

# UWC Schools: An Ideal ELF Environment?

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## Abstract

*This study aims at investigating the predominantly lingua franca use of English at the United World Colleges (UWCs) which are pre-university schools with students from over 130 countries based in thirteen countries around the world. We correlate several variables such as language confidence, language exposure, language proficiency, language models and linguistic identity and analyse how they relate to students' language awareness. Based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, we propose several tentative suggestions applicable both in current TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and in the future of TELF (Teaching English as a Lingua Franca).*

*Keywords.* English as a Lingua Franca, International English, language awareness, foreign language proficiency, linguistic identity, language models.

## Introduction

This investigation and report aims to verify several hypotheses regarding the use and perception of English at secondary international institutions, mostly attended by non-native speakers of English (NNSs) who use English predominantly for lingua franca purposes. We aimed at correlating several variables: language confidence, language exposure, language proficiency, language models and linguistic identity, as well as to look at how these variables relate to students' language awareness. Based on our findings, we propose several tentative suggestions applicable both in current TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and in the future of TELF (Teaching English as a Lingua Franca).

## Research Setting

In our research, we surveyed students of United World Colleges (UWCs). UWCs are thirteen pre-university schools based on four continents with students from over 130 countries, in which English is the primary language of instruction. UWCs are committed to a high level of international education<sup>1</sup> and promote such values as 'international and intercultural understanding' and 'celebration of difference,'<sup>2</sup> which we believe resonate

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<sup>1</sup> UWCs played a pivotal role in the creation and development of the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IB).

<sup>2</sup> These values are listed in: 'UWC – Mission and values'

<[http://www.uwc.org/about\\_uwc/mission\\_and\\_vision.aspx](http://www.uwc.org/about_uwc/mission_and_vision.aspx)> Accessed: 12 May 2012.

with the intellectual background of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)<sup>3</sup> as discussed by ELF researchers.

Students of UWCs are deliberately selected to represent a wide range of nationalities, cultures and social backgrounds. It is the inner policy of the UWCs to have no more than two students from any state at a particular college at any given time. Nevertheless, as discussed below, higher numbers of local students are being admitted to particular UWC schools. Also, a large number of scholarships are offered to students from a collection of different socio-economic backgrounds. Teachers are recruited internationally with some numbers coming from the local area.<sup>4</sup>

At all but two colleges, the only means of communication among both the students and teachers is English.<sup>5</sup> Communication in the students' mother tongue (L1) is not explicitly prohibited, but it is usually avoided or prevented by the fact that the number of students that speak the same language at any given institution is very low. Fluency in English is not a necessary requirement to apply to the UWC programme; however, all students are expected to be able to communicate in English to some degree.

### Terminological Complexities

We decided to approach the above listed phenomena such as language proficiency, language awareness and linguistic identity from a sociolinguistic perspective and subject them to analysis from a point of view of two different paradigms, i.e. EFL and ELF.<sup>6</sup> Since the field of World Englishes is terminologically a complex one, we will first clarify our take on several terms that are key for understanding our research design and the results obtained. English as an International Language (EIL) is a commonly used term in the TEFL domain; however, its meaning or reference it is not unproblematic. EIL is sometimes used synonymously with International English (IE)<sup>7</sup>, English as a Global Language (EGL), Globish, Global English (GE), English as a World Language, World Englishes (WEs) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF); upon a more detailed examination, each of these terms is used as a label for slightly or entirely different phenomena.<sup>8</sup>

In our questionnaire, which targeted high-school age students with no previous linguistic training, we adopted a broad approach to International English (IE), i.e. we treat the term interchangeably with English as an International Language (EIL), World Englishes (WEs) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). This gave students an opportunity to be open in their answers to any variety of English they may have been

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<sup>3</sup> The terminological similarities and differences between ELF, IE and WEs will be addressed in the following section.

<sup>4</sup> This information is based loosely on the information on the websites of the UWCs. However, exact numbers of teachers are not available.

<sup>5</sup> There is one college that has English and Spanish as the main languages and one in which students speak only Spanish. However, these two colleges were not included in our research.

<sup>6</sup> For more on EFL/ELF paradigms see e.g. Jenkins (2006, p. 140, 2006, p.142), Phillipson (2007, p.128); Dewey (2009, p.79); Jenkins (2009a, p. 42, 144); Pakir (2009, p. 228); Jenkins, Cogo, Dewey (2011, p. 284) and Seidlhofer (2011, p. 18)

<sup>7</sup> For the definitions of IE see McKay (2002, p. 24) and Seidlhofer (2004, p. 210).

<sup>8</sup> These terminological complexities are addressed in detail in Quinn Novotná (2012, pp. 26-36).

exposed to and that they themselves use. We intended to avoid potential confusion which could have arisen were we to explain all the differences in the above terms.

Within the 'traditional' EFL paradigm, language proficiency is associated with the level of approximation to NS models especially in terms of knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and 'authenticity' of accent; the more native-like a learner / user of English sounds and writes, the more proficient s/he is. Within the ELF paradigm, however, the notion of proficiency needs to be rethought and redefined. In the 1990s, Widdowson's (1994, p. 384) take on proficiency has been vastly influential in the change of attitudes towards this concept: '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. [...] Real proficiency is when you are able to take possession of the language, turn into your advantage, and make it real for you.' Newly, more attention is being paid by TEFL and EFL researchers world-wide to other aspects of proficiency that have been overlooked thus far (see *Discussion of Results*).<sup>9</sup>

Another key term we refer to in our study is the concept of language awareness as defined by Carter (2003, p. 64): '[LA] refers to the development in learners of an enhanced consciousness of and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language,' or by Edmondson (2009, p. 176) '[l]anguage learning awareness is a state of cognitive sensitivity concerning one's own language learning proclivities, styles, preferences, strengths and weaknesses.' We, however, wish to stress the distinction between the term 'knowledge about language' (Carter 2003, p. 64) or 'explicit L2 knowledge' (Edmondson 2009, p. 166) and LA per se.<sup>10</sup>

### Research Background and Hypotheses

Based on the outcomes of a previously completed small-scale student project<sup>11</sup> conducted in the UWC space (Grosser, 2013, forthcoming), we started a larger-scale research project with several research questions (based upon previous ELF research, Quinn Novotná, 2012). These research questions touched upon the following core themes: a) personal preference for certain varieties of English; b) 'ideal' language models; c) students' non-native status and the role of English when engaging academically and socially in the international environment, and potential differences in communication with native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs); d) students' proficiency in English and language confidence; e) perceived differences between the English taught and the English(es) used during daily informal communication; and finally, f) the familiarity of the students with the notion of ELF.<sup>12</sup> With this, several detected preliminary tendencies in participants' responses helped formulate the following working hypotheses that needed to be tested and verified:

<sup>9</sup> According to Harley (1996, p.7) 'the conceptualization of the nature of language proficiency has a major impact on a variety of practical and policy issues in education.'

<sup>10</sup> The implications of increased LA may have a broader scope than just a linguistic one. As Nicholas (1992, p. 78) postulates: '[i]ncreased conscious reflection on language by the students and the teachers leads to improved language use and better overall education.'

<sup>11</sup> This project was a part of an MA course on World Englishes and ELF at the Department of the English Language and ELT Methodology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague in 2011.

<sup>12</sup> The bulk of the data obtained is analysed partly copying the order of questions posed in the questionnaire, but more importantly following these core themes.

1. When operating in a multilingual and multicultural environment and when encouraged to study and socialize in a second or foreign language, (some) students develop high language awareness.<sup>13</sup>
2. With the high level exposure which an English-based international institution inherently provides, students' language proficiency is expected to increase; we postulate that such exposure in turn influences students' reflection of the language; this may correlate with increased students' language confidence and their general improvement in language, as well as study, social and intercultural skills. Furthermore, students may be able to reflect on the international nature of English they use on a daily basis.
3. Students may not be familiar with the term ELF per se but pro-ELF / pro-IE attitudes are expected to be found.
4. Enhanced communicative efficiency in English that we found at UWC institutions may be promoted by adopting such official and unofficial language policies of these institutions which favour open attitudes to (non-)nativeness and which enable such language management that allows for a development of a novel approach to language proficiency and language assessment.

