

ELF Communication: From Pedagogical Catalyst to ELT Game Changer

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Abstract

Raising speaker-learners' and their teachers' awareness of the possibilities and challenges of authentic ELF communication is a powerful catalyst in the process of understanding what it means to be out in the wild. But where do they turn for orientation when it comes to their own spoken and written productions? From a social constructivist perspective, I argue that ELT's standard native speaker orientation is not the problem. Rather, what counts is what speaker-learners are allowed and encouraged to do with it. Against this backdrop, I propose a pedagogical lingua franca approach that moves ELF communication from a position outside ELT to a game changer position inside ELT and helps learners develop their own voice as emancipated non-native speakers of English.

Keywords: ELF awareness, ELF pedagogy, pedagogical lingua franca, social constructivism, speaker-learner emancipation

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Introduction

The search for pedagogical implications of ELF communication begins with the observation that ELF speakers are obviously able to communicate successfully despite and even because of bold and creative deviations from the standard native speaker English (SNSE) they have been taught in the ELT classroom. As Seidlhofer and Widdowson (2017, p. 32-33) emphasize, “incompetent users [of SNSE] can be capable communicators and indeed their capability in many ways depends on their incompetence.” Variability, heterogeneity, and fluidity are key qualities commonly mentioned in descriptions of authentic ELF communication (Cogo & Dewey, 2011). This is quite the opposite of the communicative classroom interactions learners of English generally engage in, closely controlled and streamlined by a focus on SNSE and themes and material designed upon the model of native speaker varieties and cultures. What are the pedagogical implications of this discrepancy between SNSE as the preferred teaching model in ELT and the deviating realities of authentic ELF communication? This question touches on a complex mix of conflicting traditions, views and assumptions. To clarify the issues involved, I propose to take a closer look at

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three sub-questions that are of particular importance for an ELF-aware pedagogical innovation of ELT:

1. What can be learned from recorded ELF communication?
2. Is an SNSE orientation incompatible with successful ELF communication?
3. How can participation in ELF communication be made available as part of ELT practices?

The first and the third questions address different modes of exposure to ELF communication that are pedagogically both necessary and complementary. The second question concerns the pedagogical status and role of SNSE. It holds the key to whether it will be possible for ELT and ELF to find a common ground that helps them dispel their mutual suspicions and misgivings and become brothers in arms (Kohn, 2019).

In the following sections, I will address these questions in three steps: ELF communication as a pedagogical catalyst, a social constructivist perspective on SNSE as a teaching model, and ELF communication as an ELT game changer.

ELF Communication as a Pedagogical Catalyst

As regards the first questions, we can state that raising awareness of the possibilities and challenges of authentic ELF communication is a powerful catalyst in the process of understanding what it means for speaker-learners of English to be out in the wild. The issues involved have been explored and discussed in many publications from and around the ENRICH project (<http://enrichproject.eu>) and related initiatives (Hall et al., 2013; Sifakis, 2019; Sifakis et al., 2018). Being exposed to and reflecting on ELF-speakers' recorded communicative interactions can have a thoroughly comforting and encouraging effect. It shows speaker-learners that they are not alone with their communicative struggles and that it is possible for them to succeed despite shortcomings in their perceived linguistic-communicative competence. This helps them accept and tolerate others and themselves as they are. As a result, it also reassures their confidence in their capabilities and increases their readiness to communicate in English. Another important gain concerns opportunities for realistic comprehension practice across a wide range of manifestations of English characterized by unfamiliar pronunciations, sentence structures, lexical uses, and discourse organizations. In addition, reflective exposure to recorded ELF communication enables learners to evaluate interaction strategies with regard to preferred and dispreferred options and to develop and refine their sense of the essentially cooperative and empathetic nature of communication.

The value of ELF awareness raising largely depends on the extent to which the ELF manifestations that speaker-learners are exposed to are in line with their own communication needs and purposes. To be pedagogically suitable, the selected ELF awareness material and activities should reflect the local linguacultural and communicative conditions with which speaker-learners of the envisaged target group are

likely to be confronted. Considering Widdowson's (1998) reconceptualization of authenticity, we can say that it is crucial for them to *perceive* the measures that are taken to raise their ELF awareness as authentic for themselves. Relevant selection criteria may concern the kind of spoken and written communicative interactions, the communication partners involved, their special manifestations of English, the cultural settings in which their interactions are embedded, the topics they communicate about, the communicative problems and challenges they encounter, and the attitudes and strategic skills they deploy (Lopriore & Vettorel, 2016; Vettorel, 2018).

