

# Possible problems facing English as a Lingua Franca

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### Possible problems facing English as a Lingua Franca

English is the global language. It is spoken by more people, and by more diverse groups of people, than any other language on earth (Crystal 2006: 189). Whether seen as a globalizing force for good, or a threat to other languages and cultures (for example Phillipson's idea of English as a "lingua frankensteinia") (2008), the strong, global, presence of the language cannot be denied. A scholarly initiative dealing with language learning and education in response to the global position of English is "English as a Lingua Franca" (or ELF). The ELF approach by Jennifer Jenkins has garnered considerable scholarly attention and represents a distinctive voice in the debate surrounding worldwide English Language Teaching (ELT). The ELF proposal is not uncontroversial, though, and there are many questions concerning its practical implementation and pragmatic value. Three important questions regarding ELF are: whether it can be seen as a bona fide variety of English within a World Englishes Paradigm; whether learners of English would be interested in acquiring ELF; and, what the consequences of adopting ELF would be for learners. These are rather broad and general questions, but what connects them is the overarching concern with the practicality of the ELF proposal. It appears that these questions pose significant challenges to the notion of ELF in education.

### Background

In order to understand the context of and reasons for the scholarly debate surrounding ELF, it is important to see the wider linguistic context, starting with the statistical

reality. In terms of the sheer number of speakers, no language is as influential as English. It is impossible to say exactly how many people worldwide speak English. Crystal's latest revised estimate puts the total number of speakers somewhere around two billion, which means that approximately one third of the world's population now speaks English (Crystal 2008: 5). A second important fact is that when it comes to its speakers (and this is unique to the English language), non-native speakers (NNSs), those who learn English as a second or foreign language, outnumber native speakers (NSs) by three or four to one (Schneider 57). This last fact lies at the root of the discussion about the teaching of English internationally, because it raises the question of what to teach these learners. Jenkins argues that because NNSs outnumber NSs, "the (so-called) native speaker of English should no longer be the measure against which (so-called) non-native speaker performance is judged" (2006: 32)

It is also important to be aware of the World Englishes paradigm, within which Jenkins situates ELF (2007: 17). Based on Kachru's work, World Englishes divides the English speaking communities of the world into three circles: one Inner, one Outer and one Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle consists of those people for whom English is the first language (L1) and of countries in which English is the main language spoken, such as the UK, USA, Australia, and New Zealand (Melchers and Shaw 44) The Outer Circle consists of countries to which English came as a result of colonialism (Melchers and Shaw 134). In many Outer Circle countries the English language competes with both national and regional languages, and is often perceived as a prestige language (134-135). Examples of Outer Circle Countries are post-colonial countries such as India, Kenya, Tanzania, Singapore and the Philippines. The final circle is the Expanding Circle. The Expanding Circle consists of those countries in which English is not used "for official purposes", nor for general communication

by its citizens (Melchers and Shaw 189). English may be used within certain domains, though, such as higher education or international business (Melchers and Shaw 190). As Melchers and Shaw indicate, the Circles model (in this form) is beginning to show its age. When Kachru developed his categorization model the Cold War was still a reality, and global digital media a futuristic dream. Increased globalization and “computer-mediated communication... have changed the nature of interaction in English” (Melchers and Shaw 8). This is perhaps most noticeable in the case of the Expanding Circle—in numbers of speakers the largest of the three—which has seen a great increase in use of and exposure to English (Melchers and Shaw 9). It has therefore been suggested that the term “foreign-language” no longer accurately reflects the English language situation in the Outer Circle (Melchers and Shaw 9). This view is also held by Jenkins and the proposal of ELF can be seen as an attempt to do justice to the current, changed, status of English in the Expanding Circle.

### ELF

ELF, as proposed by Jenkins, is a response to the increasing internationalization and globalization of English. The acronym stands for “English as a Lingua Franca”, a lingua franca being a “contact language used among people who do not share a first language, and [which] is commonly understood to mean a second (or subsequent) language of its speakers” (Jenkins 2007: 1). In Jenkins’ words, ELF is an “emerging English” that “exists in its *own right*” and which should be described “in its *own terms*” instead of being measured against NS English (emphasis in original) (2). ELF, according to Jenkins, thus subverts the “standard language ideology” that pervades much of education and the wider world (32). Standard language ideology presents a so-called standard variety of a language as being right and proper, thereby turning

difference (from the standard) into deviance (36). ELF, in Jenkins' conception, by contrast, is an emancipated type of English spoken by those with a different L1. One of the main advantages of such a variety is that it would level the playing field in terms of linguistic power relations. The English of NNSs could no longer be judged as deficient in comparison to any native speaker variety because these no longer serve as normative linguistic reference points (Jenkins 2006: 32). Jenkins also argues that in ELF NNSs would become "the majority speakers of the language" (i.e. ELF), and would come "to see themselves as at least equals alongside NSs" (Jenkins 2007: 188). ELF is thus about "community as opposed to alienness", "commonality rather than...difference", the idea that "mixing languages is acceptable" and that there is "nothing inherently wrong in retaining certain characteristics of the L1" (4). ELF, in this view, is owned by all who speak it and is thus the exclusive property of no one particular group. This means that ELF is neutral and that all speakers can appropriate it to claim their identity in English. By contrast, the "standard language ideology" results in linguistic insecurity in NNSs on the one hand, and in linguistic over-security in NSs on the other (247).

