

Enriching the University ELT Curriculum with Insights from ELF

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1. INTRODUCTION

The worldwide spread of English is one of the many different developments closely connected with the phenomenon of globalisation. This term, which is now recurrent in contemporary rhetoric and is a keyword in both academic and popular discourse on the economy, society, technology and culture “[...] can be taken to refer to those spatio-temporal processes of change which underpin a transformation in the organisation of human affairs by linking together and expanding human activity across regions and continents” (Held and McGrew 2007, 15).

The intensification of worldwide relations inevitably calls to the fore the question of the choice of the language to be used for contacts among people living in widely different places in the world. Lingua francas, that is “contact languages used among people who do not share a first language” (Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey 2011, 281) have been in use for a long time and Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and other languages were once used for this function. In present times, the task of being a *Lingua Franca* to be used universally has fallen upon English.

English has therefore become the dominant language in the higher education sector in Europe, as can be seen from objective indicators such as the growing number of degree programmes which use English as a medium of instruction (Gotti 2014; Dearden 2015). In this way it is easier to attract foreign students. But equally important is the wish to prepare students for the global workplace.

As a consequence of observable changes in global language use, in ELT (English Language Teaching) it is not possible to fall back on

the traditions of British or US orientation (Mauranen 2015, 48), as the interlocutors that we meet and the target audience of our texts are no longer confined to any nationality or locality. Indeed, it is necessary to promote the development of a capability in learners which will allow them to become aware of “how English can be used as a communicative resource like their L1” (Seidlhofer 2015, 26). Hence, teachers should help students to become ELF (English as a *Lingua Franca*)¹ users, raising their critical awareness, cultivating their positive attitudes to communication across linguistic differences and developing their communicative skills for border-crossing communication.

To date, systematic attention has been paid to the underlying reasons and processes that are shaping ELF and to how they can act as a springboard for reflecting on the pedagogic aims of teaching English (Vettorel 2015, 4). Accordingly, a large body of ELF studies have focused on its implications for ELT (Alsagoff et al. 2012; Matsuda and Friedrich 2012; Vettorel and Lopriore 2013; Bayyurt and Akcan 2014; Lopriore 2014; Sifakis 2014; Ehrenreich and Pitzl 2015; Vettorel 2015²). Teacher education has become one of the main interests for ELF research, as it is generally agreed that the process of introducing (or not introducing) ELF into ELT begins with teachers and therefore with teachers’ education (Dewey 2012).

This chapter also explores the implications of ELF research for ELT practices. However, its focus is on the addressees’ of the teaching practices, i.e. students. In particular, this contribution explores the integration of some general ELF-oriented principles into the syllabus of a course attended by students studying languages for communication in international enterprises and organisations at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia.

From a contextual point of view, after surveying the students’ attitudes to ‘English’, the following sections will show how, thanks to the adoption of a transformative framework (Mezirow 2000) the students were involved in several tasks, in accordance with the principles of Task Based Language Learning and Teaching (TBLT) (Ellis 2003) and authentic learning (Herrington et al. 2003). The common aim of the proposed activities

¹ The definition adopted in the present analysis is the one provided by Seidlhofer (2011, 7), according to which English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF) refers to: “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option”.

² For the sake of brevity, only some of the latest publications can be mentioned here.

and tasks was to encourage students to develop a capability for using linguistic resources strategically and knowingly, aware of “*how* meaning potential encoded in English can be realised as a communicative resource” (Widdowson 2003, 177) for interacting across linguistic borders, without having necessarily to comply with ENL (English as a Native Language) norms.

2. COURSE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The role of education has greatly contributed to the spread of English in European countries. Historically speaking, Europeans have had the possibility of learning foreign languages at school since the 1950s and today the foreign language most frequently included in curricula is English. According to the 2012 research on *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe*, the proportion of pupils learning English as a second or foreign language in lower secondary and general upper secondary education in Europe is about 90% (EACEA 2012, 11). In Italy ratios are even higher- 100% for lower secondary and 96% for upper secondary (EACEA 2012, 11).

Until now mainland European English Language Teaching (ELT) has been based “on the mastering of an exonormative variety (in most instances standard British English (BrE), but increasingly standard American English (AmE)” (Modiano 2009, 208). Moreover, requirements in both academic and other professional circles still consider international certifications such as the ESOL examinations³ and TOEFL that attest the non-native speaker’s ability to produce native speaker-like language, as a kind of valid visiting card or key qualification on a CV.

However, surveys carried out among students of different ages seem to indicate that things are slowly changing. In fact, Adolphs (2008, 130) has shown that as students progress in their acculturation process, they become critical of the value of conforming to native-speaker norms, to the extent that a neutral variety is at times considered to be more ‘open’ or ‘flexible’, in that it allows for a “higher potential of communication in every English-speaking part of the world” (Erling 2008, 218).