So far, we have talked about learning from ELF communication in terms of strengthening communicative confidence, improving comprehension skills, and attending to the strategic, cooperative and empathetic qualities of communicative interaction. But there is another objective crucially important for ELF-oriented communicative competence development. It concerns the kind of English speaker-learners aim to acquire for their own spoken and written productions. Where do they turn for orientation? From an ELT perspective, the obvious answer is SNSE. From an ELF perspective the advice is less straightforward. ELF-aware pedagogical suggestions generally emphasize the pedagogical value of exposure to authentic ELF communication while, at the same time, casting doubt on the pedagogical value of SNSE. Representative of this line of thought is Kiczkowiak and Lowe's (2018) "Teaching English as a lingua franca. The journey from EFL to ELF". Emphasising the need for "raising our students' awareness that conformity with 'native speaker' norms is not always the most desirable goal", they argue for "exposing our learners to a wide range of language models, so that they are adequately prepared for the diversity of Englishes they will encounter outside the class" (p. 23). Similar views have been around since ELF became a topic of pedagogical debate (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2014).

All these suggestions for an ELF improvement of ELT have in common that they make a convincing case for the need to help speaker-learners become familiar with the linguistic and sociocultural manifestations of ELF interaction. Regarding how to best improve speaker-learners' ELF production competence, however, these statements are far less clear. When confronted with this throughout positive depiction of ELF communication, many participants in my university seminars and teacher education workshops expressed their confusion and bewilderment. The message they heard was to drop SNSE as a target repertoire and to favour instead linguistic means of expression emerging from ELF productions. One of the teacher educators I worked with even expressed her concern about being told "to teach incorrect English". At the same time, she admitted to the many deviations from SNSE in authentic communication and was perfectly ready to accept them not only in the natural habitat of ELF communication but also in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) or in more communicative phases of classroom activities. This ambivalent fluctuation between SNSE and manifestations of ELF is in line with empirical studies showing that teachers often entertain a 'plurilithic' attitude, e.g., when they expect target norms to be followed in the classroom but tolerate deviations in everyday communication (Hall et al., 2017). A look at other areas of learning and teaching, e.g. in arts or music, shows that the coexistence of seemingly conflicting criteria of assessment is a more general

phenomenon and can be seen as reflecting the strategically dynamic heterogeneity of human nature and behaviour.

So, it appears that teachers' plurilithic attitude towards balancing the gap between their SNSE preference and the realities of authentic communication points to something hidden behind the scene. To better understand what this is all about, I will now take a social constructivist look at the pedagogical concept of SNSE and its role in ELF communication.

A Social Constructivist Perspective on SNSE as a Teaching Model

It all begins with the question of how speaker-learners acquire a given target language, in our case English. That is, how do they build up a repertoire of linguistic means of expression they deem suitable for their communicative and communal needs and purposes. According to a social constructivist understanding of communication and learning, they achieve this by actually creating their own MY English version of the target repertoire in their minds, hearts and behaviour (Kohn, 2018). They are owners of English by creative construction. The cognitive, emotional and behavioural processes involved in MY English development are both individual and social. They are individual because speaker-learners are the ones who do it, and no one can communicate and learn for them. They are social because of the sociolinguistic community practices of participation and collaboration in which speaker-learners are situated. The direction in which the social constructivist acquisition and communicative use of the target repertoire evolves is influenced by a number of shaping forces. The usual suspects include

- the input speaker-learners are exposed to, in particular, teaching material and communicative contributions by their teachers, fellow students, or other interlocutors,
- where they come from, in particular, their own mono- or multi-linguacultural background,
- how they proceed, in particular, their learning approach, their attitude and motivation, and the effort they invest.

