English as a Lingua Franca from the classroom to the classroom

Jennifer Jenkins

English has served as a means of communication among speakers of different first languages (i.e. a lingua franca) for many centuries. Yet its present spread and use are so new that English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in its current global manifestation did not exist as recently as 1946 when this Journal was launched. During the 20 years or so since it was first identified and empirically researched, however, ELF has grown from a minority interest within applied linguistics to a major field of study in its own right. And most recently, attention has turned to its implications for the ELT classroom. This article explores the development of research into ELF, examines some of the misconceptions about it that have been expressed (including in this very Journal), and considers its future in terms of ELT pedagogy.

Introduction: from the classroom . . .

It is fitting that an article on English as a Lingua Franca (henceforth, ELF) should appear in this special issue of *ELTJ*, Keith Morrow's final one as Editor, since it was in the 1990s under his watch at *ELTJ* that, to my knowledge, the first article on ELF (Jenkins 1998) was published in an internationally read journal. At that time, ELF was virtually unknown even in applied linguistics/sociolinguistics/World Englishes circles, and for the sake of transparency, the better-known term 'English as an International Language' (or EIL) tended to be used instead. The two terms are, nevertheless, regarded by ELF researchers as synonymous, and over the past decade, ELF has gained ascendance, whereas EIL has fallen into minority use mainly because of its ambiguity.

But what, exactly, is ELF? In essence, as stated in the Abstract, it is a means of communication between people who come from different first language backgrounds. The website of the first and largest ELF corpus, the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English, or VOICE (see www.univie.ac.at/voice), adds that ELF is 'additionally acquired'. This may seem obvious as far as non-native English speakers (NNESs) are concerned, since English, by definition, is not their L1. But it is less obvious in respect of native English speakers (NESs), because English, by definition, *is* their L1 and, as will be discussed below, ELF is not a language variety in the traditional sense of the term. The crucial point,

486

however, is that ELF (unlike EFL) is not the same phenomenon as English as a Native Language (ENL), and therefore needs to be acquired by L1 English speakers too, albeit that their starting point, native English—rather than some other language—makes the process less arduous.

It follows that any user of English, be they from an L1 English country, a post-colonial English country, or a country where English is neither L1 nor official language, can be a user of ELF. It also follows that those for whom English is the L1 do not determine the linguistic 'agenda' of ELF. Rather, NESs constitute a small minority of those who use English for the purposes of intercultural communication, and the NNES ELF-using majority therefore should not feel the need to defer to them for appropriate English use (see Seidlhofer 2011: 2). By the same token, NES ELF users need to be able to adjust (or accommodate) their habitual modes of reception and production in order to be more effective in ELF interactions. It is in this sense that ELF can be described as 'additionally acquired' by NESs.

Despite the phenomenal increase in the use of ELF around the world, the prevailing orientation in English language teaching and testing, and ELT materials remains undoubtedly towards ENL, with correctness and appropriateness still widely driven by NES use regardless of learners' current or potential communication contexts. For example, typical 'global' ELT coursebooks, such as Headway and Oxford English Grammar Course, provide classroom models for production based largely or entirely on ENL (even if they may include recordings of non-native Englishes in order to raise awareness of their existence), whereas there are few examples indeed of coursebooks that adopt a more ELF-oriented, or at least NNES-oriented, approach, for example the New English File tentatively, and the Real Lives, Real Listening series more explicitly. Thus, learners of English who are more likely to use their English to communicate with other NNESs than with NESs, more often than not with no NESs present, are still being encouraged to aim for the kind of English that British or North American English speakers use among themselves. And when students around the world have completed their English language courses, it is this same native English (again, typically British or North American) that is assessed in the supposedly 'international' ELT examinations.

It was actually in the ELT classroom that I first became aware of ELF myself. For it was during the 1980s as an EFL teacher in London trying to instil near-native English into groups of students from a range of L1s (from mainland Europe, Latin America, and East Asia) that I noticed two things. Firstly, although they generally 'learnt' the rules they were taught, these students tended not to use them in natural(istic) conversation. In other words, when they spoke freely among themselves whether inside or outside the classroom, they often used other forms that seemed to be influenced both by their individual L1s and by factors relating to English itself (in so far as they all favoured the same 'incorrect' form regardless of their particular L1). Secondly, in most cases, their use of these alternative forms did not impede their mutual understanding either during classroom discussions, role plays,

simulations, and the like, or in social settings outside the classroom such as the café or pub, and when it did affect understanding, the cause most often seemed to be pronunciation related.