³ *First Certificate in English, Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English and Certificate of Proficiency in English.*

2.1. *Methodology*

Sifakis (2007) adopts the transformative approach originally devised by adult education theorist John Mezirow (1991), in order to transform ESOL teachers' views about English language pedagogy. A similar framework was adopted for the course described here, in order to help students realise that in our globalised world they will have to use their multilingual and multicultural competences in order to adapt their language production to their interlocutors and achieve the common goal of mutual intelligibility.

By prompting participants to engage in critical examination of their assumptions, Mezirow's approach guides them to deal with issues which have proven to be resistant to change⁴. In adopting this approach, Sifakis (2007) applies a five-phase model which he summarises as follows:

- Phase 1: Preparation.
- Phase 2: Identifying the primary issues of ELF discourse.
- Phase 3: Raising awareness of secondary issues in ELF discourse.
- Phase 4: ELF and pedagogy.
- Phase 5: Formulating an ELF action plan.

For the purpose of the course under scrutiny here it was decided to devise a three-phase framework which entails activities and tasks:

1. Awareness raising.
 - i. Surveying students' beliefs.
 - ii. Discovering usages of English.
2. Knowledge development.
 - i. Coping with communication across linguistic barriers.
3. Skills deployment.
 - i. Developing communicative skills for border-crossing communication.

It is widely acknowledged that in order for students to develop a more comprehensive view of the English language it may be useful to adopt an approach oriented towards the integration of theory and practice, which emphasises the value of direct experience for effective learning (cf. Matsuda and Friedrich 2012). Therefore, as the students' formative journey unfolded, they had first to become aware of their deeply entrenched beliefs (awareness raising), then they had to be gradually prompted to develop their understanding of communication across linguistic barriers (knowledge development) and finally they had to put to the test the competences acquired during the course, by tackling a task they were likely to encounter in their future professional lives.

⁴ Like, for instance, peacemaking, AIDS, education, social justice and spiritual justice (see Mezirow 2000; Sifakis 2014).

2.2. *Aims and learning outcomes*

This chapter reports on a course which is still taught at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. The activities described here refer, however, to the academic year 2012/2013, when the course was first implemented. The students involved were enrolled in the master's degree programme in 'Languages for Communication in International Enterprises and Organizations'. The class consisted of about 80 students (mostly females) with a C1-like level of competence⁵. The course is called 'Intercultural Communication and Language Variety'⁶ and includes 60 contact hours⁷.

The overall aim of the course is to help the students realise that rather than calling up elements of a foreign language and pressing them into service as "correctly as possible" (Seidlhofer 2009, 242), they should learn to exploit the full potential of the language, adapting to variability and different English lects⁸. After attending the course students are expected to be able to interact in international contexts, and by adapting their language production to their interlocutors, to deal with the cultural differences that may inevitably emerge in multicultural contexts.

2.3. *Awareness raising*

During week 1 the students were sensitised towards the worldwide spread of English⁹. The use of the term 'spread' was of the utmost significance and was used in contrast to the potentially synonymous term 'distribution', in accordance with Widdowson's claim, that "[D]istribution denies spread" (1997, 140). In fact, English is not so much distributed as a set of established encoded forms, unchanged in different domains of use, but rather is spread as a virtual

⁵ The entry requirement for admission to the course is a Common European Framework of Reference C1-like level of competence in the English language.

⁶ In addition, the students are also streamed into smaller groups for language tuition classes taught by native-speaker teachers.

⁷ For obvious reasons of brevity, only a brief description of the learning aims and outcomes, as well as a selection of some of the activities proposed during the course, will be provided here.

⁸ Mauranen explains that she uses the terms 'lects' or 'similects' for lack of a better word, to refer to the varieties which carry along some characteristics of their native language and take shape when different speakers' communities use English as a *Lingua Franca* to talk to people outside their own language community (2015, 38).

⁹ To such an end, the students were shown Kachru's 1985 and 1992 models for mapping the spread of the English language worldwide.

language. The two processes are quite different, as distribution implies adoption and conformity, while spread implies adaptation and non-conformity.

2.3.1. Surveying students' beliefs

Surveys on students' attitudes have revealed that even though there seems to be little evidence that they consider native-speaker norms to be irrelevant either in the local or in a more global context, exposure to native-speaker English makes learners more critical of this variety and leads them to re-define their language learning goals with a greater focus on mutual intelligibility in an international context (Adolphs 2008, 131). Therefore, as part of the *Awareness Raising* phase of the course, it was decided to make students reflect on their own beliefs about English and non-native usages of the language. Accordingly, they were asked to comment upon some statements adapted from a questionnaire devised by the Swiss Association of Applied Linguistics (Murray 2003). At first they had to read a short introductory text and then express their opinions by using a five-point scale of responses: (1) strongly agree; (2) mostly agree; (3) don't know; (4) mostly disagree; (5) strongly disagree (*Fig. 1*).