In addition to these three types of forces, there is yet another one that deserves our attention and which is generally overlooked in theories of language learning and approaches to language teaching. It concerns the requirements of communicative and communal success speaker-learners impose on their own communication and learning. This goes far beyond mere intelligibility, which is often mentioned as a key criterion of successful ELF communication and, it should be added, is usually judged by ELF researchers from outside the communicative situation. Seen from the speaker-learners' internal perspective, things look different and it is quite obvious that the satisfaction they experience with their own communicative achievements depends on a lot more than intelligibility. It may, for instance, be important for them to

- express their intended meanings,
- be understood,
- understand others,
- speak like members of a certain community by which they want to be recognized,
- establish and ensure empathetic and cooperative rapport with their communication partners,
- comply with certain learning objectives.

The personal requirements of success speaker-learners entertain are a reflection of their communicative and communal needs and purposes both in general and in relation to a certain situation. This is where teachers' and students' plurilithic attitudes have their origin and justification. Personal requirements of success explain why it is possible, even natural to accept certain forms in situation A but not in situation B. It's horses for courses! Evolving and changing throughout speaker-learners' life-long situated language acquisition journey, personal requirements of communicative and communal success play a key role as beacons of orientation in their communicative practices and, in consequence, their communicative competence development. It is by trying to meet them that speaker-learners exercise their autonomy.

This leaves us with an interesting question: Are speaker-learners entirely free to pick their requirements as they want? Of course not. In order to be successful in their communication and learning endeavours, they need to consider the communication and learning contexts in which they want to succeed and the criteria and requirements of success that are imposed on them from the outside. In authentic ELF encounters, external requirements of success may be set by the interlocutors or by certain conditions and purposes of the interaction. In the ELT classroom, it is the curriculum and the assessment requirements that should not be ignored. In this connection, it is important for teachers to understand that the requirements of success that are imposed from the outside, be it the criteria and objectives specified in the curriculum or the situational characteristics and conditions of a certain ELF encounter, can impact speaker-learners' behaviour and learning progress only in so far as they have been internalized and incorporated in their personal requirement profiles. Allowing and enabling speaker-learners to develop their own stance on externally given criteria and requirements of success is an essential element of quality teaching.

But there is more. Teaching English from a social constructivist perspective involves a fundamental shift in HOW the language is taught. With the communicative turn in language learning and teaching, deviations from the target model may now be more acceptable than before, but getting things "right" is often still considered the better option. Such a STRICT orientation towards the target language model ignores the two fundamental social constructivist conditions of language learning mentioned above:

- a) speaker-learners can only acquire a given target model by creating their own MY English version of it;

- b) the processes involved are mediated by the speaker-learners' personal requirements of communicative and communal success.

These conditions do not depend on a specific target model. They are valid regardless of whether the language taught is some kind of standard English, some World English variety or an L1-based similect (Mauranen, 2012). Speaker-learners inevitably deviate from their target model. In terms of processing, their conformities with the model and their deviations from it have the same origin in their social constructivist creativity and capability for language. Seen from the inside, conformities and deviations are both evidence of what speaker-learners are capable of doing.

A social constructivist understanding of communication and language learning enables and requires teachers to take a more OPEN and holistic look at what speaker-learners aim for and are eventually able to achieve. It also throws a new light on the frequently voiced criticism of ELT being normative (Dewey, 2012). As it turns out, the problem is not the choice of a SNSE target repertoire as such. Rather, things go wrong with what speaker-learners are allowed or not allowed to do with it (also see Seidlhofer, 2011, chap. 8). Instead of evaluating speaker-learners in terms of how close they get to the target repertoire, they should be given sufficient leeway and opportunities to activate their available resources, creative capabilities and requirements of success in their endeavour to appropriate the target repertoire and thereby to develop their own voice as emancipated non-native speakers of English (Kohn, 2020a). It is this kind of emancipation that is evoked in Widdowson's (2003) account of language proficiency: "You are proficient in a language to the extent that you possess it, make it your own, bend it to your will, assert yourself through it rather than simply submit to the dictates of its form" (p. 42). With its social constructivist reconceptualization, ELT becomes pedagogically sensitive to speaker-learners' inherent need and capability for emancipation. This is what makes ELT receptive to the pedagogical implications of ELF communication emphasized in studies on teachers' ELF-aware attitudes (Bayyurt et al., 2019; Cogo & Siqueira, 2017) and in the context of ELF-aware teacher education (Sifakis et al., 2018). It also creates a pedagogical basis for the decolonializing perspective discussed by Siqueira (2020).