It is, according to Jenkins, not yet clear what ELF will eventually come to look like, for much of the language still needs to develop (22). In the area of phonology some steps have already been made, though, with Jenkins' Lingua Franca Core as a concrete result. The LFC divides the pronunciation of English into two categories: the core features (essential for mutual intelligibility in ELF) and the non-core features (not essential for mutual intelligibility in ELF). (Jenkins 2006: 37) In theory, as long as a speaker adheres to the conventional pronunciation of the core features, he or she may freely vary his pronunciation of non-core features without endangering communication.

The ELF proposal appears to have considerable merit and provides possible answers to current questions about the teaching of English in the Expanding Circle in a globalized world. For regardless of whether the specific solutions offered by ELF prove feasible, it cannot be denied that a justification has to be found for the teaching of a specific variety of English in an Expanding Circle context. As Jenkins points out, English is unique in that NNSs (both Outer and Expanding Circle) outnumber NSs. She also argues that English is learned primarily (although by no means exclusively) to communicate with other NNSs. This type of communication (NNS-NNS) is much less likely to occur with for example German or Chinese (at the very least in a global setting) (10). Although there appear to be many advantages to ELF as an approach to English language teaching in the Expanding Circle, there are a number of questions about the practicality of the proposal that need to be addressed.

#### Possible Problems

Reactions to ELF have been varied and the notion of an independent Expanding Circle variety has proven quite contentious. Jenkins (2007) discusses some of the criticism of ELF and notes that, in her view, “scholarly opposition to ELF seems to be based not so much on rational argument as on irrational prejudice” (12). This “irrational prejudice” appears to be related to (and perhaps even informed by) the notion of the “standard language ideology”, and in Jenkins’ view it is this ideology that informs the work of scholars such as Prodromou and Kuo (Jenkins, 2007, 35 and 118-20). Jenkins also attributes a large proportion of ELF criticism to conceptual misunderstanding on the side of critics (19). As Ferguson points out, though, it is unclear to what extent this “misunderstanding” is the results of critics’ misreading or whether Jenkins’ conceptualization of ELF has in fact changed over the years

(Ferguson 131). With regard to the practicality of ELF, three separate but related issues can be raised: first, that the conception of ELF as an independent “variety” within World Englishes is untenable; second: that learners have no desire to acquire proficiency in ELF; and third: that ELF, if it were taught, might not necessarily benefit its learners.

#### ELF as a distinct variety of English

There appears to be considerable confusion surrounding the status of ELF as either a variety of English, multiple varieties of English, or perhaps not a variety as such at all. This confusion could in part be due to progressing scholarly research on the topic by ELF proponents, and the new insights resulting from this. Whereas earlier ELF research tended to focus on identifying the linguistic features typically associated with ELF, later research moved away from this and tended (and tends) to be more interested in the fluidity of language use and the processes underlying the choice for certain language use in specific circumstances. (Jenkins 2011: 296) One could wonder, though, to what extent these activities are ultimately compatible, as identifying ultimately fluid and flexible features would presumably prove both difficult and inconsequential (with regard to for example education). Leyland points out that, "Intelligibility in ELF interactions depends on successful negotiation, throughout the interaction, of the appropriate grammatical, phonological, and lexical range between participants as well as the appropriate discourse strategies" (42). Pennycook, however, sees the ELF model as “centripetal” and as “posit[ing] a core to English that is more or less stable (39). Whatever the cause, there appears to be considerable ambiguity about the nature of ELF, and this could have serious implications for the adoption of ELF in for example education.