Statement nr. 1 aimed at investigating the students' attitude towards so-called native speakers' 'supremacy'. A comfortable majority (49%) in addition to a good 22% of the students thought that non-native speaker English usage deserves more respect. This is not surprising as non-native students themselves might have felt looked down upon because of their of ENL competence (*Fig. 2*).

Statement nr. 2 required students to state whether or not they were willing to conform to ENL norms. A narrow majority (53%) seemed to be in favour of the adoption of a less prescriptive approach, while 22% were still doubtful (*Fig. 3*).

[A]lthough English is globally considered as an international language and as a tool to be used in cross-cultural communication with people having various first languages from different parts of the world, native-speakers' norms and cultures still dominate the language materials that are developed to be globally used. In fact, English language coursebooks insist on bombarding the ELT world with culturally-loaded native-speaker themes, such as actors in Hollywood, the history of Coca-Cola, the life of Lady Diana, and what American do on Halloween. (Andarab 2014, 282)

The majority of the students (72%) agreed that ELT materials should be adjusted in order to include situations in which non-native speakers communicate with each other (*Fig. 4*).

What kind of English would you like to learn?

English is being learned and used around the world by more and more people. What this means is that a high percentage of communication in English (up to 80%) takes place, not between a native speaker and a non-native speaker, but between two or more non-native speakers. In Europe, as in other countries, English is becoming a lingua franca – a language that people often fall back on when they have different first languages.

When Spanish and France and German and Italian people communicate with each other in English, they use pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar that is somewhat different from what British or American native speakers might use. However, they understand each other very well and, in time, tend to use some of the non-native like forms over and over.

How do you feel about this development?

How does it affect you?

Please give your opinion on the following statements. Indicate whether you: (1) strongly agree, (2) mostly agree, (3) don't know, (4) mostly disagree, (5) strongly disagree.

1. Native speakers should respect the English usage of non-native speakers more.
2. Learners should have more say in whether they imitate native or non-native speakers
3. Most of the situations in course books assume that learners will later be speaking English with native speakers; but there should be more situations showing non-native speakers communicating with each other.
4. Course books convey the notion that English is either British or American, but there are actually many different possible models for English in the world and these should appear in course books in the future.
5. More time should be spent on getting students to communicate in English instead of spending hours trying to correct deviant forms that are typically made by non-native speakers when they communicate with each other.

Figure 1.

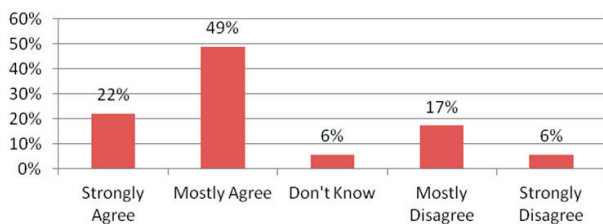


Figure 2. – Native speakers should respect the English usage of non-native speakers more.

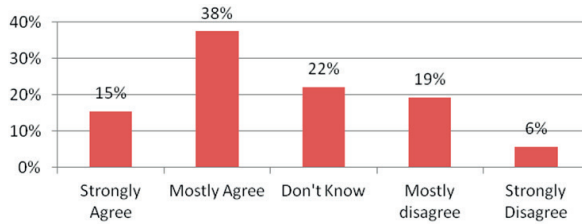


Figure 3. – Learners should have more say in whether they imitate native or non-native speakers.

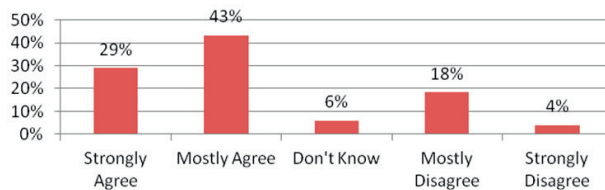


Figure 4. – Most of the situations in course books assume that learners will later be speaking English with native speakers; but there should be more situations showing non-native speakers communicating with each other.

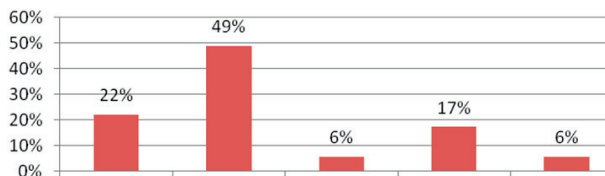


Figure 5. – Course books convey the notion that English is either British or American, but there are actually many different possible models for English in the world and these should appear in course books in the future.

