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The Mediation of Languacultural Identities through English as a Lingua Franca

1. The nature of English as a lingua franca (ELF)

For the first time in human history, we are witnessing the emergence of a contact language, English as a lingua franca (ELF), where the number of non-native speakers (NNSs) continues to grow and exceeds the number of native speakers (NSs). Trudgill[1] observes that this is the unique peculiarity of ELF:

> «There are many languages which have played important roles as institutionalized lingua francas: Latin was the lingua franca of the Roman Empire, and continued to play an important role in European learning until quite recently. But the extent to which English is employed like this is without parallel. Never before has a language been used as a lingua franca by so many people in so many parts of the world. English is also remarkable in having more non-native speakers than native speakers».

This results in an unprecedented cultural-linguistic phenomenon, which sees the rise of NNS varieties of English both locally, due to the contact between the first language (L1) of each community of NNSs and English, and globally, as English is one of the most commonly used language of choice for communication between speakers who do not share the same mother tongue. Therefore, ELF is characterised by its 'glocal' dimension[2] and can be defined a polycentric language. Following Mauranen[3]:

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[1] P. TRUDGILL, *Sociolinguistic Variation and Change*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2002, p. 150.
[2] R. ROBERTSON, *Glocalization: time-space and heterogeneity-homogeneity*, in *Global Modernities*, eds. M. Feathersone, S. Lash, R. Robertson, Sage, London 1995, pp. 25-44.
[3] A. MAURANEN, *Exploring ELF: Academic English shaped by non-native speakers*, Cambridge

> «lingua francas are used by speakers who maintain their first language. Thus, even though speakers who use English as an additional language outnumber native speakers [...], their influence is even harder to predict than the direction of language change in general. The question of numbers is nevertheless important, as are the shifting parameters of prestige. Standard English is the unquestioned prestige variety at the moment, but since the status of languages and varieties normally follows that of their speakers, alteration in social and political power on the international scene may well affect the balance between different Englishes as well».

Today, the worldwide spread of ELF is an epiphenomenon of the process of globalization that has marked the development of economic, scientific, technological and cultural exchanges in the 20th and the 21st century. Behind this trend there are two historical reasons that have led to the primacy of English as an international language: the immense colonial expansion of the British Empire across the five continents, between the 18th and the 19th century, and the emergence of the USA as a superpower in the 20th century[4], in key areas such as international politics, financial markets, industrial production, scientific research, energy resources, and military power. However, as Mauranen[5] observes: «The origins [of ELF] have ceased to be the prime motivation for the continued spread of the language. Most of its use today is by nonnative speakers.» Besides, even in post-colonial communities, it is suggested that English can be accommodated by local languages and become a resource for global communication. Canagarajah[6] suggests that:

> «Instead of maintaining both languages separately, one can appropriate the second language, and absorb part of it into the vernacular. [...] The achievement of new identities and discourse none the less involves a painful process of conflicting ideologies and interests. If we are to appropriate the language for our purposes, the oppressive history and hegemonic values associated with English have to be kept very much in mind, and engaged judiciously».

University Press, Cambridge 2012, p. 2.

[4] D. CRYSTAL, *English as a Global Language*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, p. 53.

[5] A. MAURANEN, *The Corpus of English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings*, in «TESOL Quarterly», vol. 37, n. 3, 2003, pp. 513-527, p. 513.

[6] A.S. CANAGARAJAH, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, pp. 1-2.

One of the crucial factors that have contributed to the success of English is that it is by far the most commonly used language on the Internet, through which millions of individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds carry out a whole range of activities, such as a) interact for commercial purposes (e.g. for the sale of products and services); b) access databases and exploit rich sources of information (e.g. online journalism, academic publications, electronic encyclopaedias, dedicated websites, etc.); c) become part of discourse communities and social networks (e.g. chat rooms, blogs, discussion groups, wikis, Twitter, Facebook etc.); d) entertain themselves (e.g. playing videogames, joining role-playing games (RPGs), writing fanfiction, sharing audiovisual materials etc.). This has eventually turned English into the prototypical lingua franca of the global community that populates the Web, and it is in this virtual space, as well as in other situations of intercultural contact, where the new linguistic forms of ELF have flourished and have marked the distinction between this language and the encoded models of NS Englishes, which include the so-called Standard English (namely, RP-British Received Pronunciation and GA-General American), as well as all other NS non-standard varieties of English.