If ELF were eventually to be adopted by teachers—Jenkins certainly appears to have an interest in teaching and, for example, interviews NNS English teachers at length for *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*—it will have to somehow be taught. Ferguson remarks on this topic that the ELF and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts are not in every situation mutually exclusive, meaning that there will be contexts in which a teacher will have to cater to both simultaneously (125). One could think, for example, of a classroom setting in which some of the learners aspire to NS proficiency (for whatever reason), while others are content (or would prefer) to acquire ELF. Though perhaps not insurmountable, the practical problems this would cause (for example in examinations) would be considerable. A second point made by Ferguson is perhaps more problematic from an ELF teaching perspective, namely who provides the norm of standard if not the native speaker (125). Unless one desires to radically restructure and reformulate the way education is run, there is going to be a need for some sort of normative standard. Jenkins recognizes the need to distinguish between a legitimate ELF variant of a word, and interlanguage (errors by learners who have yet to adequately master the language) (Jenkins 2009: 202). To establish what is what, empirical research is required on the “systematicity, frequency, and communicative effectiveness” of different variants (202). Codification by and of itself, though, may not be enough. As Ferguson points out “History is replete with standardisations, and constructions ... which have withered away because they have not won the loyalty of those whom the standard is supposed to serve” (129). At present, it would appear, ELF can provide neither a reference model, nor a target model. According to Jenkins it is still too early to say what will and what will not be codified in ELF (Jenkins 2009: 202); whatever the result may be when that time comes, for the moment ELF is left without norms and



this poses a possible problem if ELF is to be taken as (the basis for) and educational model.

A more fundamental problem, though, is the nature of standards/norms and their use in education and wider society. Standards, after all, determine what language use is deemed “correct” (and thus approved of) and what is deemed “incorrect” (and thus censured). Standards are also ideological. As Ferguson indicates, standards usually refer to the prestige variety and judge any language in terms of its proximity to this (Ferguson 126). The idea of language norms is thus part of the very Standard Language Ideology that ELF is supposed to subvert. The notion of a standard (or even multiple standards) is problematic for ELF, yet the matter cannot be avoided if ELF is to be incorporated in education (or at least in education in its current form). Assuming a way out of this conundrum was found, and assuming the need for a standard was agreed upon, this would still leave the question what this standard would consist of (Ferguson 126). In Jenkins’ view ELF would have its “own *sui generis* proficiency cline, a cline independent of the trajectory followed in EFL” (Ferguson 126). Ferguson notes, however, that there is very little indication of what this cline would look like. As a benchmark for ELF Jenkins proposes its “expert users”; the problem with this is that there appears to be no way of determining who is and who is not an “expert user” (127). Park and Wee note that the “expert user” appears to be the same person as the “educated user” (because “fluent” use of ELF would require “a high degree of proficiency in an already extant linguistic variety” (368). According to Park and Wee ELF appears to be assuming a “class-based usage”, thereby replacing one type of linguistic inequality with another (368).

Perhaps in time sufficient corpus data will support the identification of certain ELF-unique language features, and this would certainly strengthen the case for ELF. Identifying certain features will not be enough, however, as this still leaves the need for a cut-off point. This “ELF end-point”, as Ferguson calls it, will have to be the result of a conscious, “evaluative, even ideological, judgment” (127). It remains to be seen if the corpus data shows any degree of convergence among NNS Englishes. Unlike post-colonial varieties, ELF is used in a great many different linguistic and cultural contexts. This makes convergence, at least in Prodromou’s view, very unlikely (2008: 245). He therefore concludes that ELF is in fact not a separate norm-generating international variety of English.

#### The choice of the learner

Perhaps the most interesting, and certainly one of the most complicated questions surrounding ELF involves the choice of the learner. It is also a problematic issue from the perspective of an ELF advocate, because learners appear, by and large, not to be positively inclined towards the idea of ELF. Studies by Timmis (2002), Kuo (2006), Suzuki (2011), and Groom (2011), as well as Jenkins’ (2007) own research on the matter reveals a largely negative attitude of learners towards ELF. These studies deserve careful analysis and description; for their results appear to indicate what could potentially be a very serious challenge to the practical implementation of ELF. The various studies cover a range of different types of learners of English, both in terms of geographical as well as socio-economic background.

Timmis’ article, “Native Speaker Norms and International English: a Classroom” view describes the results of two relatively large-scale surveys, one among students and one among teachers from a range of different countries. On the

whole, respondents (both students and teachers) expressed a desire to adhere to native speaker norms. Respondents were asked questions regarding the desirability of certain forms of English use in three different areas: pronunciation, (written) grammar and spoken grammar. Regarding pronunciation, students indicated that they preferred “native-speaker competence” to “accented international intelligibility”. Notable exceptions to this were the students from South Africa, Pakistan and India, who indicated a preference for “accented international intelligibility” (242). This result is interesting in that it shows a possible difference between Outer Circle and Expanding Circle users of English with regard to their identity as English speakers. The preference for “accented international intelligibility” indicated by Outer Circle speaker respondents is consistent with the idea that varieties of English in this circle are to some degree endonormative. By contrast, the Expanding Circle speakers appear to derive their norms from NS varieties such as Standard British English (SBE) and General American (GA). Similar results were achieved for the questions relating to grammar and informal spoken grammar. In each instance students indicated a preference for NS English. The results for the teachers showed a similar pattern to those of the students, though their attachment to NS norms was not quite as strong (248). The most interesting of Timmis’ results was that there appeared to be no significant difference in stated preference (for a native speaker variety) between the students in general, and those students who indicated that they mainly used English (or would use it in the future) to communicate with other NNSs (248). If Timmis’ respondents are any indication, the learners who Jenkins envisions will most benefit from ELF appear not to be interested in it. The implications of this result (should it prove representative) are not yet clear, as Jenkins argues that that students’ acceptance