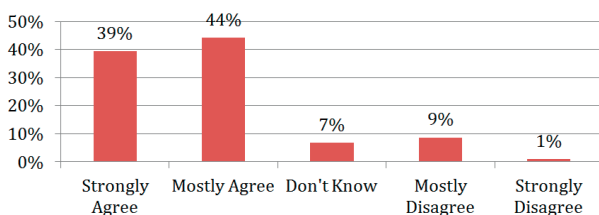


Figure 6. – *More time should be spent on getting students to communicate in English instead of spending hours trying to correct deviant forms that are typically made by non-native speakers when they communicate with each other.*

Statement nr. 4, which is related to the previous one, shows that a high proportion of respondents agreed that “even if one variety is selected as a dominant target model, an awareness of different varieties would help [...] develop a more comprehensive view of the English language” (Matsuda and Friedrich 2012, 20). Nonetheless, as in statement nr. 3, 17% of the respondents mostly disagreed on this issue, possibly believing that exposure to different forms and functions of English detracts from full competence as English speakers (*Fig. 5*).

Statement nr. 5 aimed at investigating the students’ attitudes to deviant forms, with a view to paving the way for establishing the distinction between deviant forms which create intelligibility problems and those which only engender negative attitudes. A substantial majority of the students stated that their main task was to effectively communicate in English rather than spend time being corrected (*Fig. 6*).

According to the survey results, the students showed respect for less mainstream usages of English and were in favour of including non-native communication situations in coursebooks. Hence, they seemed to be somewhat open to changes and prepared to value correctness less than intelligibility and comprehension. However, each statement (except for statement nr. 5), received more than 15% of “mostly disagree” responses (between 17% and 26%). This highlights the fact that some students were not yet inclined to accept a model different from ENL, “probably due to the fact that they had invested heavily themselves in near-native speaker competence and did not wish to see their achievement devalued” (Mansfield and Poppi 2012, 167). This is confirmed by the answers the students provided to one final question (*Fig. 7*).

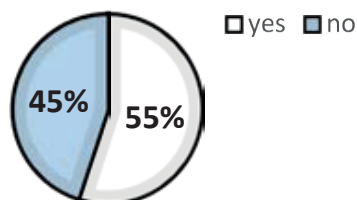


Figure 7. – Do you think that grammatical mistakes (e.g. dropping the 3rd person 's' morpheme or confusing the pronouns 'who' and 'which') could hamper intelligibility in international interactions?

55% of respondents agreed that deviant forms, typical of ELF interactions, may represent an obstacle to mutual intelligibility, rather than an opportunity for further development of the language, as stated by Seidlhofer, who argues that ELF is “a different but not a deficient way of realizing the virtual language, or playing the English language game” (Seidlhofer 2011, 120).

Altogether, the results of the survey seem to indicate that

[A]bandoning the native speaker totally may be unrealistic since the stereotype is so entrenched in teachers' and students' minds. (Cook 1999, 192)

Nonetheless, teaching can at least take some steps towards integrating the curriculum with insights from ELF, to better prepare the students for their future, professional lives. In fact, in “meetings at the United Nations headquarters in New York, tourist cruises around Sydney harbour, or academic conferences in Hyderabad” (Seidlhofer 2011, 7) it is ELF which is used as a contact language.

2.3.2. Discovering usages of English

At this stage the students were sensitised towards different usages of English through exposure to instances of authentic and situated discourse in the written form¹⁰. The materials were distributed to groups of students, who had to read them and were asked to write down their reflections and thoughts. Notes were then collected and discussed in groups. In this first stage four texts as instances of different communicative exchanges in a variety of international settings were handed out to the students.

¹⁰ The activities described here are limited to instances of written discourse, while during the course students were also confronted with instances of spoken discourse.

- (1) Guests should announce **the abandonment of their rooms** before 12 o'clock, emptying the room **at the latest until 14 o'clock**, for the use of the room before 5 at the arrival or **after the 16 o'clock at the departure**, will be billed as one night more. (Bryson 1990, 173)
- (2) The integrity and thus the vitality of Urbino is no chance, but a conservation due the factors constituted in all probability by the approximate framework of the unity of the country, the difficulty **od** communications, the very concentric pattern of hill **siystems** or the remoteness from highly developed areas, the force of the original design proposed in construction, with the means at the disposal of the new science of the Renaissance, as an ideal city even. (Bryson 1990, 175)
- (3) Mr. Poppi,
This is a very serious **manner** that has happened. Because your friend made a mistake in booking those two extra rooms for the evening of the 10th of June and you are just now contacting us, they were not cancelled and your friend has been charged as a no-show. We were completely booked on Friday night and so we were not able to **sell you friends rooms** because she did not contact us to cancel these rooms. I am sorry that she did not understand how to book a room correctly on our website, **but she should have contacted** us as soon as she saw there was a problem, not 3 or 4 days later. Would she like to keep her reservation for **august**? [...] I am sorry about this, but we will not be able to refund the money charged for the two mistake reservations, as we **fill** your friend did not do enough to mitigate the situation.
[...] The problem with the bookings on June 10th is that even though they were for one room a piece, they were still for June 10th and **they new** that and they didn't cancel the rooms.
xxx
Manager
Ruby's Inn
[personal data]
- (4) M Can I ask you a question?
EA Yes, of course.
M Do you know what time it is?
E Yes, it's two o'clock.
M Might you have a little soup left in the pot?
EA What? I don't understand. (Lustig and Koestner 2006, 112-113)