Quoting form Brutt-Griffler[7], Seidlhofer[8] classifies four main features of the development of English as a global language:

1. Econocultural functions of the language (i.e., World English is the product of the development of a world market and global developments in the fields of science, technology, culture, and the media.)
2. The transcendence of the role of an elite lingua franca; (i.e., World English is learned by people at various levels of society, not just by the socioeconomic elite.)
3. The stabilization of bilingualism through the coexistence of world language with other languages in bilingual/multilingual contexts; (i.e., World English tends to establish itself alongside local languages rather than replacing them, and so contributes to multilingualism rather than jeopardizes it) and
4. Language change via the processes of world language convergence and world language divergence (i.e., World English spreads due to the fact that many people learn it rather than by speakers of

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[7] J. Brutt-Griffler, *Conceptual questions in English as a world language*, in «World Englishes», 17, 1998, pp. 381-392.
[8] B. Seidlhofer, *Research perspectives on teaching English as a lingua franca*, in «Annual Review of applied linguistics», 24, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 209-239, pp. 213-214.

English migrating to other areas; thus two processes happen concurrently: new varieties are created and unity in the world language is maintained).

The remarkable global diffusion of ELF and the fact that nowadays the number of NSs is inferior to that of NNSs have foregrounded the value of linguacultural diversity among L2-users. So, even though the teaching of English as a foreign language is largely based on NS language models, it seems reasonable to think that the pragmatic criterion of acceptability of learners' successful discourse entails the incorporation of ELF-mediated communication also in English language teaching. In-depth research in this particular area, which combines studies in linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, has been carried out over the last fifteen years, and certainly one of the first and most seminal works has been Jenkins's (2000) study into the phonology of English as an international language (EIL), where the author presents what she has termed the phonological Lingua Franca Core (LFC). Jenkins[9] analyses «ILT [interlanguage talk] interactions in which communication had broken down, and in which unintelligible pronunciation was wholly or partly the cause of the breakdown». Then, she classifies the core phonological features of English (both segmental and suprasegmental) that are essential to grant successful communication in ILT contexts, and that need to be taught as part of the language syllabus. Hence, the LFC makes a distinction between typical NNSs variations in pronunciation that can be accepted, and unacceptable deviations, which instead make communication difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, Jenkins's study has immediate pedagogical implications, as it leads to a reconceptualisation of learning objectives and language activities that are more focused on the reality of global L2-users.

The pedagogical implications of ELF go well beyond the level of phonology, and include all other language levels, as for example lexicogrammar. Seidlhofer[10], who directed the VOICE[11] project between 2001 and

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[9] J. JENKINS, *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, p. 134.

[10] SEIDLHOFER, *Research perspectives on teaching English as a lingua franca*, cit., p. 220.

[11] <www.univie.ac.at/voice/index.php> (last access 15.04.2014) VOICE (the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English), a corpus of transcribed spoken ELF that comprises 1 million words, was compiled by a team of researchers at the Department of English at the University of *Vienna*, under the direction of Prof. B. Seidlhofer, between 2001 and 2009. As stated on the official web site of VOICE: «It is the ultimate aim of the VOICE project to open the way for a *large-scale* and *in-depth linguistic description* of this most common contemporary use of English by providing a corpus of spoken ELF interactions which will be accessible to linguistic researchers all over the world».

2009, explains that:

> «many theses and seminar projects conducted on VOICE data at the University of Vienna [...] have brought to light certain regularities that at least point to some hypotheses, which in turn are proving useful for formulating more focused research questions. In particular, typical "errors" that most English teachers would consider in urgent need of correction and remediation, and that consequently often get allotted a great deal of time and effort in English lessons, appear to be generally unproblematic and no obstacle to communicative success. These include
> - Dropping the third person present tense *–s*
> - Confusing the relative pronouns *who* and *which*
> - Omitting definite and indefinite articles where they are obligatory in ENL [English as a native language], and inserting them where the do not occur in ENL
> - Failing to use correct forms in tag questions (e.g., *isn't it?* or *no?* instead of *shouldn't they?*)
> - Inserting redundant prepositions, as in *We have to study about…*)
> - Overusing certain verbs of high semantic generality, such as *do, have, make, put, take*
> - Replacing infinitive-constructions with *that*-clauses, as in *I want that*
> - Overdoing explicitness (e.g. *black colour* rather than just *black*)
> However, there are recurrent events in these interactions that do cause communication problems and misunderstandings. Unsurprisingly, not being familiar with certain vocabulary items can give rise to problems, particularly when speakers lack paraphrasing skills. Most interesting, perhaps, are cases of "unilateral idiomaticity"[12], where particularly idiomatic speech by one participant can be problematic when the expressions used are not known to the interlocutor(s). Characteristics of such unilateral idiomaticity are, for example, e.g., metaphorical language use, idioms, phrasal verbs, and fixed ENL expressions such as *this drink is on the house* or *can we give you a hand*».