Despite the fact that successions of such EFL students were using their own versions of English effectively among themselves inside and outside my classes, I knew from my teacher training on Cambridge ESOL (then University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate) courses that their non-nativelike forms were (and still are, as I write in 2012) characterized in the mainstream second language acquisition (SLA) and ELT literature as errors: 'interlanguage' errors if classroom learning is still in progress, and 'fossilized' errors if it has ended. An 'interlanguage' approach might (or might not) be relevant to EFL, where students learn English primarily in order to be able to communicate with NESs. But it seemed to me even then that it was irrelevant to the kinds of lingua franca uses to which my student groups were putting their English in their daily interactions with each other, or were likely to put them in their future working and social lives.

It was this observation that led me to conduct my first ELF research, which focused mainly on the ways in which ELF users accommodated to each other pronunciation-wise depending on the activity in progress. Naïve though that early ELF pronunciation research (for example Jenkins 2000) now seems by comparison with the more-nuanced ELF research and conceptualizing that followed, the empirically supported presentation of ELF as 'an adaptable and creative use of language in its own right' rather than 'a deviant or erroneous version of native English' (Seidlhofer 2011: back cover) was entirely new. And together with Seidlhofer's (2001) call for descriptions of ELF, it provided an impetus for the establishment of the ELF paradigm.

I turn now to consider briefly the key ELF areas of research and to chart how understanding of ELF has developed and advanced over recent years (though for a more detailed discussion of developments in ELF research, see Jenkins with Cogo and Dewey 2011).

ELF: forms and functions

In describing my students' apparent reluctance to use some of the native English forms I had taught them, I referred to the influence of both their various L1s (to which can be added any other languages they spoke) and English itself. ELF research has subsequently begun to demonstrate how these influences work. Starting with English itself, one important finding has been that forms identified as 'typical ELF forms' are often remarkably similar typologically to those that have already developed in both native and post-colonial Englishes. That is, ELF users, like native and post-colonial English users, seem to be exploiting the potential of the English language in ways that are found in any natural language development (see Seidlhofer 2011 on the 'virtual' English language), often as a means of regularization. This is resulting in forms that differ from native English and are widely shared among ELF speakers from many different L1s, who may use them even

Jennifer Jenkins

though—as in the case of my 1980s students—they know the native English version and the rule from which it derives. But despite their typological similarity to the kinds of forms found in native English, these NNES-led innovations tend to be regarded in ELT as errors until/unless they are eventually 'sanctioned' by NES use.

To take a few examples, there is a tendency for uncountable nouns to become countable across all three English-using groups (native, post-colonial, and neither). The process simply seems to occur more slowly in native English than in post-colonial Englishes (which already use countable forms such as 'furnitures' and 'staffs' that would be considered errors in native English), and even more slowly than in the rest of the world (i.e. the places where English is neither the mother tongue nor an official language), whose speakers make copious use of forms such as 'advices', 'feedbacks', and 'informations'. Other ELF forms arising from regularization that have precedents in native and post-colonial Englishes include zero marking of third person present singular *–s*, as in 'she think'; merging of 'who' and 'which' (as native English already does in employing 'that' in defining relative clauses for both people and things, see Cogo and Dewey 2012), for example 'the book who . . . '; and use of a multi-purpose question tag form such as 'isn't it?' or 'no?'. To these lexico-grammatical items can be added, pronunciation-wise, realizations of the phonemes /θ/ and /ð/, which are produced by numerous NNESs from a range of L1s with either [s] and [z] or [t] and [d], or a combination of the two sets, for example, 'think' pronounced [sɪŋk] or [tɪŋk], not [θɪŋk], and 'then' pronounced [zen] or [den], not [ðen].

Turning to the second kind of influence, that of ELF speaker's L1s/other languages they speak, a large body of research into ELF pragmatics demonstrates how ELF users draw on their bilingual or plurilingual resources (their L1s as well as any other languages they speak in addition to English) in order to project cultural identity, signal solidarity with an interlocutor, and prioritize communicative efficiency over correctness according to ENL.

Much of the research into ELF pragmatics has focused on the use of code switching and demonstrates that the prevailing ELT view of code switching, that it is used primarily to fill gaps in lexical knowledge, is often far from the truth. Klimpfinger (2009), for example, draws on the VOICE corpus to demonstrate how code switching provides multilingual ELF users with an additional linguistic tool and serves four main functions:

- specifying an addressee
- introducing another idea
- signalling culture
- appealing for assistance

with only the fourth implying a language gap. It is, however, the signalling culture function that has received most attention in ELF pragmatics research. Cogo (in Cogo and Dewey op.cit.), shows, for

instance, how a French ELF speaker uses the expression *fleur bleue* to gloss the English idiom 'cheesy', despite the fact that his German and Italian interlocutors have indicated that they already know the meaning of 'cheesy'. The German interlocutor then glosses the English idiom with her native form *kitschig*. In both cases, the speakers are signalling their cultural identity, while intelligibility problems are pre-empted and the conversation enriched by their explanations of their L1 forms.