### Methodology

In testing these research hypotheses we proceeded in two steps. First, we conducted a pilot study (Survey I) with questionnaires focused on the core themes listed above at two UWC institutions: UWC Adriatic in Duino, Italy (56 respondents) and UWC in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (44 respondents). After collecting the data we continued our research at three other UWC institutions (Survey II): UWC Atlantic College Llantwit Major in the UK (46 respondents), UWC Red Cross Nordic Flekke in Norway (39 respondents) and UWC Mahindra College Pune in India (50 respondents)<sup>14</sup>. This research included both a quantitative and a qualitative component. The quantitative part consisted of a ten-question voluntary and anonymous on-line questionnaire approved by the UWC deputies<sup>15</sup>. The questionnaire was designed in SurveyMonkey and a link was sent by the school representatives to all UWC students attending the above listed institutions that academic year. We targeted both first and second year students so that possible time-related changes in attitudes to language could be compared and contrasted. Results of Survey I and Survey II for were analyzed together (except Question 8).

Two versions of the questionnaire were used. After having conducted Survey I, we decided to reword Question 8; to ensure comparability of results, both the content

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<sup>13</sup> International English (see *Terminological Complexities*).

<sup>14</sup> The first two UWCs were chosen based on of pre-existing informal contacts; the next three institutions were selected based on their openness and willingness to participate in this research project.

<sup>15</sup> Survey I: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Q7HGLC2>. Survey II: [https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ELF\\_UWC\\_II](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ELF_UWC_II)

and wording of all other questions remained the same.<sup>16</sup> The formulation of Question 8 in Survey II was inspired by Language Management Theory (LMT).<sup>17</sup>

The qualitative component was twofold; one aspect was embedded in the open-ended character of three out of ten questions of the questionnaire.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, interactive semi-structured interviews were designed and conducted online with several participants of the survey who volunteered to participate.<sup>19</sup> The main structure was based on eight open ended questions (see Appendix 2).<sup>20</sup> However, the interlocutors were encouraged to supply additional answers and their own comments. These interviews were either oral (conducted via conference calls), or written (via an instant messaging program). The duration of each interview was approximately 40 minutes. Due to time constraints and to the lack of professional technical equipment, the oral interviews were neither recorded nor transcribed, but the answers were taken down in a form of field notes and summarized for later analysis.<sup>21</sup>

### Discussion of results

In the following section we present in detail and discuss the data obtained in the questionnaires. Our results indicate that altogether 372 students from five different UWC institutions signed into SurveyMonkey (in Survey I and II) following to the email that they received and 235 completed the online questionnaire. Figures from the UWCs' websites<sup>22</sup> show that there are about 1100 students at these institutions, which gives us a response rate of 21,4%. In the next section, we use data obtained in the first part of our questionnaire (Questions 1 to 3) to characterise our respondent population.

<sup>16</sup> Details regarding the modification of Question 8 will be discussed in *Attitudes to Nativeness and Non-nativeness* section.

<sup>17</sup> The original wording of this question in Survey I seemed to yield slightly biased data. One of the key objectives of LMT is to identify language and sociocultural problems; it enables their subsequent micro and macroanalysis. LMT is characterized by its orientation on language processes (cf. Neustupný, 2002, p. 436). Therefore, we find it suitable for the analysis of ELF / IE situations and phenomena which are inherently very dynamic. Following the five stages of management processes (ibid., see also Nekvapil, 2009, p. 3), we were interested in finding out if being recognized as a non-native speaker poses a problem for our respondents and, if so, what implications it has for them.

<sup>18</sup> In another three questions we gave students the option to expand on their answers in detail rather than to merely select one option from the drop-down multiple-choice menu. They could also combine a multiple-choice answer with a more extensive comment.

<sup>19</sup> Study participants volunteered upon being asked and, thus, were not selected randomly. This method, however, has been shown by various scholars to yield relevant results (see 'convenience sample' Creswell, 2003, p. 156; Dörnyei, 2007, p. 98).

<sup>20</sup> Our interviews focussed on the following groups of topics: a. the approach to language assessment, language correctness and proficiency; reinforcing standard varieties; linguistic discrimination; b. change of attitudes to English as related to exposure to English; c. differences between formal and use of English at UWCs and d. studying different subjects through English and the challenges associated with it (CEIL).

<sup>21</sup> The data obtained in the interviews are not discussed in a separate chapter but through the paper whenever they relate to the core themes.

<sup>22</sup> See the UWCs' website, section: 'Our colleges and schools' [http://www.uwc.org/uwc\\_education/our\\_schools\\_and\\_colleges/](http://www.uwc.org/uwc_education/our_schools_and_colleges/). Accessed 24 Feb 2013.

### ***Sociolinguistic Profile of Questionnaire Respondents***

In some respects, such as nationality, first languages, the number of years spent at UWCs and age, the questionnaire respondents formed a relatively heterogeneous group.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the respondents shared certain important characteristics, such as high motivation for the use of English as the only means of communication at UWCs<sup>24</sup>, and for participating in a demanding school curriculum which both requires and seeks to develop a great range of intellectual and creative abilities and skills.

Overall the respondent group consisted of 236 students of 69 different nationalities and speaking 58 different mother tongues. For the most common countries of origin and the major native languages see Appendix, Figure 1.

The age of the respondents ranged from 16 to 21 (years old), with the majority of the students being 17 years old (31,7 %), 18 years old (37,5 %), and 19 years old (22 %). The gender division of the respondents was 63 % females and 37 % males.

The initial questions of the survey did not ask the participants for demographic information only, but also about their level of English, which was identified by subjective evaluations. The participants were also asked to evaluate their peers' level of language proficiency.<sup>25</sup>

The majority of the participants both self- and peer-assessed their English (143; 61,7 % and 138; 59,2 % respectively) to be at the upper-intermediate and advanced level, with a smaller portion at a native-like level. However, it should be mentioned that the participants were more likely to evaluate their level as native-like when they were self-evaluating (83; 35,8 %) than when they were asked to assess the level of their peers (only 23; 9,9 % of the respondents evaluated their peer-level of English as native-like).<sup>26</sup> Based on the students' self-reported level as well as on the linguistic analysis (grammatical structure and range of vocabulary) of the language used in the corpus of the students' answers to open-ended questions, we would roughly estimate the students' level of English as being in most cases between B2 and C2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

### ***UWCs and Varieties of English***

As our research focused, among other things, on the varieties of English used at UWCs, one of our initial tasks was to determine (in Question 4 a.) what kind of English is taught at the schools, or rather what kind of English the students perceive as being taught. Question 4 included the following five options: some variant of 'international English'; Standard British English (RP English, BBC English, Estuary English);

<sup>23</sup> It could also be said that although the ages of the respondents differ, the variability is not very great and they all fit into a homogenous age group labelled as late adolescence and/or early adulthood.

<sup>24</sup> Unlike at the beginning of their studies where the level of English is not a crucial aspect when applying for UWC studies, good command of English is a pre-requisite for obtaining the final IB diploma.

<sup>25</sup> Due to time constraints and range and scope of our research, we have decided not to conduct a standardized language assessment to objectify respondents' self-evaluations. However, we opted for the procedure of peer level assessment as an additional means of determining language proficiency level of our respondents.

<sup>26</sup> Such evaluation could, upon further analysis, be revealing about the level of self-confidence of our respondents, but this issue is outside of the scope of this research paper and thus it is not pursued further.