of and preference for a native speaker model do not necessarily mean that the model is acceptable, let alone preferable (Jenkins 2006b: 154).

Kuo interviewed a number of learners from various L1 backgrounds in an EFL setting (in the UK) about their ideas and attitudes towards English. The most interesting result of her study was her students' awareness of the native speaker model. Although they recognized the need for linguistic tolerance in "real world communication" (thus accepting certain grammatical and phonological inaccuracies), they did not feel that such a model would be appropriate for education. Kuo's learners consciously chose a NS model and were not content with merely being communicative; flawless command of the target language was a goal in and of itself (219). Because of this, Kuo argues that the choice for a NS model or otherwise should be left to the learners themselves, and because learners apparently hold the view that anything other than a NS model is of lesser value, this choice will probably amount to a NS model indeed. Kuo's paper is one of the texts discussed in *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*. In her response Jenkins argues that Kuo's respondents may not be representative, as they had all traveled to the UK, and that their preference for a NS model was therefore hardly surprising (Jenkins 2007: 113). Another point of criticism Jenkins mentions is that Kuo accepts her respondents' remarks at face value, without further investigating possible underlying reasons for their stated preference (113). Jenkins' first point of criticism certainly seems valid; Kuo's respondents probably all had an interest in Britain and the English (NS) language, and are therefore probably not representative of the Expanding Circle in general. This does not make Kuo's results any less consistent with Timmis', though. Jenkins' second point is complicated, and in a way lies at the heart of the 'learner's choice' question. Jenkins argues that the learner's choice "needs to be made in full knowledge of the

sociolinguistic facts and without pressure from the dominant NS community” (2006b: 155). It is, however, unclear when learners will have acquired “full knowledge of the sociolinguistic facts” and where they can make this decision “without pressure from the dominant NS community”.

Suzuki collected in-depth data from three student teachers enrolled in a Multicultural Education module at a university in Tokio. The program itself was taught as part of the language teacher preparation program (146). Suzuki’s findings were as follows: from the in-depth interviews held with the students over the course of the 12-week program it appeared that being taught about the existence of different varieties of English (other than the metropolitan ones) greatly expanded students’ horizons. Two of Suzuki’s students had, prior to course, next to no awareness, let alone solid notions, of any varieties of English other than “British” or “American” (148). After being introduced to several other varieties of English, Suzuki’s respondents indicated that their view of the language had changed quite dramatically. They now realized that English could not be simply equated with Standard British and General American and they had also become aware of the fact that their views were by no means impartial (149). The three students indicated that they thought these were valuable insights for student teachers. They now described their prior-held views as “preconception[s]”, “biased”, “stereotypes”, “fixed ideas” and even as “discrimination” (149). Based on these (small-scale) results, it would seem that some students find knowledge of different varieties of English world wide both useful and necessary, with one of the students arguing that: “knowledge of diversity could improve students’ flexibility towards L2 speakers, resulting in fewer communication breakdowns” (149). When speaking in general terms, all three of Suzuki’s respondents valued the insights provided by the course. However, when the researcher

asked them whether they thought this information should be taught in (high school) classroom settings, and whether they would teach it themselves, the answers presented a markedly different picture. The three students indicated that they would mention the different varieties in passing but did not see the value of elaborate teaching on the subject. This, they said, would only lead to confusion among learners and would not be to their benefit. Instead, a standard variety of English should be taught, because these were “easy to catch” “correct English” which could be used in international communication (150). Suzuki concludes from this set of results, that apparently one course on Multicultural English “may not bring student teachers to fully accept or appreciate the diversity of English”, and argues that it would be helpful if every component of the language teacher preparation program would include material that referenced the many varieties of English, thereby inculcating students with an awareness of and appreciation for the great diversity of the English language landscape (152). According to Suzuki, the belief in American/British English as being somehow superior and more suitable (for international communication) than any other variety is so deeply ingrained in student teachers that it cannot simply be remedied with a single course or module on Multicultural English; instead, if one is serious about preparing students for “future international communication” the concept of diversity should be made an integral part of English language education (153). Although Suzuki sees a possible way forward in extensive education on the subject of diversity, her respondents, even when they had been made aware of the great many different varieties of English, were unwilling to relinquish their view of NS models as being superior—at the very least for international communication.