An essential framework condition for putting this social constructivist integration and reconciliation of ELT and ELF (Kohn, 2019) into practice is a learning environment that provides access to authentic ELF communication as part of ELT practice. With this, I come to the third and final part of my paper.

ELF Communication as an ELT Game Changer

In ELT curricula in German secondary schools, ELF is explicitly mentioned as an area of authentic communication relevant in a wide range of intercultural encounters from business, politics and administration to social media and travel, and it is strongly emphasized that the students should be prepared for this kind of interaction. This is pretty much where the good news ends. What is missing is a pedagogical concept that

goes beyond the generally implemented communicative approach by adopting a social constructivist perspective on ELT with space for speaker-learners' emancipatory ELF involvement. What can be done? In the Erasmus+ project TeCoLa (<http://tecola.eu>) and its predecessor TILA (<http://tilaproject.eu>), we opted for an experiential authentication strategy. Inspired by a social constructivist understanding of communication and language learning and its implications for language teaching, we designed and implemented a pedagogical lingua franca (PLF) approach as an ELF extension of communicative language teaching (CLT). The focus is on communication tasks that give students and their teachers an immersive experience of ELF communication and of what it takes to be successful. In a PLF approach, students of different linguacultural backgrounds communicate in small groups or pairs using their shared target language as a pedagogical lingua franca. With these interactions being firmly embedded in the speaker-learners' regular ELT class activities, ELF communication moves from a position outside ELT to what I consider a game changer position within ELT.

In our case studies, the PLF meetings were implemented as intercultural virtual exchanges supported by online communication and collaboration tools and tasks made available in the TeCoLa environment (see the Teacher Resources section on the TeCoLa website). The telecollaboration tools included in particular the videoconferencing platform BigBlueButton, a virtual world specifically designed for TeCoLa, and the digital wall Padlet. The online pedagogical lingua franca interactions were embedded in a blended learning design with preparatory and follow-up activities in class. The participants involved students and teachers from secondary and upper-primary schools in Germany, Greece, Spain, The Netherlands, and Taiwan. The communicative tasks the students were asked to carry out concerned exploring and discussing topics of low intercultural load such as "Breakfast", "Waste avoidance" or "An interesting sport". Although most of our exchanges were in English, it should be emphasized that the pedagogical lingua franca approach can be used with any foreign target language. In our studies, for instance, we also implemented exchanges in German (Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2017).

When a few years ago I first mentioned the phrase "pedagogical lingua franca" (Kohn, 2018), I was asked why I had decided to use the term "pedagogical". At that time, the reason I gave was that the ELF activities were all situated in a pedagogical context. In the meantime, it has become evident that there is a lot more to it. In our case studies, we were able to establish that a PLF exchange gives students the opportunity to experience and practise agency, cooperativity and empathetic rapport as key qualities of communicative interaction (Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2017). But it also became obvious that beneficial gains very much depended on the pedagogical mentoring support students received from their teacher(s) during task preparation and task follow-up (Kohn, 2020b, chap. 5). While a substantial part of pedagogical mentoring was needed for pedagogical organization and technological issues, its essential contribution concerned making the students aware of the special conditions of a pedagogical lingua franca exchange and the rich learning opportunities it provided. Pedagogical mentoring tasks that emerged as particularly relevant included helping speaker-learners perceive their communication and language learning activities in a social constructivist light.

They need to understand that they are ultimately responsible for their own communicative performance and its situational appropriateness and that their personal requirements of communicative and communal success play a key role in how they exercise their responsibility. This again makes it necessary for speaker-learners to become aware of and negotiate their requirements of success in relation to the given situation, which includes the preferences and capabilities of their communication partner(s), and also in relation to the learning objectives set by their teacher(s).

In addition, speaker-learners' attention should be directed to the verbal and non-verbal techniques and strategies of communication monitoring. They should understand why monitoring is needed for successful communication and how communication monitoring contributes to communication learning (Kohn, 2020b, chap. 4). In this connection, the following observations from our case studies were particularly interesting. First, the students' explicit communication monitoring was predominantly cautious and restrained, quite similar to the monitoring behaviour known from everyday communication. That is, some of their own and their partners' comprehension and production problems might have been noticed but were left unattended, presumably because of a 'let it pass' or 'wait and see' strategy or because of cultural conventions of politeness. Second, there was a strong bias towards self-oriented communication monitoring. Partner orientation was mostly limited to comprehension, with little attention to the partner's struggle for expression. Third, there were no attempts to monitor the exchanges with regard to their cooperative and empathetic qualities. These observations identify an important challenge and task for pedagogical mentoring. Speaker-learners need to be made aware of the benefits of communication monitoring for communication learning, and they need to be encouraged to intensify and extend their communication monitoring practices beyond what they are used to from everyday communication. When engaging in communication monitoring, speaker-learners should look beyond their immediate communicative satisfaction and consider the consequences for improving their own and their partners' ELF communication learning. Again, the necessary orientation and guidance is provided by their personal requirements of communicative and communal success.