Standard American English (General American); several variants together (e.g. different teachers teach different variants); I am not able to tell. Out of the 235 participants, 108 (45,6 %) answered that they were taught several varieties of English at the same time and 55 (23,4 %) thought they were taught in International English. Only 32 (13,6 %) of the participants responded that they were taught Standard British English and even fewer of them (17; 7,2 %) Standard American English.<sup>27</sup>

These results reveal that more than sixty percent of the students reported not to be learning, or learning through, any specific variety of NS English.<sup>28</sup> The English occurring around our respondents at UWCs encompasses not only different NS and NNS varieties but also becomes its own unique ‘blend’ of all these varieties; this ‘blend’ can be labelled either International English (IE), English as an International Language (EIL), Global English (GE), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) or World Englishes (WEs).<sup>29</sup> In turn, we believe that the surroundings that enable such exposure to literally countless forms of English increases the chance for the students to develop pro-IE / pro-ELF / pro-WEs attitudes regardless of the label.

Next, we wanted the respondents to substantiate their answers (Question 4 b.). We provided the following options: the type of textbook, the type of final exams, the accents or nationalities of the teachers, the opinion of native speakers, personal feelings, and other. The majority responded that they had made their judgment according to personal feelings (120; 51,2 %) and the accents or nationalities of the teachers (81; 34,6 %). The type of textbooks, opinions of NSs,<sup>30</sup> and (the type of) the final exams were less cited sources of what they based their answers on (23; 9,5 % / 7; 3 % / 4; 1,7 % respectively).

The fact that students rely on their personal feelings rather than opinions of other parties and that they pay attention to accents and nationalities of their teachers and peers may be illustrative of the fact that students are aware how language is being used around them and with them (for more about the implications of these findings see also section *Language Awareness and ELF Accommodation Strategies*).

### ***Convenience of Varieties of English***

Next, we aimed at finding out which varieties students, especially non-native students, consider best and most convenient to use in their school environment and why (Question 6). As suggested above, UWC students are challenged daily by the necessity to express themselves in English on both formal and informal basis. Based on preliminary data reported by Grosser (2013, forthcoming), we assumed that the ability to reflect upon the convenience of varieties of English would not be rare among UWC students.

<sup>27</sup> Approximately one tenth of the students could not specify which variety of English they are taught.

<sup>28</sup> These results correspond with the analysis of the qualitative data provided below (see section *Language awareness and ELF accommodation strategies*).

<sup>29</sup> See also section *Terminological Complexities* for our take on key terms.

<sup>30</sup> This was a very generic option in the questionnaire which enabled the respondents to include any NSs they may potentially trust on issues of language, regardless of whether or not they study or teach at the particular UWC.

Regarding this point we collected in both surveys 203 responses from 192 respondents.<sup>31</sup> The amount of responses was larger than the number of respondents due to the fact that respondents were given the opportunity for open-ended answers and some of them expressed fairly complex thoughts and/or included more options in their answers. As a guideline, students could refer to a list of varieties provided in Question 4 (see section *Motivation for the Choice of Varieties*); these options may have to some extent impacted the participants' answers. We, however, found that many students were by no means shy to provide personal responses which were to a great extent independent of the guidelines. To analyse the large volume of the data more easily and to transform textual data into numerical data, we decided first to perform a manual count for each variety and subsequently to proceed to a more detailed qualitative analysis.

British English and/or Standard British English is regarded to be the most convenient variety in 63 (i.e. 31 %) responses (British English with no reference to its 'Standard' form has been listed in 47 responses; Standard British English in 16). A slightly lower percentage of responses, 42; 20,7 %, indicated American English and/or Standard American English (American English with no reference to its 'Standard' form was present in 30 responses; Standard American English in 12). Interestingly, International English was the next most frequently listed item with 39; 19,2 % responses.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Motivation for the Choice of Varieties***

#### *British English*

The reasons provided in students' choices include many different motives. Reasons for selecting (Standard) British English<sup>33</sup> seem to combine pragmatic motives<sup>34</sup> and/or location.<sup>35</sup> Characteristics that are used to further substantiate the choice of BrE include: "delicate"<sup>36</sup> (1 response), "richer [in expressions]" (2), "more polite" (1), "more formal" (1), "most correct because it's 'English English'" (2), "sophisticated" (2), "[the] best one" (5),<sup>37</sup> and "legendary" (1). Several comments stress the "original" (8) role of

<sup>31</sup> That is 83 in Survey I, 109 in Survey II.

<sup>32</sup> For the rest of less common answers see Appendix 1, Figure 2.

<sup>33</sup> The exact numbers were: BrE: 47 responses, 23,2 %; Standard BrE: 16 responses, 7,9 %.

<sup>34</sup> Examples that illustrate this point are, for example: "[BrE is] most common," "most convenient," "understood world-wide," "because I was taught it in my primary and high school," or "professionalism".

<sup>35</sup> For example, "we are a school based in the UK and the majority of our teachers are English," or "in the UK, Standard British English is both predominant and useful." The last two answers show that surveying a UWC (Atlantic) based in an IC country, the United Kingdom in our case, may have slightly skewed the results in favour of British English (13 respondents in Survey II out of which 12 attended Atlantic UWC based in Wales).

<sup>36</sup> Throughout the article, double quotation marks are used to indicate the students' verbatim quotes. These quotes have not been corrected for grammar and spelling with respect to Standard varieties. The motivation for quoting our respondents' answers verbatim and for keeping their original spelling and grammar was twofold; first, we wanted to maintain the authenticity of the comments; and secondly, we wanted to illustrate the actual usage which we believe represents authentic written ELF / IE.

<sup>37</sup> The higher count of the adjective "best" is probably influenced by the wording of the actual question which included this very word.



British English.<sup>38</sup> All the above suggest that the importance of tradition, history and prestige as far as English - or more precisely British English - is concerned is not to be underestimated.<sup>39</sup> Other comments, on the other hand, stress a strong personal relationship and/or liking for the language and its perceived 'beauty': e.g. "[BrE] without specific accent is the best," or "I simply like it / I madly want to speak it."

### *American English*

Summarizing the motives for choosing (Standard) American English<sup>40</sup> seem to be mostly pragmatic, including reasons based on economy, convenience and location (work and study in the US);<sup>41</sup> they also include references to media, internet and popular culture (especially movies and games). Some survey participants seem to associate AmE with a certain degree of 'simplicity': e.g. "[AmE is] the easiest variant[s] of English," "I see [AmE] as simpler and more understandable than British English."<sup>42</sup>

### *International English and English as a Lingua Franca*

In the following section we will be discussing all data we elicited in our investigation regarding two key notions, i.e. IE and ELF. We want to address our hypothesis that students may not be familiar with the term ELF per se but they may display pro-ELF / pro-IE attitudes. When analysing our students' perception of IE and ELF, we include data obtained throughout the questionnaire, not just in Questions 4. The reason for this is to bring the conceptualization of IE and/or ELF by UWC students into focus since these phenomena, or rather one phenomenon with different labels, are at the heart of our investigation.

If we look at both results from Question 4 and Question 6 of our questionnaire, International English was chosen by 23,4 % and 19,2 % respondents respectively; several varieties of English at the same time (45,6 %)<sup>43</sup>. These quantitative data are reinforced by several inspiring textual observations about IE made by our respondents. What we may infer from their comments, is that they acknowledge the existence of a variety we labelled 'International English'; moreover, they seem to be aware of the fact

<sup>38</sup>For example, "[BrE] because it sounds better, looks better written out and is the original," or "I guess, British English 'cause British English is kind of source language and which gave all other variants," or "[it is] where english comes from," or "it is more respectful of the language roots," "colonial ties with the UK," or "BrE with no other reason than the tradition of the language."

<sup>39</sup>Within the EFL paradigm, unlike the ELF paradigm, the traditional standard varieties and their connotations play an important role.

