jenkins 2003; Dewey 2007; Jenkins *et al.* 2011; Cogo and Dewey 2012; Jenkins 2013). Jenkins (2013), for example, makes the following observation, 'According to the ELF school of thought and supported by extensive empirical ELF research innovative features are emerging in intercultural communication' (pp. 9–10). It is fair to say that epistemologically amongst ELF movement researchers there is a general preoccupation with a positivist and objectivist politics of enquiry in which, "'fact" is proclaimed as the ultimate basis and criterion for any kind of knowledge' (Vološinov 1973: 62). Yet, the distinction which is intimated between false consciousness and truth in many ELF movement estimations of NNS beliefs about NS varieties—as well as the preoccupation with a positivist and objectivist politics of knowledge in research—is one which is roundly rejected in postmodern and poststructuralist thinking of the kind which underpins the transformationalist, pluricentrist and plurilithic approaches to globalization and WE with which the ELF movement now aligns itself (see above). This is due to the denial of the category of truth and of the ability to take an Archimedean view (Foucault 1980; Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982; Pennycook 2001). To claim legitimacy for a false consciousness

view, or to emphasize empirical proofs as the basis of truth, as the ELF movement does, is to assume either true knowledge or the capacity to grasp it. The reason why an Archimedean position on truth is denied is due to the role discourse is perceived to play in the mediation of reality (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Blommaert 2005; Pennycook 2007; Fairclough 2010). Few applied linguists subscribe to a wholly reductionist view of the relationship of reality to discourse. Fairclough *et al.* (2010) maintain that, 'Semiosis is a crucial part of social life, but it does not exhaust the latter' (p. 206). Pennycook (2007) perhaps comes closest to the reductionist position, '[W]e should now no longer have to argue that subjects are discursively constructed, that interpretations are contingent, that there is no position outside discourse' (p. 43). My view is that discourse as semiosis, 'to refer to language and other semiotic modes' (Fairclough 2010: 69), is the collective skein through which we are able to access the real, but that the real cannot be reduced to it. Semiosis, in these terms, is a collective modality—or 'meaning ensemble' (Kress 2010: 58)—through which the material and the immaterial—social, cultural, historical, political, economic, religious, concrete, physical, etc.—are entered into a system of signification. Semiosis is thus the means by which the existence of the real is acknowledged—in signs—and brought within the realm of human experience and interpretation (cf. Vološinov 1973; Derrida 1978; Bhaskar 1998). It follows then, that class as well as other forms of social struggle are no less 'real' for their being made intelligible through semiosis. Real struggle goes on, and is 'causally efficacious' (Bhaskar 2008: 106), but it requires semiosis for individuals and groups to make struggle, as well as other forms of human activity, intelligible and mutually interpretable.

Whatever we may think of these arguments whether as Marxists, critical realists or poststructuralists—and respective views on this can differ considerably—one point which is clear is that on these questions the ELF movement is silent. It has no apparent view on the semiotic and social theory dimensions of discourse, or the related constructs of reality, knowledge and the status of truth. Rather, the concept of discourse is invoked only in general terms to refer to the way certain topics are talked about in applied linguistics, usually in reference to debates in WE; for example, concerning NS ideologies, the merits of native and non-native teachers of English, and the different positions which are taken up. Thus, Jenkins (2006) refers to debates about native and non-native teachers as being, 'a product of the various discourses on the concept of the *native speaker*' (p. 172; original emphasis); and Dewey (2007) to, 'applied linguistic discourse which has produced significant debate on the global spread of English' (p. 333). The other manner in which discourse is employed is to refer to the discourse of speakers of 'ELF'. For example, Jenkins *et al.* (2011) make reference to, 'ELF discourse, as contrasted with ENL discourse' (p. 294).

If the ELF movement is unable to give anything more than a cursory account of ideology, discourse, reality and truth, this also applies to the category of power. In ELF movement philosophy power too appears in its popular

guise—as something possessed by some (NSs) in their unjust domination of others (NNSs).

As we see in the difficulties reported by non-Anglo scholars, and in applied linguistics work that addresses these issues, the way the 'ownership' of the language is perceived is not a trivial matter, but on the contrary lies at the heart of the questions of access and power that we are talking about. Failure to radically rethink the language as such, and default assumptions that result from this failure, have put disabling limits on the room for manoeuvre that we perceive non-Anglos to have in their efforts to assert their equal rights (Seidlhofer 2012: 396).