The following questions were then asked:

1. Can you make out what kind of information each text is meant to provide?
2. Which features, in your opinion, could aid/hinder comprehension?

3. Do you think text nr. 4 could be considered a successful instance of communication? Yes/No? Why?
4. Do you think the texts involve native speakers (NSs) or non-native speakers (NNSs)?

After reading the texts, the students were told that

- text nr. 1 is a notice on a hotel door in Sarajevo;
- text nr. 2 is an excerpt from a brochure describing Urbino;
- text nr. 3 is an e-mail written by an American native speaker;
- text nr. 4 is a short conversation between a Malaysian and an American NS, who are both teaching at a community college in the United States.

From their remarks it emerged that:

- notwithstanding its non-standard quality, as highlighted by the presence of a few “unusual” forms (*abandonment, at the latest until 14 o’ clock, after the 16 o’ clock*) text nr. 1 can be understood and considered functional to conveying its meaning;
- text nr. 2 contains a few misspellings (*od, siystems*). It is somewhat more difficult to understand it than text nr. 1, because of the presence of long, tortuous syntax;
- text nr. 3 contains a few misspellings (*manner* instead of *matter*; *your friends rooms*; *but she sould have contacted*; *august, fill* instead of *feel*; *they new* rather than *they knew*), some of which could actually impede the correct understanding of the message;
- text nr. 4 is perfectly phrased as regards the lexico-grammatical features of the language. However, the Malaysian does not succeed in making his NS colleague understand what his real intent is. This clearly shows that even when accuracy is present, misunderstandings may arise. This is due to the fact that different people have different visions of reality, different “softwares of the mind” (Hofstede 1985), which make them phrase information in different ways. As a consequence, any interaction and therefore also international interactions may be unsuccessful, even when accuracy is not an issue.

By engaging in the above activities and tasks the students were expected to realise that in international settings, NS English correctness is not the only requirement, as what really matters is mutual intelligibility. Intelligibility is an interactional phenomenon depending on both writer and reader (speaker and listener). Meanwhile, they should develop inference skills (Nelson 2011) and acknowledge that “those changes that do not impede intelligibility should be recognized as one of the natural consequences of the use of English as an international language” (McKay 2002, 127).

In addition, it was also believed that the proposed activities could contribute to introducing elements of Intercultural Awareness (ICA) (Baker 2011, 2012). In fact, by showing the relationship between language and culture in situated and emergent situations (Baker 2015b, 9)¹¹ students could be sensitised towards intercultural communication and made to realise that it requires:

- (a) knowledge of different communicative practices in different socio-cultural settings;
- (b) the skills to be able to employ this knowledge appropriately and flexibly; and
- (c) attitudes towards communication that involve the ability to de-centre and relativize one's own values, beliefs and expectations. (Baker 2015a, 132)

2.4. Knowledge development

To make students realise that mastery of the language alone is not enough, and that it is necessary to try and phrase one's message in such a way that it can be as easily understood as possible also by members of different linguacultures, they were shown the continuation of the conversation between the Malaysian and the American native speaker:

M (Becoming more explicit since the colleague is not getting the point) I will be on campus teaching until nine o'clock tonight, a very long day for any person, let alone a hungry one!

EA (Finally getting the point) Would you like me to drive you to a restaurant off campus so you can have lunch?

M What a very good idea you have! (Lustig and Koestner 2006, 112-113)

In this way it was clear to both interlocutors that in order for the American colleague to understand what he really meant, it was necessary for the Malaysian to be even more explicit. In other words, he had to clearly spell out the request which had not previously been understood by his colleague, not because he lacked the necessary language competence, but because it was formulated in a way that did not make the intention clear enough.

¹¹ In Baker's words, this approach "involves a move away from cross-cultural comparisons, where cultures are treated as discrete entities that can be compared with each other, e.g. 'in British culture people do... but in Italian culture people do'..." (2015a, 131).