<sup>40</sup>To list the exact number of responses: AmE: 30 responses, 14,8 %; Standard AmE: 12 responses, 5,9 %.

<sup>41</sup>For example, "[AmE is] most common;" "most convenient;" "more understandable;" "I will study in the US;" "it is the language of the economically dominant country in the world;" "I'm used to it;" "personal bias;" "more people use AmE."

<sup>42</sup>Finding out more about why several students perceive AmE as simpler than other varieties, especially BrE, even though the systemic linguistic differences are rather negligible, would be a topic for a whole new research project.

<sup>43</sup>This number has been included in this section since the combination of different varieties also fits into the wider framework of IE / World Englishes.

that English is now ‘owned’<sup>44</sup> by all rather than just its native users and that IE is the most widely spread form of English, which is in turn what makes IE convenient.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, some students seem to think that IE “[is] easier to understand and/because [its] grammatical rules are less straight\rigid,” or “is more adaptable and accessible to non-natives and those natives from different corners of the globe.”

One respondent<sup>46</sup> concluded that IE is “the best for a non-native [...] but other than that, I can’t think of one variety that is more convenient for it depends on the situation in which it is being used.”<sup>47</sup> This comment is very illustrative of the fact how dangerous it would be to generalize about language usage. There are an infinite number of situations, settings and motivations for language use and, therefore, even one person can make different choices based on the situation he is currently in.

Next, our respondents seem to favour IE since it includes mixed elements from different varieties: e.g. “all the variants of English put together in one IE would be the most convenient,” “a great amalgam of accents and expressions from diverse varieties,” or “a mix of everything everyone around [...] speaks”, “the student body is from around the world our English accent meets somewhere in the middle” or “international mix is useful.” The following response summarizes our respondents’ appreciation of linguistic diversity: e.g. “[s]everal Variants together, as it is an international school and it should celebrate diversity, even in the language taught.”<sup>48 49</sup>

This openness to different varieties and variation within these varieties we observe in our respondents’ answers may, however, also cause problematic feelings associated with language identity. The ‘mixture’ of varieties or “variants” that English users are exposed to throughout their lives can cause ‘schizophrenic’ feelings about English. One of the respondents’ comments may be representative of such feelings of fairly proficient English users world-wide: e.g. “When I talk I combine American and British English because I was forced to talk British English in my old schools, in my country it is considered as the ‘real’ English but I prefer American so now I am stuck in between.” This feeling of being “stuck in between” and being neither fully able to emulate native-like usage or one of the other varieties (especially in terms of pronunciation) nor wanting to do so may be rather stressful or sometimes embarrassing

<sup>44</sup> As Widdowson (2003, p.43) put it: ‘The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have a custody over it.’

<sup>45</sup> The following comments should be illustrative of this point: e.g. [IE] “is very good”, “is the most known and used version of English in the world,” “makes it possible to communicate very easily with a broader number of people,” or “can be understood easily”.

<sup>46</sup>This respondent was originally quite critical or sceptical about the question (“What kind of question is that?”), however s/he went on to provide a very informative comment.

<sup>47</sup>For similar comments regarding situational and interlocutor dependence see section *Attitudes to Nativeness and Non-nativeness*.

<sup>48</sup>Other responses did not state clearly that it is IE they would opt for but since these respondents show a very open attitude towards English and its variation we can subsume these comments under the IE label: e.g. “all English is good,” or, “[since UWCs are international institutions] the best solution is to accept people’s various accents and grammatical differences.”

<sup>49</sup>One of the distinctive qualities of this diverse and ever changing linguistic IE ‘blend’ that many of the students reflect upon, is the diversity of acceptable linguistic features (even though this is often expressed in traditional EFL terms of “mistakes” and “proper forms”).

especially when studying and/or working in an English-speaking country.<sup>50</sup> In ELF contexts, on the other hand, we could argue, this blend or mixture of different native accents merged with a non-native, albeit a proficient one, may guarantee general intelligibility (see e.g. Jenkins, 2000).

Another crucial finding regarding IE is that according to our results, students seem to display a genuine joy of the universality, democratic nature and neutrality of a variety labelled IE. This conceptualization of English seems in a way to enable to integrate and cherish all different linguistic and cultural backgrounds which are represented at UWCs, as in the following comments: e.g. [“IE because/as”] “its universal,” “we all learn to understand each other. It's fun to get to know all the different varieties. I think our international English doesn't present a problem and its variety is enjoyable,” “it entails less status loaded words that puts people with a better proficiency level at a higher level of social status. It's more democratic,” or “it is less culturally biased and accented, and within reach of most people,” “it is the one I am exposed the most to and it feels neutral.” Students made similar comments when providing answers to Question 10 of our questionnaire which focussed on their familiarity with the notion of ELF.<sup>51</sup> They tended to stress both the universality or global nature of ELF and the fact that ELF is independent of a given set of NS cultural values<sup>52</sup>: e.g. “[ELF is] a ‘global language’ for people of all different parts of the world to communicate,” “[ELF is] English used as a international, neutral language with the purpose of easing communication and activities between speakers of different languages,” or “a language of communication but not cultural significance.”

Lastly, some of the students did not hesitate to identify the English that is being spoken at UWCs as ELF. As one of the students stated: “I wasn't aware of it before now but I think it refers to a functional and communicative form of English that does not stress on the correctness of the speech. The main goal is to get the message across and now that I come to think of it, it's more or less the kind of English we use here at UWC-English as a Lingua Franca!”<sup>53</sup>

All comments listed in this sub-section suggest a significant amount of overlap between how our respondents conceptualize IE and ELF. Therefore, they can be seen as two terms referring to one concept. Also, the above observations seem to exhibit a distinct level of openness to a broadly conceived concept of International English. More

<sup>50</sup> Based on both our interview results and personal experience of the authors of this paper, due to their ‘insufficient’ command of English, NNSs may be easily recognized as coming from a different cultural and linguistic background, which in some CSs involving predominantly NSs can make them feel ostracized.

<sup>51</sup> In Question 10, the respondents were questioned about their familiarity with the notion of English as a Lingua Franca. The reason why we asked this question, was merely to find out whether the term English as a Lingua Franca per se is widely known and/ or used among UWC students. Similarities and/or difference between ELF and IE were for reasons listed above not of our interest. By asking about IE and ELF differently in different sections of our questionnaire we gave our respondents plenty of opportunity to think about these terms independently and to contemplate their significance with respect to their own unique linguistic experience. The collected data (227 responses) show that 145 (64,7 %) of the participants reported that they were not familiar with the concept while 82 (36,1 %) reported that they were. Nevertheless, even students that had never come across the notion of English as a Lingua Franca, were often able to grasp its main characteristics; some students inferred their answers from the name itself.

<sup>52</sup> For more about ELF and cultural identity see: McKay (2002), Pözl (2003) and Jenkins (2007).

<sup>53</sup> This comment corresponds with Firth's theory that ELF is task-oriented rather than language, i.e. correctness-oriented (cf. Firth, 2009, p. 155).

data would be necessary to be able to generalize but we perceive that the above comments may hint to changing attitudes to English used globally in favour of a more polymodel approach.<sup>54,55</sup>

### *Other Varieties*

For many respondents (22, i.e. 10,8 %) “none of [the varieties] is the ‘best one’.” Several of these 22 respondents mentioned that language use is situationally and interlocutor dependent<sup>56</sup> or is a “matter of personal preference.”

Interestingly, respondents who have no preference for a certain variety (i.e. BrE, AmE or IE) voice a need for consistency, comprehensibility and clarity throughout any variety used.<sup>57</sup> These observations reiterate the need for accommodation strategies (especially in terms of pronunciation and lexis) discussed below.

### *Models of English*

As a complementary question to Question 6, we asked the participants what kind of speaker they perceived as a good ‘role-model’ for English use (Question 7). Out of 511 responses from 229 respondents, 348 (i.e. 68,1 %) indicated that they preferred native models;<sup>58</sup> 139 (27,2 %) responses were allocated to non-native speakers, either proficient ones or those who are able to deal with most international communication situations.