Power in poststructuralism—and hence also in hybridized transformationalism—is intertwined with discourse and ideology in the production of knowledge. The common reference point in most informed accounts of this conception of power in applied linguistics is Foucault (cf. Fairclough 1992; Pennycook 2001; Blommaert 2005). As Pennycook (2001) has shown, Foucault's theory of power is not one that relies solely upon coercion or domination for its comprehension. For Foucault, power constructs, frames, classifies and produces. It is responsible for subjecthood, knowledge and meaning.

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole of society, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault 1980: 119).

It is evident that the ELF movement does not have a conception of power in these terms, despite its professed attachment to the thinking of Pennycook and others within a Foucauldian frame, and therefore no considered position on this either. Rather, it seems wedded to a politics of knowledge in which ideology, discourse and power are separated out and neatly located within a rationalist, positivist and objectivist epistemology.

## CONCLUSION

This article set out with the aim of exposing the performative inconsistency, ideological conservatism and theoretical paucity of the English as a lingua franca movement in respect of the implications of the positions it adopts on the global spread of English. To this end I have subjected ELF movement discourse to an immanent critique which has highlighted how the term 'English as a lingua franca' has been detached from its more prosaic etymological origins for referring to English used as a common language between people with

different linguacultural backgrounds to become in the discourse of the ELF movement a reified and—consequent upon that—hypostatized and fetishized *thing-in-itself*. This article does not specifically take issue with the linguistic data offered by ELF researchers; others have already done this. Rather, this article has drawn attention to another issue, which is a general imprecision in articulation so that in ELF movement discourse ELF researchers, through their viral hypostatization of ‘ELF’, succeed not only in presenting ‘ELF’ as if it were an already existing variety, but also in simultaneously undermining their own insistence upon ‘ELF’ variability and pluralism. At the same time, the ELF movement’s fetishism of the ELF concept as a *thing-in-itself*, at least in classical Marxist terms, has had the effect of projecting ‘ELF’ as a necessary ‘false consciousness’ for the purposes of legitimizing its project.

I have also argued that the portrayal of those who are taught English in language classrooms globally as representative of a disenfranchised silent majority of ‘ELF’ speakers is misleading. A distinction may be made between those who are exposed to English as learners but never actually use it, and those who advance to become users. Even then, there is likely to be a cline of use from basic utterances to functional bilingualism and the cosmopolitan ‘Anglo-nativeness’ of the kind displayed by many bilingual researchers in the ELF movement. Here too, access to social, cultural, linguistic and economic capital is likely to be decisive in determining where users are located on the cline. Most learners of English, for example, do not achieve the status of users because of the systemic economic, gendered and racial inequalities with which many societies globally are historically infected. From a diachronic historical-social perspective, the ELF movement neglects the history and reality of capitalism—and more recently neoliberalism—and the unequal manner in which it allocates economic and linguistic resources across social classes, and gendered and racial groups, within nations and within the world-system. From a synchronic perspective, it makes no distinction between learners of unsolicited school English and actual users and so, by a conflation of the two, it creates a moral hyperbole based on inflated numbers which in practice only serves to advance the linguistic claims of a stratified bilingual cosmopolitan elite within a largely given global-capitalist status quo.

Finally, I have sought to demonstrate that the ELF movement’s stated alignment with and cooption of transformationalist, postmodern and poststructuralist positions on globalization and WE is flawed and epistemologically incommensurable. The ELF movement’s conception of globalization is anachronistically imprisoned in a ludic twentieth century celebration of ‘end-of-history’ capitalism in which cultural and linguistic borders have melted away and everything—particularly English—is in hybrid, flexible and liquid flow. Yet this conception has been shown to be incompatible with the rational-idealist and positivist politics of knowledge to which the ELF movement adheres. Adorno (1994) comments that, ‘By its regression to magic under late capitalism, thought is assimilated to late capitalist forms’ (p. 173). It is an apt metaphor for the theoretical cul-de-sac of the ELF movement.



## SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

A longer version of this article is available as Supplementary material at *Applied Linguistics* online.

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## NOTE

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