More problematic from an ELF perspective is the article “Non-native attitudes towards teaching English as a lingua franca in Europe” by Groom, as this study would

appear to contradict one of the basic assumptions underlying ELF, namely the predominance of NNS-NNS ELF communication. Groom conducted a survey among 127 people (who were notably not currently involved in formal language learning and teaching) from 22 different European L1 backgrounds (51). Respondents were asked to listen to both NS and NNS English sound samples and were asked to indicate their preference as to “which speaker was easier to understand, which speaker they would prefer to speak like, and whether they believed Speaker A and Speaker B were NS or NNS” (51). After listening to the samples, respondents were asked to rate on a scale their how they felt about learning European English (the term used for ELF in the survey) (51); whether they would like to be identified as speakers of ELF; the extent to which they thought ELF should be taught in schools and finally in what contexts they would consider ELF usage appropriate (51). The results of the survey were quite clear. Respondents indicated that they had no problem understanding the recorded NNS sample: about 36% percent found the native speaker easier to understand whereas 26% indicated that the NNS was easier for them (37% found them equally intelligible). Intelligibility then, was not an issue. Next, respondents were asked to indicate a preference for either NS or NNS English (they were asked who they would like to speak like). The answers show an overwhelming preference for the NS, with close to 80% expressing a preference for this type of speaking. 17% of the respondents had no preference for either NS or NNS, and only a very small minority of about 3% indicated that they would prefer to speak like the NNS sample. This preference for a NS model can also be found in the answers respondents provided to the questions on ELF and education. When asked whether they thought ELF, rather than NS English, should be taught in schools, a little over 80% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed (52). It should be noted here that Groom

presents ELF and Standard English as being mutually exclusive, thereby forcing the respondent to pick one or the other. Jenkins has indicated that ELF is in fact not intended to simply replace Standard English in education and argues that it is much too early to speak of any kind of ELF teaching model (Jenkins 2007: 22). When Groom's respondents were asked to consider if they wished to learn ELF themselves (rather than a native variety of English), a similar result to that of the last question was obtained, with 81% of respondents rejecting the suggestion. Interestingly, Groom's respondents were not quite as negatively disposed towards the idea of being identified as a speaker of European English, with only a small majority (56%) objecting to the idea. This result is particularly interesting with regard to Jenkins' assertions about linguistic insecurity caused by NS norms, for although Groom's respondents state a clear preference for NS English in general and with regard to education, they do not appear to have similarly strong feelings about being identified as a speaker of European English. Perhaps then, these respondents see NS English proficiency in mostly positive terms, as adding to their linguistic repertoire and identity. This is certainly the image presented by the respondents themselves. As Groom points out "many participants in this survey would very much like to speak English with a native accent and thereby adopt a NS identity and go unnoticed as a NNS" (53). A final point worth making with regard to this survey is that Groom's respondents indicated that they used English to communicate with NNSs and NSs alike (54), and not, as is proposed by Jenkins, merely in lingua franca (NNS–NNS) contexts. This last point is a matter of emphasis, though, because Jenkins' ELF does not assume exclusive NNS-NNS communication (Jenkins 2007: 10). ELF is, however, built on the premise that most communication will be between NNSs, and this assumption forms the basis for the dismissal of NS norms as a "linguistic



reference point” (Jenkins 2007: 5). If it were to turn out that NSs do make up a significant proportion of speakers, then their dismissal becomes much more problematic. ELF is shaped by its users, and their actual use of the English language will provide the basis for any kind of codification of the language (Jenkins 2007, 2). If NS-NNS interaction proves to be a significant part of all ELF interaction, then it would follow that their language use should also be taken into account. If not, then ELF research (and any norms established on its basis) would not be representative of actual ELF practice.

Jenkins (2007) includes three analyses of text (both written and spoken) dealing with language learners’ attitudes towards ELF. The first study presented by Jenkins is an analysis of a “representative selection of discussions of ELF and the LFC among NNS and NS teachers of English” (Jenkins 2007: 123). Jenkins looks both at the content of the spoken text, as well as certain prosodic features (124). From her spoken data set she concludes the following: teachers have great difficulty with the concept of ELF; they strongly identify with native speaker norms; they view “correctness” in terms of nativeness; and they see intelligibility and acceptability from a NS standpoint only, which leads them to believe that standard NS English is more widely understood than any other variety (“regardless of the context of use”) (141). In Jenkins’ view this apparent unwillingness to even consider ELF can be traced directly to the type of professional identity that teachers have constructed throughout their careers. In other words, they have invested considerable time and energy in acquiring NS-like English and this proficiency forms the basis of their identity as teachers (141). It is therefore understandable that, when faced with a claim that threatens to undermine this identity (as ELF does, by declaring the NS and their language irrelevant), that teachers should resist (141). Jenkins’ explanation of teachers’