In general, the responses to Questions 6 and 7 display, on the one hand, a lot of ‘traditional’ but also flexible or linguistically ‘modern’ attitudes. Certainly, the entrenchment of native Englishes prevails.<sup>59</sup> Yet, based on our research findings, native varieties may not be the only standard reference varieties to influence the future global use of English. NNSs seem to prefer NS varieties as ‘model’ varieties and/or as a point of reference; they, however, also admit that in real-life practice NS Englishes do not have much impact on their everyday functioning in English.

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<sup>54</sup>For the discussion of mono- vs. polymodel approaches see e.g. Rubdy, Saraceni, 2006, p. 13; Kirkpatrick, 2007 & Pennycook, 2009, p. 200-201.

<sup>55</sup>Several scholars from various academic circles, practicing teachers and users of English at least in the Czech Republic (see Quinn Novotná, 2012, p. 252; also personal informal interviews on this topic of the authors of this paper with many different parties) believe that adopting a simplified, bastardized and/or pidginized version of English would lead to fatal linguistic chaos. Our respondents’ comments, on the other hand, seem to suggest that some active users of English may not share these fears and are instead open to variation and strive to make English their own.

<sup>56</sup> For example, “I don’t regard any of them as best; their efficiency depends on the situation.” See also comments in section *Attitudes to Nativeness and Non-nativeness*.

<sup>57</sup> For instance, “everyone should try to be consistent,” “all [are] fine as long as everyone understands,” or “any variant would work as long as there is no use of slang language.”

<sup>58</sup> British English, Standard British English, American English, Standard American English, Canadian and Australian English; for a detailed distribution of responses see Appendix, Figure 3.

<sup>59</sup> Altogether 107 out of 203 responses for British, American, Canadian and Australian, i.e. 52,7 %.

### *Language Awareness and ELF Accommodation Strategies*

Our data helped us gain useful insight with respect to linguistic sensitivity and to appreciate how linguistic sensitivity is crucially interconnected with language awareness.<sup>60</sup> Our focus is LA detected in a second and foreign language use but we do believe there may exist a correlation between increased LA in speakers' L1, L2 and/or L3.<sup>61</sup>

Examples of high language awareness and sensitivity can be found in our respondents' answers. Without any previous instruction on linguistics or linguistic terminology, one survey participant, for example, described the pragmatic strategy of accommodation<sup>62</sup> where a successful language user is not defined by flawless, native-like language use but rather his/her ability to adapt or 'accommodate' to his/her interlocutor: e.g. "For me the most convenient is to adapt the English to who I'm speaking to." According to Seidlhofer (2001a, p. 147) '[in ELF contexts] mutual accommodation is found to have greater importance for communicative effectiveness than "correctness" or idiomaticity in ENL terms.'

Other answers generated by Questions 8 and 9 imply that indeed many respondents are aware of the importance of accommodation strategies and supportive communicative behaviour in international settings (see also Firth, 2009, p. 156), as in the following example: "[I]n a multinational environment, [t]he key element in communication is to reach through to the interlocutor and other elements such as accents, eloquence or fluency are mainly (important however) assets,"<sup>63</sup> or "[I don't feel more confident with one or the other], I just sometimes speak differently because of someone's level of English [...]."

Our data show that the principle of accommodation is perceived to work both in 'core ELF communication situations' (CSs) (Quinn Novotná, 2012, p. 70), i.e. with no NSs being present in the conversation, and in CSs involving both NSs and NNSs, since both groups seem to incorporate some accommodation strategies. Based on our respondents' answers when NSs talk to NNSs they report to "pronounce [...] more clearly," and "use simpler vocabulary and not talk too fast;" in sum, some smooth-communication-seeking NSs seem to "tone down" their English when talking to NNSs. Not all NSs however, are always perceived to employ accommodation strategies to the same degree when talking to NNSs; frequently NNSs in our data report that NSs speak too fast, use a lot of idiomatic language and /or refer to a lot of culturally loaded realia. As the following comment suggests, we can also find a positive outlook of NNSs on other ELF-typical communication strategies, such as the 'make-it-normal' and 'let-it-pass' principles:<sup>64</sup> e.g. "I feel more confident because the chances of them [NNSs] correcting me if I say something wrong is less likely." Another example of pinpointing a flexible and very pragmatic approach to language use so typical of ELF interactions is suggested in the following comment: "[I prefer] IE for its broadness and acceptance of

<sup>60</sup> For our take on language awareness (LA) see section *Terminological Complexities*.

<sup>61</sup> The investigation of such correlation remained, however, outside the scope of our research.

<sup>62</sup> For more about accommodation in ELF see also Seidlhofer (2001), Firth (2009), Jenkins (2006, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> For more about pragmatic strategies found in ELF see Björkman (2011).

<sup>64</sup> See Meierkord (2000), Seidlhofer (2001), Firth (2009).

different words for same thing and opposite.” The speaker may even have meant the ELF-typical pragmatic and lexical strategies of code-mixing and code-switching.<sup>65</sup>

Students showed considerable level of LA during the interviews when asked whether they think they modify their language in any way when they speak with the teachers (authorities, more formal setting) than when they have a casual conversation with friends. In their answers they admitted some differences between the formal and the casual language, and also provided descriptions of the aspects that were modified: e.g. “Yes, I try to use more ‘proper’ language in formal situations and try to avoid fennisms“ (typo, student’s self-correction: “Using literal translations from finnish to get understood.“

Such ability of the students to reflect upon their own English is rather exceptional given their young age and the fact that they have never been formally educated in linguistics. It appears to be suggestive of the fact that it is the conditions of the UWC institutions that enable and enhance the development of such self-reflective skills.

#### *Attitudes to Nativeness and Non-Nativeness*

Question 8 and 9 of our survey concentrated on UWC students’ attitudes to non-nativeness and their preference in communicating with NSs or NNSs, respectively. As mentioned in the section on Methodology, after conducting Survey I, we decided to modify the wording of this particular question because the formulation of this question<sup>66</sup> was eliciting potentially skewed answers and was not neutral in tone. However, since in both surveys the question yielded similar key sets of answers they are analysed together. The results from Question 9 then expand on the data obtained in Question 8 by providing information concerning the respondents’ preferences related to NS and NNSs interlocutors.

In Question 8, 219 responses were collected altogether in both surveys.<sup>67</sup> If we perform quantitative analysis of all answers, most of the respondents (83 responses out of 97, i.e. 85,6 %) in Survey I reported that they do not consider it harmful for their communication in the international environment if somebody recognizes them as not being native speakers. In Survey II, the majority of respondents (66 responses out of 122, 54,1 %) reported having some problems with communication because of their NNS status. Nonetheless, there was a set of respondents claiming that there was no

<sup>65</sup>See Cogo (2009), Firth (2009), Klimpfinger (2007, 2009) and House (2010).

<sup>66</sup>Question 8 in Survey I contained the adjective ‘harmful’ which we found to be too expressive and generating negative thinking about the issue; the original version of the question was: ‘Do you think that if somebody recognizes you as not being a native speaker it could be harmful for you during the communication in the international environment? Please, provide a reason for your answer?’ In Survey II question 8 was modified as follows: ‘Have you ever perceived being a non-native speaker of English as a problem? As a non-native speaker, have you ever felt disadvantaged when communicating in international settings? If so, what kind of challenges have you faced? Please, explain your answers.’ For the reasoning behind the choice of LMT see section *Terminological Complexities*.

<sup>67</sup>There is a discrepancy between the number of respondents and the number of answers as some of the answers provided were counted as two possibilities. This is due to the complex nature of some of the comments the respondents provided.

disadvantage in being NNS (38 responses, 31,1 %); and the NNS status was sometimes even viewed as “an opportunity [...] to develop [their] level of English.”