As well as switching into their own L1, ELF speakers are found to make use of their plurilingual resources to switch into the L1 of an interlocutor in order to signal a plurilingual identity and/or promote a sense of solidarity with the interlocutor by demonstrating 'a special bond to another language or culture' (Klimpfinger op.cit.: 361). ELF speakers are also shown to switch into languages that are not the L1 of anyone present. For example, Cogo (in Cogo and Dewey op.cit.) demonstrates how a Japanese L1 speaker signals rapport with an Italian L1 interlocutor by switching into Spanish to offer biscuits (*galletas*), Spanish being close to Italian and known by both speakers. In addition, as Baker (2009) points out, ELF users may eschew national lingua-cultural associations altogether in favour of an identification that is more *multi*-lingua-cultural. He demonstrates (p. 581), for example, how a Thai and French-Belgian negotiate different interpretations of the word *pétanque*, arriving at a new one that transcends any national connotations.

Other research into ELF pragmatics focuses, like Jenkins's early pronunciation research, on the use of accommodation strategies and ways in which ELF users adjust their speech to make it more like that of their interlocutors so as to signal solidarity and/or promote intelligibility. For example, Hülmbauer (2009) demonstrates the strategy of accommodative dovetailing, according to which one interlocutor knowingly repeats the 'incorrect' form another has uttered, and the first speaker repeats it again. While this makes for effective lingua franca communication, it would be seen, according to traditional SLA/ELT, as lack of competence by the first speaker and its reinforcement by the second. In a sense, then, it is the opposite of the use of reformulation as a corrective device in EFL classrooms, whereby the teacher may reformulate a learner's 'incorrect' utterance regardless of its communicative effectiveness, and the learner then repeats the 'correct', i.e. ENL, form.

ELF variability variably misinterpreted

As the above discussion of ELF pragmatics research findings demonstrates, ELF communication by its nature entails a substantial element of 'online' variability, to the extent that English speakers from a highly diverse range of lingua-cultural backgrounds negotiate and accommodate their English *in situ*. This means, in turn, that ELF cannot be conceptualized as a language 'variety' (or even several 'varieties') in the traditional sense of the term. While it is indeed the case that researchers have been able to identify forms that differ from ENL and are frequently and systematically used by ELF speakers from many different L1s, as well as others that are characteristic of ELF speakers from individual L1s (in so far as there are distinctive features

Jennifer Jenkins

of, say, Chinese use of ELF, German use of ELF, etc.), this is not the whole story. For even the earliest ELF research, for example Jenkins (2000), had documented ways in which contextual factors led to variation (in the latter case, phonological accommodation). And more recent research has increasingly noted, and begun to account for, the central role of these contextual factors in determining the ELF forms that occur in any particular interaction.

ELF, thus, does not fit into existing frameworks, and it makes better sense to approach it from a different perspective altogether, that of the notion of 'communities of practice' (see Seidlhofer 2011: 87–8). Such an approach is able to account for both ELF's observed regularities across speakers and its variability in the context of the specific, and often very small, community's interaction (for example a meeting of an international group of physicists or environmentalists), as speakers jointly develop a shared repertoire to suit their specific purposes on that specific occasion. Or, as Hülmbauer (op.cit.: 325) puts it, 'ELF speakers with their individual backgrounds and resources contribute to a *situational resource pool* which changes as speaker constellations change' (her italics).

The problem for some working at the more traditional end of ELT and SLA, and in World Englishes, seems to be a difficulty in conceptualizing language except in relation to the nation state, each with its (relatively) fixed, bounded, native language. In ELT and SLA, this translates into the belief that only ENL, the English of NESs, is a 'proper' English variety, with the main debate being whether EFL learners should opt for a standard British or North American (or, occasionally, Australian) version as their target model, and SLA research focusing on how this native version can best be acquired. In World Englishes, with its 'varieties of English' approach, according to which the post-colonial nations each have their own relatively fixed English variety (Indian English, Nigerian English, and so on), the issue is slightly different, even though the conclusion is similar. That is, the argument goes, English is not an official language used in daily communication among the indigenous populations of the so-called EFL countries and thus does not fit into the traditional World Englishes varieties paradigm. It therefore 'follows' that English speakers from countries such as Germany and Japan should be taught a native or post-colonial variety of English. Somewhat ironically, then, the ELT industry and the World Englishes paradigm are in agreement on 'EFL' speakers' lack of right to their own English, if on little else.