attachment to NS norms certainly seems plausible, but it appears to risk becoming unfalsifiable. The question is whether a learner of English can choose a NS variety, for reasons other than a lack of “full knowledge of the sociolinguistic facts” and “pressure from the dominant NS community” (Jenkins 2006b: 155). And similarly, whether a teacher can choose a NS variety for reasons other than the preservation of his or her professional identity (Jenkins 2007: 141). If the answer to these questions is “no”, then Jenkins’ explanations for NS variety preference become unfalsifiable. Assuming therefore that the answer to the questions is “yes”, it would seem that further research is required into learners’ motives in choosing a variety (or expressing a preference).

The second piece of research by Jenkins that will be discussed here is a study of teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about ELF, and is predicated on the principles of “folk linguistics” (which deals with overt language beliefs (categories and definitions) held by speakers) (148). Whereas Jenkins’ research mentioned above took the form of an analysis of spoken text, this study consisted of a questionnaire in a written format. The aim of the questionnaire was to find out “how teachers perceived ELF accents relative to NS English accents: whether they regarded ELF accents as inferior, inauthentic, deficient “NNS” accents, or as legitimate English accents for lingua franca communication (150). Respondents were asked to provide a top-5 ranking of accents they “considered to be the best in the whole world context”, and also to rank 10 specified accents (from the inner, outer and expanding circle) in terms of correctness, pleasantness, international acceptability, and familiarity (in order to establish the extent to which respondents resorted to stereotypes when judging accents) (150). Respondents were also invited to write down their particular views on the ten specified countries, in a map-labeling exercise. The questionnaires were sent

to NNS English teachers in twelve countries, covering a wide range of expanding circle contexts. In total 326 responses were received (155).

The results of the questionnaire were in line with the results of the spoken text analysis. From the accent rating assignment it can be concluded that NNS English teachers rate the two metropolitan NS varieties of English far higher than any other variety. It is also clear that the majority of teachers are unfamiliar with the concept of ELF. On the whole teachers held views that are in line with conventional EFL practices. The teachers also displayed the tendency to rank NNS in a hierarchy with European varieties at the top and East Asian varieties at the bottom. The results of the map-labeling exercise shed further light on the rationale behind the classifications and categorizations made by the respondents. Respondents' comments featured a number of recurring themes "relating to correctness, authenticity, and intelligibility", which were fraught with ambivalence and ambiguity (especially with regard to the notion of national identity, which seemed to interact with all three themes) (176). Respondents viewed notions of correctness, however, exclusively in relation to the perceived proximity of any given variety to NS English (176). Again there was a near complete lack of awareness of ELF as a means for international communication. Local varieties were deemed appropriate for local usage only, whereas the two metropolitan varieties were considered appropriate for international use and education (180). Although Jenkins' research did not explicitly ask respondents what variety they wanted to speak, the results nevertheless appear to indicate an overwhelming preference for NS English (as evidenced for example by the very positive comments describing British and American English) (168).

The final study performed by Jenkins took the form of seventeen hour-long interviews with NNS teachers of English. The teachers came from a variety of

expanding circle contexts, all were proficient in English, and all had Bachelor degrees (presumably in English, Jenkins is not explicit about this) (207). Jenkins' interviewees, more than the respondents of Timmis, Kuo, Suzuki and Groom, felt considerable ambivalence towards NS English. Although approximating to the standard increased their confidence (212), a number of them experienced considerable internal conflict over the matter. Some indicated that they felt obliged (because of their profession and ambitions) to use a standard variety, whereas this did not in their opinion express their ethnic/cultural identity (214). There were, however, also teachers who indicated that even if they were to teach ELF, they would still aspire to NS proficiency themselves (228). The teachers Jenkins interviewed thus present a much more varied picture (in terms of their feelings about English) than Timmis' and Groom's respondents.

Based on the articles by Timmis, Kuo, Suzuki and Groom, and Jenkins' own research on the topic, a number of tentative conclusions may be drawn. The first conclusion is that an overwhelming majority of expanding circle English learners aspires to a NS-like proficiency. This sentiment is found in each of the mentioned articles and is also borne out by Jenkins' research. To compound the problem (from an ELF perspective), learners also appear to be unwilling to learn ELF. This becomes particularly clear from the results of Groom's article (which may incidentally be the most relevant of the articles discussed, because it deals not with ELT professionals, but with Expanding Circle learners from outside ELT. Jenkins argues that the negative feelings expressed towards ELF are the result of internalized standard language ideology and are born out of linguistic insecurity (Jenkins 2007: 231). The problem is therefore not that learners have no interest in ELF, but rather that they feel they cannot use it (because of the all pervasive standard language ideology) (214).