Several respondents generated highly sensitive answers reflecting upon their own multilingualism, multiculturalism and identity. Many respondents see the multilingual repertoire and variety it brings into international environment as an asset<sup>68</sup>; one comment was even explicitly critical of monolingualism. Further, adhering to and certainly not denying or anyhow disguising their linguacultural roots and identity seems to be of great importance to our informants as NNSs of English<sup>69</sup>.

Being able to convey content, message, thoughts and ideas and having a solid grasp of vocabulary<sup>70</sup> ranges the highest on the respondents' scale of importance.<sup>71</sup> This applies to the answers collected from both surveys. Grammar, emulating native accents and other skills such as fluency and eloquence are seen as important but not crucial: e.g. “I have quite a strong Dutch accent, so people mostly hear that I'm not a native speaker after a full sentence. I would rather be judged on my vocabulary than on my pronunciation.” Several respondents explicitly mentioned being proud of their NN accents in English; accents - more than any other language elements - seem to be strongly linked to language users' identity (compare respondents' comments above; see also Jenkins, 2009b, p.204 summarizing her research from 2007.)<sup>72</sup> Many respondents agree that sound and deep knowledge of vocabulary in English is highly important and contributes to their language confidence, whether it be general vocabulary, English for Specific Purposes (ESP)<sup>73</sup> - or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) - related terminology, slang, jargon, false friends, connotations or vocabulary helping to express emotions.<sup>74</sup>

Supporting this are also the results obtained from our interviews. Essentially, the participants agreed that as far as the evaluation of their schoolwork is concerned, it is mainly the knowledge of the subject matter and the ability to convey meaning that is of

<sup>68</sup> See the following comments by several respondents: “[if somebody recognizes you as not being a native speaker] it may cause a bit more reluctance and reservation in working together in an international environment just because it takes a bit more effort and may be a bit more difficult, but it also brings attention to your proficiency in multiple languages and that can function to serve your interests,” “not everyone on the world can be from a native English country - variety is important,” or “considering the fact that I'm multilingual, I have no problems with getting corrected or being advised on the matter of language.”

<sup>69</sup> Two respondents literally said: “[...] I have my polish identity,” “[...] it's exactly the same for me to speak english with my accent, It's not something that ashames me,” or “I'm PROUD to be a non-native English speaker.” [Respondent's emphasis.]

<sup>70</sup> See for example the following comment: “the only thing which can make situation little harmful is very poor vocab[ul]ary.”

<sup>71</sup> This in turn is, then, closely connected to the earlier discussed fact that the main emphasis is put by UWC students on the communicative functions of the language: e.g. “Communication, not grammer is the priority.” or “Outside of this place, making simple mistakes is unacceptable whereas here it seems as long as you can make others understand you, then it'll be fine.”

<sup>72</sup> As regards their status as learners, some respondents' comments reveal that they view the perpetual learning process as a natural part of their non-nativeness.

<sup>73</sup> Students gave examples of not knowing terminology pertinent to e.g. agriculture, car parts, philosophy and physics. They stressed the frustration that accompanies communicative situations where they want to use English equally precisely as they do in their mother tongue to discuss these highly specific issues. They find themselves being unable to do so due to lack of knowledge of ESP terminology.

<sup>74</sup> The discussion of challenges posed by Content and English Integrated Learning (CEIL) remained outside the scope of this study. It is the subject of an on-going research project in the UWC setting conducted by the authors of this paper.

importance, as opposed to grammar and accuracy in the assessment. The only exception, when some of the participants felt that “grammar mattered,” was in the case of English lessons. However, several respondents also stated that in certain subjects their English might affect assessment, especially when they are required to use subject-specific vocabulary.

Going back to Question 8, answers in which our respondents reported that being recognized as non-native speakers may be of a disadvantage centred mostly around Inner Circle countries (e.g. when looking for a job) as opposed to international environments. With respect to these comments, we find that the distinction between the EFL and ELF/WEs paradigms that is discussed in current academic studies highly relevant (see section *Terminological Complexities*). Where the goal of the students is to work or study in the inner circle countries, the choice of the EFL paradigm might be more suitable; students, who after completing their studies, will mostly interact with other NNSs may be more interested in rationale connected with ELF pedagogy.<sup>75</sup>

Other challenges - causing “inferior” feelings - our respondents have faced, include writing (especially writing essays), public speaking, debates and argumentation. When speaking in front of larger public, some NNSs feel disadvantaged in terms of precision, speed, eloquence and power of conviction. Further problematic areas include telling jokes<sup>76</sup>, understanding songs, documentaries, allusions and cultural context (mostly native English one) which penetrates or is often expressed via language. One informant provided a long comment which grasps the complexities and “ups and downs” of using a foreign language with both native and non-native speakers. She reports that her feelings range from those of the above mentioned inferiority to moments of “fun” caused by NNS usage of English.

Many students feel that not having a better, i.e. a more native-like level of English significantly “affects [their] social life” at UWCs. Especially first year students report finding it hard to socialize shortly after their arrival. The use of English as a chief means of socializing at UWCs is connected with another challenge which is to express the speakers’ personality via the means of a FL. Students report experiencing difficulty to “convey ‘who [they are],’” and even observe changing some of their personality traits, e.g. they become more shy, quiet, less confident; or they “couldn’t express how I really was.” We find that this aspect is often overlooked in FL instruction and would deserve further research and reflection in teacher training courses.

Respondents’ answers vary when it comes to the reactions to their English when confronted with native speakers. Some students reported encountering “reactions [which] are quite positive,” while other students had a totally opposite experience describing situations where NS are “not sensible enough” and, due to their insufficient language skills, “don’t pay the same attention” to what they are saying. Moreover, many NNSs do not feel comfortable when NS accommodate to them ‘unnaturally’ by, for example, “talk[ing] extremely slowly.”<sup>77,78</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Where the goal of the students is to work or study in one of the IC countries, the choice of the EFL paradigm might be more suitable; students, who after completing their studies, will mostly interact with other NNSs may be more interested in rationale connected with ELF pedagogy.

<sup>76</sup> “Everything is funnier in your native language.”

<sup>77</sup> Confront with the section devoted to accommodation above. See also Jenkins (2012) for more on the topic of accommodation.



In order to determine the preferences of our respondents in connection with the native/non-native status of their interlocutors, in Question 9, there were given four multiple-choice options. Out of 231 answers, 95 (41,1 %) feel more confident in communication with a non-native speaker, 77 (33,4 %) do not have any preference with either NSs or NNSs, 44 (19 %) feel more confident in communication with a native speaker, and 27 (11,7 %) ticked the option labelled 'Other' and provided more detailed answers.

Respondents were also asked to explain their answer. We collected 69 textual explanations, which can be grouped into several categories. Respondents in the most numerous group, i.e. those who find it easier to communicate with NNSs, mostly provided reasons such as "[NNSs] speak more slowly," and "understand each other better." As discussed above, time and language exposure play a role too; with time speakers become more confident in communicating with both native and non-native speakers. Many respondents also agreed, however, that 'confidence' or ease of communication is person-dependent rather than NS/NNS-dependent.<sup>79</sup>

Some respondents distinguished between situations where they feel "comfortable," "free," and "confident" (which mostly involve NNSs) and situations which are seen as convenient and "beneficial" for them in terms of language improvement.<sup>80</sup> What can be inferred from this is that we have to distinguish between viewing NSs as interlocutors and NSs as language models and/or points of language reference. As discussed earlier, NSs can be both very helpful and respectful but also at times nonchalant and non-accommodating when communicating with NNSs. As a linguistic source and language model<sup>81</sup>, however, their role will very probably remain unquestionable (as hinted to above especially within the EFL paradigm).