In both cases, the position leads to misinterpretations of ELF. On the one hand, as far as many ELT practitioners and mainstream SLA researchers are concerned, ELF is simply a case of 'anything goes' and constitutes linguistic anarchy to the extent that NNES ELF speakers 'fail' to defer to ENL. In addition, ELF may be described in the ELT literature as a 'reduced' or 'simplified' version of English, whereas ELF research findings demonstrate, on the contrary, that ELF is as rich as any other English, including that of NESs. It is also claimed that ELF researchers wish to impose ELF on all learners of English and remove

from them the choice of which kind of English to learn rather than, as is the case, provide a greater element of choice. Meanwhile, from a World Englishes perspective, ELF is widely seen as a monolithic English, a single global ELF 'variety', somewhat amusingly, the opposite of 'anything goes'. Of course, none of these accusations is true, as those who make them would discover, were they to read the copious ELF literature in this dynamic, fast-moving field.

I would not for a moment want to suggest that *ELTJ* is particularly guilty of publishing misinterpretations of ELF research, as this is by no means true: several other well-known journals including, for example, *English Today* and *World Englishes* are equally or more guilty in this respect. However, as anyone reading my article is likely to have access to other issues of *ELTJ*, I will mention a few instances where the kinds of misinterpretation to which I refer have appeared in this Journal.

Unfortunately *ELTJ*'s 15-reference rule prevents me from giving specific details as I do not wish to waste my precious reference allowance on such items. But if I might 'cheat' a little, readers will find examples of the kind of thing I mean by consulting the following recent issues of *ELTJ*: 64/4, 65/4, and 66/1, the latter item being an astonishingly misinformed 'Point' forming part of a 'Point and counterpoint'. Looking further back, the most misinformed article on ELF to appear in *ELTJ* to date is that of Kuo (2006). To my mind, it is a pity that Kuo's gross misrepresentation of ELF is so frequently and uncritically cited. By contrast, when presented to an ELF-informed audience (in a paper at the 4th International Conference of ELF in Hong Kong 2011), her arguments did not stand up at all to scrutiny.

Conclusion: . . . to the classroom

And so we return to the classroom, although not in order for me to provide specific pedagogic recommendations. For ELF researchers have always been careful to point out that we do not believe it is our place to tell teachers what to do, but that it is for ELT practitioners to decide whether/to what extent ELF is relevant to their learners in their context. ELF researchers have also always argued in favour of learner choice as to which kind of English to aim for (a choice which, it has to be said, often *is not* available in traditional EFL classrooms). All they ask is that learners are presented with the sociolinguistic facts of the spread of English around the world before they make their choice. Thus, although both Jenkins (2007: 241) and Seidlhofer (2011: 196–8) make tentative suggestions for incorporating some general ELF-oriented principles into ELT as and when required, they do not see it as their role to encroach any further on to teacher territory.

The process of introducing (or not introducing) ELF into ELT, as Dewey (2012) observes, begins with teachers and therefore with teacher education. He points out that although ELF research findings question many long-held beliefs about what and how English should be taught and tested, hitherto there has been little discussion of what this means in practice for ELT professionals. And this has led to a feeling of unease and insecurity among them, as tends to happen whenever existing language standards or pedagogies are challenged (see Jenkins 2007).

Jennifer Jenkins

Dewey's response (op.cit.) is to recommend working with teachers to help them explore the possibilities of an ELF approach. He reports on his own attempt to work collaboratively with teachers to do precisely this, an attempt which, he reports, has so far proved fruitful.

Others, too, consider the pedagogic challenges raised by ELF research. For instance, ELF is being researched in relation to learner motivation. Kormos, Kiddle, and Csizér (2011) explore the English language learning motivations of 518 Chilean learners. These researchers are interested in the possibility that traditional models of motivation may not apply now that English 'has become an international language serving as a lingua franca in a globalized world', and that '[c]onsequently, a new language-learning goal has emerged: international posture' (p. 496). Crucially, they find 'the most important learning goal of the surveyed students was related to the status of English as a lingua franca' (p. 513). Other empirical research, such as that by Ranta (2010), reveals that younger NNESs are developing an awareness that the English they are taught in their ELT classrooms, both the idealizations and the 'real' native English, often does not reflect the kind of English they need to communicate in their intercultural lives outside.