2.4.1. Coping with communication across linguistic barriers

Later on, with a view to providing exposure to a wider selection of English lects, like the ones that might be encountered during their professional lives, students were shown some extracts taken from the on-line version of *The Hindustan Times*, a leading newspaper in India written in English, published since 1924, with roots in the independence movement, which enjoys nation-wide circulation.

- (5) So, who's to blame? It needs an empathetic senior to bring a celebrity to task, says Bureau of Police Research and Development chief Kiran Bedi. "A junior colleague will have the courage to take on the powerful only if his superiors back him", she says, pointing out that none of the **challans**¹² issued between 1982 and 1983, when she was in charge of Delhi's traffic, were cancelled due to political pressure.
- (6) The carefully slung **anga vastra**¹³ and the frequent **Nataraja**¹⁴ **mudras**¹⁵ while speaking may have been something Modi picked up from the Washington-based image consulting firm, Apco Worldwide, that the Gujarat BJP hired. But the totally alive and crackling speeches were pure **Om Shanti Om**¹⁶ moments plucked out of **Karz**¹⁷. And if you want a vital clue, both **Karz** and **Farah Khan's**¹⁸ **Om Shanti Om** are based on the theme of reincarnation. Now, you don't have to be an **L.K. Advani**¹⁹ to figure out who wants to be reincarnated in the nation's political firmament these days. Just buy the DVD – of **Karz**, not the **Modi**²⁰ rallies – for confirmation.

After asking the students to read the above excerpts, they were made aware that despite the native-like quality of the text, comprehension might be seriously impeded by the presence of words deriving from the Hindi

¹² The word *challan* refers to an official form, or another kind of document.

¹³ The term *anga vastra* refers to a cotton cloth.

¹⁴ *Nataraja* is a word usually associated with Shiva, when the deity is represented as a cosmic dancer.

¹⁵ The word *mudras* refers to the position of a person's hands, when the thumb and the index of each hand are united, to form two small circles.

¹⁶ This is the title of a Bollywood film released in 2007.

¹⁷ This is the title of a film released in 1980.

¹⁸ This is the name of a famous Bollywood choreographer.

¹⁹ L.K. Advani is an Indian politician, well known for his persistence.

²⁰ Narendra Damodardas Modi is the 15th and current Prime Minister of India, in office since 26 May 2014. Modi, a leader of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), was the Chief Minister of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014 and is the Member of Parliament (MP) for Varanasi.

language (*challans*), referring to India's religious heritage (*anga vastra*, *Nataraja mudras*), to its political context (*L.K. Advani*, *Modi*), or to Bollywood, (*Om Shanti Om*, *Farah Khan*, *Karz*). In fact, no explanation or translation is provided for the Hindi words in the newspaper and no background information is added. However, this attitude became more easily understandable once the students were told that the expected readership of *The Hindustan Times* is restricted to "the global Indian reader" and does not, therefore, include international readers.

After looking at the articles of *The Hindustan Times*, the students were shown some more articles taken from two different newspapers published in English in China and in the Baltic Republics: *The China Daily* and *The Baltic Times*.

The *China Daily's* domestic readers "mainly include foreigners and high-end nationals, for example, diplomats and governmental policy makers. Overseas subscribers are mostly government officials, members of parliament, staff members of international organisations and multinationals, professors, researchers and students in universities and institutes, one-third of which is abroad in more than 150 countries and regions"²¹.

- (7) The existing **hukou**, or household registration system, appears to be too rigid to accommodate the new situation. (*China Daily*)
- (8) More than 60 per cent of families in cities in Sichuan Province are moderately well-off – a standard of living known as **xiaokang** – but more should be done to help those on lower income, a survey by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed over the weekend. (*China Daily*)
- (9) Textbooks on history and literature have been found with fabricated stories on real figures such as Hans Christian Andersen, the Danish writer noted for his children's stories and **Chen Yi**, a Chinese politician and military commander. History textbooks have also been criticized for their portrayals of famous Chinese historical personages including **Ying Zheng** (259-210 BC), the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), Emperor **Wudi** of the Han AD), and **Zhuge Liang** (AD 181-234), statesman and strategist in the State of Chu during the period of the Three Kingdoms (AD 220-280). (*China Daily*)
- (10) The march in the mountains is only part of the curriculum at the official-training facility in **Jinggang**, a revolutionary base where the CPC-led Red Army began its own march toward national leadership. (*China Daily*)

²¹ <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/>.

*The Baltic Times*²² is the only pan-Baltic English language newspaper which covers political, economic, business and cultural events in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Born of a merger between *The Baltic Independent* and *The Baltic Observer* in 1996, *The Baltic Times* continues to bring objective, comprehensive, and timely information to those with an interest in this rapidly developing region.