### ***Language Proficiency and Language Confidence***

Summing up some recurring general trends we have detected in our data, we can say that confidence (in operating) in English has been closely tied to self-perceived proficiency. Improvement in proficiency, in turn, is for many students directly linked to the length of studies at UWCs. As mentioned earlier, several students reported they felt disadvantaged at the beginning of their studies.<sup>82</sup> These NNSs correlate their level of English with perceived lower intellectual faculties, too. It also appears to be the case that the respondents associate sophisticated knowledge of English with being respected in communication, or with having communicative advantage. Therefore, whoever has seemingly "better" command of English is considered somehow superior to the other participants. Still, one respondent aptly expressed how proficiency can be defined

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<sup>78</sup>The transition back and forth from the EFL to the IE / ELF paradigms may not only not be a rare occurrence, but also may be a necessity in the future; in other words, there are many examples when one and the same person can be at the same time an English learner (EFL paradigm) and an efficient English user (ELF paradigm).

<sup>79</sup>Also see *Pedagogical Implications* section.

<sup>80</sup>As one respondent put it: "talking to natives raises your English level and confidence." One respondent, however, also pointed out that s/he learns from NNSs since they "share experiences with [one another]."

<sup>81</sup> Within the IE/ELF paradigm both educated NSs and native-like NNSs are increasingly respected as informants on the English language use.

<sup>82</sup>For more on feelings of frustration see *Attitudes to Nativeness and Non-nativeness* section.

within in the IE/ELF paradigm: “[...] English is just a means of communication. Proficiency, in an international context, is simply a way of communicating effectively.”<sup>83</sup> Lastly, as we can also read from these comments and from some of the comments discussed above, often the lack of proficiency is seen as a problem when communicating with NS of English, hence not in ‘core’ LF situations.<sup>84</sup>

When looking at all responses received, we find that respondents’ experience with using English ranges on a continuum. Several respondents have never experienced any problems as NNSs of English (e.g. “never been a problem”); yet, when we juxtapose answers of those who are “extremely comfortable with the English language” with their self-reported level, we can see that they have high, near native-like command of English. At the other end of the spectrum we find a group of respondents who have “faced many challenges,” and “felt disadvantaged.” A whole range of answers testifies that most respondents reside somewhere in the middle, i.e. they have faced some challenges and/or have had some communication problems and developed various strategies to overcome them. By employing these strategies the respondents behave like ELF users as defined by ELF researchers. Considering the high respondent rate of our respondents, it appears that it is the environment of the UWCs that, through creating the need of using English on everyday basis as the only language of communication, and the general emphasis on content rather than form, is vital for the students to develop communication strategies which can complement their general language skills.

Another key result concerning proficiency comes from the interviews conducted. The respondents strongly felt that the approach to English at the UWC institutions greatly differed from the approach they had experienced during their previous studies. The students highlighted the fact that UWCs are designed to be international and to give everyone the opportunity to function in English hence the main focus is on using the language actively and creatively. This treatment of language corresponds with the concepts of languaging (coined by Becker, 2000) which is defined as ‘attunement between a person and a context’ (Becker, 2000, p. 11), or as ‘having a go, trying to make sense and getting somewhere against all the odds’ (Phipps, 2007, p. 1). We believe that the practical application of this concept is brought daily into practice by our respondents at UWCs and through it they are able to become more proficient users of English.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

#### ***Language Forms and Skills***<sup>85</sup>

All the data generated in our research yielded several pedagogically relevant implications. Based on the respondents’ answers, the main areas that constitute challenges for NNSs are the language skills of speaking and writing. Grammar,

<sup>83</sup> This observation strikingly corresponds with Widdowson’s (1994, p. 384) take on proficiency. See section *Terminological Complexities*.

<sup>84</sup> E.g. “often I felt inferior (intellectually) to some natives, as they used words I understood, but could never use myself. Therefore I felt stupid when, for example, asking a question myself.”

<sup>85</sup> We apply the traditional TEFL distinction into four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and four language forms (spelling, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary).

pronunciation, accents, fluency and other forms, skills and sub-skills are perceived as important but not crucial when functioning in an international environment such as the one under examination.

Solid command of both general and specialized (ESP) vocabulary, on the other hand, is reported to be of utmost importance. At pre-university international schools such as UWCs the stress on using correct terminology is very high. Our respondents find the lexical aspect of their study challenging. As one of the participants summarized it: “They [the teachers] mostly accept anything once it's understandable. But the subject-specific vocabulary is always required [...]”

First, this finding has relevant implications for teaching English both as a *lingua franca* and/or as a foreign language. With respect to our findings, we propose a ‘lexical approach to TEFL/TEFL’, i.e. emphasis in teaching should be given primarily to acquiring and expanding lexis. Other language elements, such as grammatical precision and focus on native(-like) accents would, based on this new outlook on teaching and learning English, be given a different position within curricula. We believe this shift in pedagogical focus could possibly lead to improved language use in that it would mitigate the above discussed instances which right now students report to be challenging and problematic in multilingual communities (see section *UWCs and Varieties of English*).

### ***Language Proficiency, Confidence and Exposure***

Our next goal was to operationalize the notion of proficiency in (international) English and/or ELF at UWCs. Based on the respondents’ answers, we observed that the self-perceived lack of proficiency in English leads to frustration. In turn, this leads to low self-esteem and/or feelings of anger over being seen by NSs of English as linguistically and/or intellectually inferior. Hence, confidence in English is perceived as closely tied to proficiency. Furthermore, for many of our respondents, the lack of proficiency is only seen as a problem when communicating with NSs of English (i.e. not in core LF situations); students feel disadvantaged in these situations. What we have, however, also noted is that confidence or feelings of linguistic comfort and ease are highly interlocutor dependent, i.e. if there is mutual liking and good rapport, the fact whether the other interlocutor is a NS or a NNS is of secondary importance.

Further, confidence and proficiency improve with exposure to English and time spent at an international schooling institution; the UWC environment, thanks to its multi-language policies, stimulates the increase in English proficiency which has far-reaching positive effects on students’ linguistic and academic skills and their social life at and possibly beyond UWC schools.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> The attitudes of teachers towards language proficiency and correctness were not analysed in detail in this study. The attitudes of UWC teachers and their influence on the language usage at the institutions, together with their influence on the students and their awareness of language, are to be the focus of further research that is currently being conducted (see *Teaching through ELF at international post-secondary institutions. A case study at UWC Schools*. Dunková, Grosser, Quinn Novotná, (forthcoming 2014) and Dunková (2013) *Mistake: curse or blessing? The ELF Perspective*, forthcoming). These two separate studies will examine in the form of a field research the particular procedures and techniques when approaching proficiency and correctness in ELF-friendly environment.

### ***Intercultural Environment***

We find our respondents' observations regarding universality, democratic nature and neutrality of a variety labelled IE very powerful and highly relevant to current TEFL and general educational realities. The implicit language policies of the UWC schools, which among other targets, aim at educating - through intercultural understanding and acceptance of difference - individuals with the potential to promote positive human values and influence world politics, seem to be taking shape in the in most cases very eloquently formulated metalinguistic comments elicited by our questionnaire survey. Moreover, it is not only the understanding of different cultures that the students seem to be developing thanks to these written and unwritten policies, but, more significantly for our research, the same appears to be true in relation to linguistic differences.

### ***CEIL***

Lastly, our findings imply that teaching and learning in a non-native form of English is viable (TEFL/CEIL); as shown by our analysis, it also appears to create an environment that enables the students to develop language abilities. Therefore, more detailed analysis of the way non-native English is used and fostered at the institutions should be carried out in order to determine how other schools could benefit from adopting a similar approach to language instruction.

### **Conclusions**

In our investigation, we set to answer the question of whether UWC schools represent an ideal ELF environment. Based on our data, we consider UWCs as very linguistically liberal and open institutions where the exposure to English and the way English is used create an ideal IE / ELF / WEs environment.