Although this sounds plausible enough in theory, the idea is not substantiated by the results of any of the other surveys. Quite to the contrary, the respondents in Timmis', Kuo's and Groom's research ostensibly have a very positive view of Standard English, both on aesthetic and pragmatic grounds. In fact, the teachers in Jenkins' research also indicate as much in their descriptions of the standard varieties (Jenkins 2007: 168). Jenkins argues against this by suggesting that the teachers may have been rendered incapable of providing "objective" (whatever that might mean) answers by the all-pervasive standard language ideology. In other words, the teachers have been brainwashed (187). Assuming this were true, it still would not solve the problem of learner choice. Learners' beliefs, however misguided they may be, still inform their behavior, and for the foreseeable future this means that most will prefer a NS variety of English. As ELF is at present not yet an educational reality, this is for the time being unlikely to pose any real problem. The question is what happens when ELF does become a reality, and learners still do not aspire to it. A more fundamental question must also be answered, namely, who decides what learners should learn. Timmis' concluding remarks appear particularly relevant here. He concludes with two considerations, first: that "While it is clearly inappropriate to foist native-speaker norms on students who neither want nor need them, it is scarcely more appropriate to offer students a target which manifestly does not meet their aspirations"; and second: "Teachers may find some of the views expressed by the students above to be quaint, reactionary, or ill-informed. In that case, how far is it our right or responsibility to politically re-educate our students? When does awareness-raising become proselytizing?" (Timmis 249). These remarks strike at the heart of the matter, and raise rather profound questions about the role and nature of education. Their implications lie far outside the scope of this paper, but they certainly deserve to be

studied in-depth. There appears to be considerable tension between Timmis' remarks and Jenkins' assertion that the learner's choice need not necessarily be the right choice (2006b: 155) Jenkins indicates that she does not wish to patronize learners, though, and that those learners who, having been well informed of the alternatives, nevertheless opt for a NS variety should be free to do so (Jenkins 2007: 26). Jenkins' position appears to be somewhat ambivalent, though. In one place she remarks that "it is entirely for learners to decide what kind of English they want to learn" (21), but some 80 pages further on she notes "ELT seems somewhat bizarrely to be the only educational subject where an important curriculum decision (which kind of English should be taught) is seen as being to some extent the prerogative of the students or their parents. It would be unthinkable in the teaching of other subjects such as mathematics, physics, history, or the like." (105) Both opinions seem perfectly defensible, but holding them both at the same time is contradictory.

In conclusion, it seems that at present learners are not interested in acquiring ELF, and that this presents a serious problem for those in favor of it. It is still too early to see where developments surrounding ELF are headed, but for now it should be noted that there is a great discrepancy between what ELF appears to supply and what learners demand.

#### Possible consequences of ELF

Although the choice of the learner plays an important role in the discussion about ELF, it is not the only factor in determining the relative merit of ELF. It is also important to look at what the adoption of ELF could mean for the speaker in terms of status and in relation to the wider socio-political realities of the world he or she inhabits. Two potential problems can be identified as possible consequences of ELF.

The first one relates to the role of the native speaker in ELF communication, the second one considers the socio-political realities facing ELF and its speakers.

### The Native Speaker

According to Jenkins, ELF emphasizes the role of English in communication between speakers from different L1s, by focusing on community instead of “alienness”, commonality instead of difference; within ELF language “mixing” is considered acceptable and L1 retentions do not have to pose a problem (Jenkins 2007:3). ELF communication, with its suggested ability to support new “language centered equalities” (188), appears to level the playing field by providing a more neutral medium through which people from over the world can communicate. As such it could help correct the imbalance (caused by the standard language ideology) that currently pervades the English-speaking world (Jenkins 2006b, 143), by doing away with the native–non-native speaker distinction. ELF has no native speakers, or ELF has only native speakers. In order to successfully project this image of global (English) language equality, Jenkins banishes NS English, or at the very least relegates it to a position of little to no importance. ELF is considered an emancipated variety on which ENL has little bearing (Jenkins, 2007 3-4). This contention would not appear to hold up under scrutiny. As Prodromou points out "ELF cannot be insulated from ENL" (2008: 248). In his view, students will inevitably encounter NS English outside the classroom. In the media, and on the Internet NNSs will be confronted with the Standard English Core Grammar (the variable, but shared rules regarding written text) (Prodromou, 2007: 52). Prodromou certainly seems to have a