- (11) New Democrats argued that the People's Party and the Latvia's First Party / Latvia's Way bloc had used two legal entities – the non-governmental organizations **Sabiedriba Par Varda Brivibu (Society For Freedom of Speech)** and **Pa Saulei (For the World)** – whose participants and organizers were also members of the aforementioned political parties, to earn campaign donations and boost party popularity during the pre-elections.
- (12) RIGA – As one of their last acts in power, the ministers of Latvia's outgoing Cabinet secretly voted to pay themselves a bonus on Oct. 10. The decision, which was only last week revealed by journalists, spurred **Latvia's Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB)** to launch an investigation into whether the Cabinet vote violates the nation's conflict of interest law.²³

By comparing the articles, the students were made to realise that a different attitude is adopted in the three newspapers. In fact, differently from *The Hindustan Times*, every time a term in the local language is mentioned, its translation into English or some background information in English is soon provided, both in *The China Daily* and in *The Baltic Times*.

It was therefore possible to state that only the English used in *The China Daily* and in *The Baltic Times* is suitable for international exchanges on the grounds of its features, which makes it possible to focus on the negotiation of cultures and meaning. The first logical consequence of the above arguments was the acknowledgement that

there is no such thing as 'neutral' communication [...]. All communication involves participants, settings, purposes, linguistic and other communicative medium choices, none of which are culturally neutral: Even in the most apparently functional of social practices, such as buying a cup of coffee, there will be culturally influenced expectations and scripts or schemata for such interactions. (Baker 2015b, 12)

²² http://www.baltictimes.com/news_latvia/.

²³ These examples have been taken from a larger corpus of articles from *The Baltic Times*, which have been examined in Poppi 2011.

In this way, and as suggested by Baker (2015a, 135), recognition of the variations inherent in the usages of English was promoted thanks to the focus on situated and emergent situations, without trying to simplify and essentialise ‘other’ cultures, people and places.

2.5. *Skills deployment*

After engaging in the tasks described in the previous sections, the students were expected to have become aware of the need to “adapt to variability, [and] live with a more varied selection of English lects than has been customary for second-language users” (Mauranen 2012, 143). Therefore they were ready to put their knowledge into practice by designing, implementing and evaluating an ELF communication. The students were therefore shown a short text taken from an Italian website:

- (13) Welcome to Lombardia. The official Region site. A Region to act.
In the files here attached you can find figures of our Region; economic and territorial data, history, political guidelines divided in themes, Presidency's activities, useful addresses, values and the mission of Regione Lombardia.

Once again they were asked to comment on its communicative efficiency.

The analysis of the text revealed:

- a deviant form (*divided in*) which does not, nonetheless, compromise the correct understanding of the information conveyed;
- phrases which reproduce the typical structural patterns of the Italian language (*a region to act*);
- terms translated from the Italian language into English, without any explanation provided (*region, Presidentship*);
- expressions typically associated with letter or email writing rather than with documents posted on the web (*in the files here attached*);
- the lengthy articulation of the text, which does not, however, contribute to its clarity;
- the textual structure which results in language inappropriate for Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC)²⁴ (cf. Poppi 2010, 131).

²⁴ This issue was dealt with in class with the students. However, since it is beyond the scope of this contribution, it is only briefly referred to here.

2.5.1. Developing communicative skills for border-crossing communication

Later, the students themselves were asked to develop their own versions of the original text:

- (14) Welcome to the official site of the Italian Regione Lombardia²⁵.
Come and visit us!
Find out about our region:
- economy
 - territory
 - history
 - political issues
 - regional government activities
- (15) Regione Lombardia: come and visit us!
- Looking for more information on Regione Lombardia?
 - Browse our web site and find out more about:
 - Facts and figures
 - History
 - Mission and values
 - Policies
 - Projects promoted by our Presidenza Regionale²⁶
 - Useful addresses

Finally, some of the students even created a new website, in which they tried to exploit the additional affordances of the web.

(16) (*Fig. 8*)

Obviously, the new versions prepared by the students were not flawless or unproblematic. However, they all revealed an increased awareness about the need to make the original text more suitable for an international audience accessing it via CMC. This is why in some cases the word 'Region' was replaced with the Italian word *Regione*, to highlight the different sociocultural contexts which lie behind these two words. The initial long main clause was broken up into shorter chunks of language and in general, a new layout was adopted, more appropriate for computer-mediated communication.

²⁵ The *regione* is the first-level administrative division of the state.

²⁶ Each *regione* has an elective parliament called *Consiglio regionale* and a regional government called *Giunta regionale*, which is headed by a regional president. Every region is divided into *province* (provinces) and each *provincia* is divided into *comuni* (municipalities).



Figure 8.

3. OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

As McKay (2002) explains, the spread of English has undoubtedly brought with it language change and variation. Thus a first teaching goal should be that of developing in learners a special kind of textual competence which allows them to accept as a natural consequence of the use of English in international contexts those changes which do not impede intelligibility (see § 2.3.2). A second teaching goal should be that of ensuring intelligibility among English speakers, as correctness and mere compliance with Ns norms may not be enough (see § 2.4). Thirdly, a final goal should be that of helping learners develop interaction strategies that promote friendly relations when English is used with speakers of other cultures. These strategies may include ways to establish rapport, accommodation, code-switching, negotiation and linguistic and cultural awareness in order to mediate between different cultural norms (see § 2.4.1).

In the case of *The Hindustan Times*, since the newspaper addresses the 'global Indian reader', the presence of Hindi words is legitimised by the assumption that the people who live in the Dravidian-speaking areas in the south of the country would normally prefer English to Hindi as a *Lingua Franca*. In addition, they are also familiar with Hindi words and names of places and personalities. This is why, no further explanations are provided whenever Hindi words are mentioned. At the same time, however, these articles are not easily intelligible for an international audience, which might lack the cultural background needed to make sense of what is written; and this is so because the language used in *The Hindustan Times* is highly localised.

On the contrary, in *The Baltic Times* and *The China Daily*, a greater effort is made to provide an English-language 'window' into Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as well as China, as proved by the choice of a language which is particularly attentive to the needs of an international audience that has to understand the information provided. This kind of language is of a more globalised nature than that of *The Hindustan Times* and it is therefore more in line with the tenets of ELF.

As a consequence, when the students were asked to modify the English version of the excerpt taken from the website of Regione Lombardia, they tried to make the text more accessible and easily understandable for speakers coming from different cultural contexts. They clarified possible language problems, because of the need to ensure that the text produced could be understood by all possible users, many of whom are not native speakers. So, while preserving some Italian terms, they also tended to pro-

vide a clear reference to the local socio-cultural identity, and their national affiliation, as well as a paraphrase in English. In addition, they tried to adopt particular rhetorical strategies designed to make the reading and understanding of the text easier, breaking up, for example, the information into shorter chunks more suitable for CMC.

4. CONCLUSION

Globalisation has changed the requirements that language teaching and learning have to address. In this sphere, as in others, some of the most significant changes are economic. Therefore, some commentators have even suggested that languages tend to be treated as economic commodities, and that this will result in the disappearance of traditional ideologies in which languages were primarily symbols of ethnic or national identity. Even without going so far as to claim that languages are nothing but commodities, it is clear, however, that

[B]esides the English – or rather ‘Englishes’ – we traditionally know, used as a mother tongue and a national language in a number of countries, we are also seeing the emergence of a new form of English – English as a lingua franca or Global English – which is appropriated by, and belongs to, all its speakers, native and non-native alike. In this new perspective, English is proposed as a hybrid and fluid tool which – like the lingua franca of the Mediterranean – should not be seen as an instrument of imperialism, or as being associated with the culture of the countries originally speaking it. Its supporters’ objective is not to replace local languages through this new English, but to reserve it for specific situations and enrich it through the native languages and cultures of all its speakers. (European Commission 2010, 47)

In the light of the present globalisation trends through English and of English, the insistence on a monochrome native-speaker standard may inevitably lead to a number of contradictions and discrepancies. This is for instance what happens in many English Departments in universities. While in cultural and literary studies language variation and change and pluri-and-multilingualism are highly acclaimed and celebrated, in language classes, the ideal, as far as language proficiency goes, is very much that of a usually monolingual native speaker of Standard English. In actual fact, what is emerging with some clarity is that near-nativeness is no longer a goal for many speakers (Seidlhofer 2008, 169).

This chapter has shown that it is possible to enrich the ELT university curriculum with insights from ELF. The diversity of English language calls for new aims in ELT. Apart from good linguistic skills, learners need to develop the necessary competences for successful communication in an international context, relying on the foreign language with the aim of establishing and maintaining relationships, rather than just exchanging information.

It stands to reason that teaching always requires the definition of goals and objectives, i.e. something that the teaching and learning are directed at. And learning outcomes in language teaching have traditionally been formulated with reference to a standard language. As Widdowson puts it: “linguistic description cannot automatically meet pedagogic requirement and it would therefore be wrong to assume that findings should directly and uniquely inform what is included in a language course” (2003, 106). Therefore, what is being argued for here is not a rejection of all norms and standards, but a reappraisal of their justification (see Seidlhofer 2008, 168). Indeed, some scholars claim that native speakers themselves will have to make allowance for the pragmatic level of communication, by adjusting their grammar and lexis as well as refraining from local idioms and colloquial expressions in ELF communication in order to ensure communicative success (Gnutzmann and Intemann 2008, 15).

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