Furthermore, we have found several key correlations among the data. The multilingual environment with high language exposure and demanding social and academic challenges created by studying through the medium of a (for most UWC students) foreign language can have immense impact on linguistic sensitivity and language awareness of our respondents. If we look at the relationship between exposure to English and reflection of the language, and its correlation with students' language confidence and their general study, as well as their social and intercultural skills,<sup>87</sup> we observe a strong link among all these elements.

Our results indicate that our respondents, who are at the same time both language learners and active language users, are - based on their linguistic intuition - able to provide the main characteristics of the kind of English they use. Many survey participants showed acute awareness of the fact that the English that is spoken at UWCs may be strikingly different from the established conceptualizations of IC varieties such as American or British English. The English or Englishes spoken at UWCs are often

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<sup>87</sup> See sections *Attitudes to Nativeness and Non-nativeness* and *Language Proficiency and Language Confidence*.

viewed as being in constant flux, always changing and evolving: e.g. “English works as a language of communication and is, due to the wide geographic range of the student’s ethnicities, a living organism.” This observation, as well as many other comments listed throughout this paper, not only illustrate the high level of linguistic awareness which we detected to be implicitly promoted at the UWCs but also have potentially very inspiring implications for wider teaching practice. UWC students seem not only to intuitively characterize IE / ELF / WEs similarly to prominent ELF proponents<sup>88</sup> but also perceive the co-existence of different varieties of English and the organic ‘blend’ created from these varieties as a fruitful source and vehicle of cultural content and social and personal interaction.

Being able to embrace linguistic diversity, we believe, can help and promote embracing diversity in other crucial aspects of life such as ethnic or social differences. All these values not only lie at the core of the UWC philosophy but are or should be universal to any modern educational institution. Hence, we see a great educational potential in embracing linguistic diversity through the means of World Englishes.<sup>89</sup> Throughout our research, the respondents were not only able to reflect upon the English they use on a daily basis, but have also demonstrated a high level of linguistically sensitive attitudes which revealed their ability to accommodate English to their interlocutors which helps them achieve efficient communication. Several respondents have also generated very insightful answers reflecting upon their own linguistic background and how it relates to their linguistic identity.

Therefore, the results inform us that the language of instruction at UWCs appears to mirror both the international and multicultural nature of the schools and its general educational tenets. Since it is in that kind of environment that ELF is usually used, the UWCs seem to provide an ideal setting for the development of linguistically open attitudes and heightened language awareness.

### UWC Okulları: İyi Bir ELF Ortamı mı?

#### Özet

*Bu çalışma, dünya genelinde 130 ülkede üniversite öncesi okullar olarak hizmet veren United World Colleges (UWC) okullarında İngilizce'nin lingua franca olarak kullanımını incelemektedir. Dilsel özgüven, dile maruz kalma, dil yeterliliği, dil modelleri ve dilsel çeşitlilik gibi değişkenler arasında ve bunlar ve öğrencilerin dil bilinci arasında ilişki kurulmuştur. Niceliksel ve niteliksel verilere dayalı olarak İngilizce'nin hem yabancı dil olarak hem de lingua franca olarak öğretiminde uygulanabilecek çeşitli öneriler sunulmuştur.*

*Anahtar sözcükler:* Lingua franca olarak İngilizce, Uluslararası İngilizce, dil bilinci, yabancı dil yeterliliği, dilsel kimlik, dil modelleri

<sup>88</sup> See e.g. (Firth, 2009, pp. 150-151) and Seidlhofer (2011, pp.7-19).

<sup>89</sup> The term World Englishes is this time used as a broad umbrella term encompassing all Englishes spoken world-wide.

### Appendix 1

Nationality		Native language	
UK	15 (6,4 %)	English <sup>90</sup>	(38; 16,1 %)
Norway	14 (5,9 %)	Spanish	(17; 7,2 %)
Italy	13 (5,5 %)	Norwegian	(15; 6,4 %)
India	11 (4,7 %)	Italian	(12; 5,1 %)
Canada	10 (4,2 %)	German	(11; 4,7 %)
Denmark	9 (3,8 %)	French	(9; 3,8 %)
Hong Kong	8 (3,4 %)	Danish	(9; 3,8 %)
Sweden	8 (3,4 %)	Dutch	(9; 3,8 %)
Germany	8 (3,4 %)	Swedish	(8; 3,4 %)

**Figure 1.** The most common nationalities and native languages of the participants in the study (Question 2).

Options:	Responses:	Options:	Responses:
<b>(Standard) BrE</b>	63 (31 %)	<b>Not sure/do not know</b>	6 (3 %)
<b>(Standard) AmE</b>	42, (20,7 %)	<b>Depends</b>	4 (2 %)
<b>International English</b>	39, (19,2 %)	<b>Indian English</b>	3 (1,5 %)
<b>No variety preferred</b>	22 (10,8 %)	<b>Australian English</b>	1 (0,5 %)
<b>Mixture/more varieties</b>	10 (5 %)	<b>Canadian English</b>	1 (0,5 %)
<b>Other</b>	10 (5 %)		

**Figure 2.** The most convenient varieties of English selected by the respondents (Question 6).

<sup>90</sup> By analyzing the data of the students that indicated that their native tongue was English we concluded that the fact they are NSs of English does not skew their answers in any way as they were as varied and open to other varieties of English, as the answers of the other NNS respondents; in other words the respondents who are native speakers do not act as native-speakerists.

<b>Options:</b>	<b>Responses:</b>
Proficient NNSs (almost bilingual)	96 (18,8 %)
Educated NSs of Standard BrE	86 (16,8 %)
NSs of BrE	80 (15,7 %)
Educated NSs of General AmE	57 (11,2 %)
NSs of some other standard variety of English (e.g. from Canada, Australia, New Zealand)	56 (10,9 %)
NSs of AmE	44 (8,6 %)
NNSs who are able to deal with most international communication situations (e.g. most of your teachers)	43 (8,4 %)
NSs of some dialectal, regional or nonstandard variety of English (e.g. Cockney, Scouse, Geordie, Brummie, Scots, Irish, Southern (USA), etc.)	25 (4,9 %)
Other	24 (4,7 %)
<b>Overall</b>	<b>511 (100 %)</b>

**Figure 3:** The respondents' 'ideal' model speaker (Question 7).

#### **Appendix 2: Semi-Structured Interviews - Question List**

- 1) How do your teachers assess your English?
- 2) Is language as such and/or proficiency in English important for the evaluation of your schoolwork?
- 3) Does the assessment differ by subject or teacher? If it differs by teacher, do you think it is anyhow influenced by the fact that the teacher is (non-)native speaker of English?
- 4) Do non-native teachers insist on / enforce using "Standard English" (if so, which variety) or are they lenient / tolerant about your accent and the mistakes you make once/ if successful communication is achieved and the knowledge of subject matter is satisfactory.
- 5) Do you think that high command of English may positively influence one's study results?
- 6) Have you ever come across and discrimination / humiliation from your teachers based on your insufficient command of English?
- 7) Do you feel any difference in the way you are taught English at the UWC and the way you were taught English at your previous school(s)?
- 8) Would you say that your approach to English as a means of communication has changed in any way since you started studying at the UWC? If yes, could you comment on it?
- 9) Does the English you use with your peers in informal situations differ in any way from the English you use when communicating in English formally? Do you pay more attention to form / accent / lexis?
- 10) What problems do you face when studying in English? If so, do you develop any strategies to overcome these problems?

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### ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CEIL	Content and English Integrated Learning
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CSs	Communicative Situations
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EIL	English as an International Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
IB	International Baccalaureate
IE	International English
LA	Linguistic Awareness
LMT	Language Management Theory
NS	Native Speaker
NEST	Native English-Speaking Teacher
NNS	Non-native Speaker
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TELF	Teaching English as a Lingua Franca
UWC	United Worlds Colleges