Conclusion

Reflective exposure to recordings of ELF communication can serve as a powerful catalyst for speaker-learners to develop their ELF competence. Beneficial learning effects may include, in particular, awareness of what it is like to be out in the wild, communicative confidence in their own resources and strategically creative capabilities, a sense of the value of cooperativity and empathy and, last but not least, comprehension practice. For acquiring ELF-related production competence, exposure to other speaker-learners' performance is less helpful. What is needed is active participation in ELF encounters and, most importantly, a direction in which to go. The advice commonly found in publications and debates about ELF pedagogy is to be aware of ELT's normative SNSE orientation and to familiarize oneself with ELF communication instead. In my own account, I argue for a social constructivist understanding of speaker-

learners as principal agents of their communication and language learning who cannot help creating their own MY English version of the English taught, guided by their personal requirements of communicative and communal success. This conceptualization strongly suggests to replace ELT's still fairly strict target language orientation by an open, social constructivist orientation with sufficient pedagogical room for LEARNERS of English to develop their own voice as emancipated SPEAKERS of English. It should be emphasized that changing from a strict to an open target language orientation has a social constructivist origin and is not motivated by the nature of ELF communication. Rather, a social constructivist revision of language learning and teaching is relevant for ELF pedagogy by making it possible to integrate ELF communication as a pedagogical game changer within ELT. The necessary communicative framework is provided by a pedagogical lingua franca approach. It enables speaker-learners to engage in intercultural lingua franca exchanges in a pedagogical context and supported by pedagogical mentoring interventions. The actual implementation is facilitated by a virtual learning environment.

Regarding teacher education, it is important to extend the focus beyond raising awareness of ELF communication to include issues of learning and teaching languages. Teachers should be encouraged to understand ELT from a social constructivist perspective so as to be able to adopt a pedagogical lingua franca approach as part of their regular ELT classes. A key element in this connection is pedagogical mentoring specifically with attention to speaker-learners' requirements of communicative and communal success and the learning potential of communication monitoring. In addition, teachers should be supported to explore online tools and environments and their pedagogical affordances for intercultural virtual exchange. To ensure sustainable results, it is advisable to closely integrate all teacher education measures into the teachers' everyday teaching practices.

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ODİ İletişimi: Pedagojik Katalizörden ODİ Oyun Değiştiriciye

Öz

Konuşmacı-öğrencilerin ve öğretmenlerinin gerçek ODİ (ortak dil olarak İngilizce) iletişiminin olasılıkları ve zorlukları hakkında farkındalıklarını artırmak, gerçek iletişimle karşılaşacakları vahşi doğada olmanın ne demek olduğunu anlama sürecinde güçlü bir katalizördür. Ancak konu kendi sözlü ve yazılı üretimlerine gelince, ne yapmaktadırlar? Sosyal yapılandırmacı bir bakış açısından, İngilizce öğretiminde standart anadili konuşmacı yöneliminin sorun olmadığını savunmaktayım. Aksine, önemli olan, konuşmacı-öğrencilerin bununla ne yapmasına izin verildiği ve teşvik edildiğidir. Bu arka plana karşı, ODİ iletişimini İngilizce öğretimi dışındaki bir konumdan İngilizce öğretimi içinde ezber bozan bir konuma taşıyan ve öğrencilerin özgür, anadili İngilizce olmayan kişiler olarak kendi seslerini geliştirmelerine yardımcı olan pedagojik bir ortak dil yaklaşımı öneriyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngiliz Dili Öğretimi (İDÖ), ODİ farkındalığı, pedagojik ortak dil yaklaşımı, BENİM İngilizcem, konuşmacı-öğrenci özgürlüğü