Given the growing awareness of the need for pedagogical issues to be addressed in relation to ELF, it is timely that the organizers of the 5th International Conference of ELF (Istanbul 2012) have made it their conference theme. Although at the time of writing, the conference has not yet taken place, it is evident from the programme (see http://www.elf5.org/) that there will be plentiful discussion of practical as well as theoretical issues. This may lead, in turn, to the development of ELF-oriented materials, which, admittedly, have been thin on the ground to date. In fact, the only book for teachers currently devoted to an ELF approach is Walker's (2010) handbook on teaching ELF-oriented pronunciation, whereas as mentioned earlier, there are very few ELF-oriented coursebooks indeed for teachers to use in their classrooms with their students.

Meanwhile, there is as yet little evidence that the global examination boards, such as Cambridge ESOL, IELTS, and TOEFL, are taking account of ELF or are even willing to engage in debate with ELF researchers. The 2012 Going Global conference (see http://ihe.britishcouncil.org/going-global) which, like all the previous Going Global conferences, was heavily sponsored by IELTS and TOEFL, is a case in point. From the online programme, it appears to have had only two talks on English language issues, one of which focused specifically on 'how to understand and use' TOEFL scores. By contrast, my proposal for a talk ('Internationalizing English for the international university'), which included a challenge to these kinds of examinations from an ELF perspective, was rejected.

On the other hand, the negative orientations of testers and ELT/SLA traditionalists are increasingly being countered by a growing receptivity towards ELF, especially among younger ELF users and researchers. This is witnessed, for example, by a notable growth in the number of younger NNESs studying for PhDs in ELF and going on to publish

in the field. To this can be added other positive signs such as the establishment of ELF corpora in addition to VOICE, for example ELFA (the corpus of ELF in Academic Settings) and ACE (the Asian Corpus of English) among many others, and the launch of both the *Journal of ELF* and a new book series, Developments in ELF (De Gruyter Mouton). So it may not be too much longer before *ELTJ* is able to come full circle and report on ELF in the ELT classroom.

References

Baker, W. 2009. 'The cultures of English as a lingua franca'. *TESOL Quarterly* 43/4: 567–92.

Cogo, A. and **M. Dewey.** 2012. *Analysing English as a Lingua Franca: A Corpus-driven Investigation.* London: Continuum.

Dewey, M. 2012. 'Towards a post-normative approach: learning the pedagogy of ELF'. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* 1/1: 141–70.

Hülmbauer, C. 2009. '"We don't take the right way. We just take the way that we think you will understand"—the shifting relationship of correctness and effectiveness in ELF communication' in A. Mauranen and E. Ranta (eds.). *English as a Lingua Franca. Studies and Findings.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Jenkins, J. 1998. 'Which pronunciation norms and models for English as an International Language?' *ELT Journal* 52/2: 119–26.

Jenkins, J. 2000. *The Phonology of English as an International Language.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. 2007. *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. with **A. Cogo** and **M. Dewey.** 2011. 'Review of developments in research into English as a lingua franca'. *Language Teaching* 44/3: 281–315.

Klimpfinger, T. 2009. '"She's mixing the two languages together"—forms and functions of code-switching in English as a lingua franca' in A. Mauranen and E. Ranta (eds.). *English as a Lingua Franca. Studies and Findings.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Kormos J., T. Kiddle, and **K. Csizér.** 2011. 'Systems of goals, attitudes, and self-related beliefs in second-language-learning motivation'. *Applied Linguistics* 32/5: 495–516.

Kuo, I-C. 2006. 'Addressing the issue of teaching English as a lingua franca'. *ELT Journal* 60/3: 213–21.

Ranta, E. 2010. 'English in the real world vs. English at school: Finnish English teachers' and students' views'. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 20/2: 156–77.

Seidlhofer, B. 2001. 'Closing a conceptual gap: the case for a description of English as a Lingua Franca'. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 11/2: 133–58.

Seidlhofer, B. 2011. *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Walker, R. 2010. *Teaching the Pronunciation of English as a Lingua Franca.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The author

Jennifer Jenkins is Professor of Global Englishes, Director of the Centre for Global Englishes at the University of Southampton, and founding Co-editor of the *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca.* She has published numerous articles on ELF along with two monographs, *The Phonology of English as an International Language* (Oxford University Press 2000) and *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity* (Oxford University Press 2007), as well as a university coursebook, *World Englishes* (second edition, Routledge 2009). She is currently writing a book on ELF and English language policy in higher education (Routledge 2013).

Email: j.jenkins@soton.ac.uk