point with regard to the global media; these reach large parts of the world and are at least for the present, dominated by the (standard) English language (Graddol 44). As Groom's research demonstrated, it is not a given that NNSs of English use the language exclusively to communicate with other NNSs. In fact, as far as European NNSs of English are concerned, quite the opposite seems to be the case. About four fifths (78,74%) of Groom's respondents indicated that they used English on a regular basis in communication with both native and non-native speakers (54). So it appears that at the very least for European ELF, the dismissal of the native speaker may not be justified. Glass (2009), investigating the correspondence habits of Thai learners of English, also noted that, after other Thai, his respondents most often corresponded with people from the USA, UK and Australia. These two studies are by no means enough to draw any far-reaching conclusion about the worldwide use of English by NNSs. They do, however, seem to suggest that Jenkins' assertion that only a "small number do need English for communication with its NSs" (2006b: 143), should perhaps not be taken for granted, and may in fact not be consistent with the reality of actual English use in the Expanding Circle.

#### The socio-political realities facing ELF

There is at present no viable ELF standard to replace the NS one. A similar problem can be seen with regard to ELF and language ideology at large. As Jenkins has stated, the present situation is characterized by the hegemony of standard language ideology (Jenkins 2007: 32). According to Jenkins, this hegemony is held firmly in place and is supported by extensive gatekeeping (239). And although it may one day be broken, at present the position of the standard language ideology remains unshaken. This situation may change, but it may also remain the same for a long time to come.



Jenkins appears to be quite well aware of the self-sustaining and self-perpetuating tendencies of such systems when she quotes Canagarajah as saying that “given the reality of washback effect, tests based on inner circle norms will prevent the development of pedagogical material and methods for local varieties, and stultify the expansion of local varieties altogether” (Jenkins 2007: 242). Although Canagarajah is referring to outer circle varieties, Jenkins states that this also applies to ELF (242). If this is the case then, one could ask how much of a favor one would be doing learners by telling them to ignore NS models. The position of NS varieties appears to be very strong. The research discussed has shown that learners’ preference for NS varieties is quite pronounced, and with this preference comes a dislike of varieties that deviate from the standard. For the present, ignoring NS models is therefore a problematic; doing so means insufficiently taking into account the socio-political realities that ELF learner will face in the world at large. Prodromou argues that teaching learners ELF amounts to providing them with a “broken weapon”, i.e. reduced linguistic capital. Students should instead be prepared for a maximum of contexts and interlocutors, both native and non-native speaking (2008: 249). A similar sentiment is echoed in Groom, who agrees with Jenkins that Standard Language Ideology influences learners choices, but which will have to be dealt with as it “is a part of the world in which learners live.” (54) Van den Doel also notes that the use of stigmatized ENL accent/pronunciation features could harm learners’ communicative position in relation to native speakers and should therefore be avoided in EIL education (the point here being that the NS standard thus cannot be ignored without risking communicative repercussion). Kuo mentions that ELF does not account for the needs of those learners who would like to develop their English skills beyond the level required for international communication (216). Park and Wee explain the problem facing ELF as

follows: “simply creating an egalitarian market where everyone has equal access to valued resources or claims of legitimacy is not possible; and for this reason, endeavors such as the ELF project need to be greatly more sensitive to the political consequences of formulating and promoting such alternative markets” (366). What all these (admittedly disparate) critical voices have in common is that they look to the practical and pragmatic aspects of language learning. And though it is certainly no vice to have lofty aspirations, as ELF does, these aspirations should be held in check by, and judged on, their actual effect. In other words, language-learning proposals, if they are to be implemented, should be practical. Perhaps then, learners are not wrong to aspire to NS English. As Prodromou argues, learners should not attempt to combat standard language ideology by completely rejecting NS norms, but rather appropriate those norms, make them their own and use them to claim their voice (2008: 249).

### Conclusion

At the very start of *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*, Jenkins disparagingly remarks that Davies’ conclusion that “prestige...is not evenhanded and it is indeed a *trahison des clercs* for applied linguists to advocate a new or emerging politically motivated variety of English as the standard of choice where it does not have the imprimatur of speech community acceptance”, amounts to little more than the idea that “if you can’t beat’em, join’em” (Jenkins 2007: 12). The research by Timmis, Kuo, Suzuki, and Groom, and some of Jenkins’ own results would seem to indicate that the reality of English language use in the expanding circle is more complex than this. Although Jenkins’ study into the attitudes and identity of English learners has certainly revealed many problematic aspects of the unequal distribution of linguistic power between native and non-native speakers, there does not seem to be

a clear-cut solution to the problem. More research is needed into practical matters relating to ELF. It needs to be investigated what learners want and why they want it, and a debate is required on the status of the learner's choice. The question needs to be answered who decides what learners of English in an International setting learn, and what criteria need to be considered to come to a decision. At present, ELF is faced with a number of serious challenges concerning its practical applicability.

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