As we can see, both Jenkins's and Seidlhofer's studies indicate that the spread of ELF has direct consequences with respect to the fields of applied linguistics and English language teaching (ELT). However, it is important to note that the goal of ELF researchers is not prescriptive, but rather descriptive, i.e. aimed to identify both the common and the local features

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[12] B. Seidlhofer, *Habeas corpus and divide et impera: 'Global English' and applied linguistics*, in *Unity and diversity in language use*, eds. K. Spelman Miller, P. Thompson, Continuum, London 2002, pp. 198-217.

of NNS Englishes. As Jenkins[13] explains: «The goal of ELF is [not] to establish a single lingua franca norm to which all users should conform». Hence, taking up a concept by Seidlhofer[14], Jenkins[15] is «in favour of the more sensible notion of raising all English learners' awareness of the global role of English, and of the effort that everyone needs to make to achieve successful global communication».

It is not surprising that the notion of ELF has sparked heated academic debate in recent years, that opposes those who advocate the exonormative model of standard English (SE) and claim that there is no scientific foundation underpinning the concept of ELF as an emerging variety of the English language, and those who otherwise consider the emergence of a lingua franca an interesting sociolinguisitic phenomenon, which places NNSs on the same level of NSs with respect to the concept of 'ownership of the language'. Among those who have spoken critically of ELF, Maley's[16] point of view is quite emblematic. For example, in his essay[17], he contends that ELF is a «myth»:

> «The claim that ELF is an emerging or emergent new variety overlooks the fact that a new variety needs a base in a speech community. This is precisely what ELF lacks. The aggregate of NNS-NNS interactions globally does not add up to a speech community. It is no more than an inchoate and disconnected agglomeration of instances of use. [...] A further point relates to the relatively small list of features isolated by the ELF researchers in relation to Core-, non-Core items. A handful of common new features hardly adds up to a new variety. [...] They are also heavily dependent on context. [...] What we can do is to teach something as close to a "standard" variety as possible, while at the same time raising learners' awareness of and respect for variability they will encounter the moment they leave the safe haven of the classroom».

Maley's words reveal a misunderstanding in conceptualising ELF. On reflection, the very fact that it is called 'lingua franca' presupposes that

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[13] J. JENKINS, *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, p. 19.

[14] Jenkins has summarized a point made by Seidlhofer in 2006 (B. SEIDLHOFER, *English as a lingua franca in the expanding circle: What it isn't*, in *English in the World: Global Rules Global Roles*, eds. R. Rubdy, M. Saraceni, Continuum, London 2006, pp. 40-50).

[15] JENKINS, *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity,* cit., p. 20.

[16] A. MALEY, *The Reality of EIL and the Myth of ELF*, in *EIL, ELF Global English: Teaching and Learning Issues*, eds. C. Gagliardi, A. Maley, Peter Lang, Bern 2010, pp. 25-44.

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 31-42.

there is neither a community of native speakers of this language, nor a culturally homogeneous community of non-native speakers who can claim its ownership. A lingua franca, in fact, is a contact language, which usually emerges orally and evolves through the attrition of one language of prestige with many other local languages, over a long period of time. If we were to agree with Jenkins[18] who conceives ELF: «as an emerging English that exists in its *own right* and which is being described in its *own terms* rather than by comparison with ENL», we could conclude that[19]: «None of its speakers can be native speakers of the language. [...] ELF does not exclude NSs of English, but they are not included in data collection, and when they take part in ELF interactions, they do not represent a linguistic reference point.» Therefore, the expression lingua franca does not refer, as one would imagine, to an encoded, stable language system, but rather to a sociolinguistic process that is characterised by language variation and change. For instance, what we can observe diachronically about past lingua francas like Latin and the so-called 'historical' Lingua Franca – or Mediterranean[20] –, is their tendency to be adopted and adapted by a multifarious community of L2-users (i.e. people from different languacultural contexts who interact by means of the same second language), which included the educated elites as well as the uneducated, who managed to carry out successful communication in authentic pragmatic contexts. ELF is no exception from this point of view.

As for Maley's remark on the question of the relative paucity of Core-ELF features, it can be refuted by the fact that ELF is a relatively 'young' lingua franca and corpus-linguistic research in this field, especially as regards the collection of quantitative and qualitative data about its lexicogrammar, has recently begun. As opposed to the past centuries, when linguistics as a field of research did not exist, today's linguists have the competence and the instruments to observe and study an interesting phenomenon like ELF synchronically, ever since its blossoming began. This is probably the greatest advantage in ELF studies, compared to the study of past lingua francas, which is essentially retrospective. Finally, Maley's indication about what sort of standard English should be taught in schools is rather vague. However, agreement can be found on the last point he makes, as it is also the ELF researchers' belief that one of the goals of English language teaching (ELT) is to educate learners to cope

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[18] Jenkins, *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*, cit., p. 2.
[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
[20] E. Grazzi, *The Sociocultural Dimension of ELF in the English Classroom*, Anicia, Roma 2013.

with language diversity.

Those who advocate ELF theory believe that ELF should be put on a par with other languages, which entails that it can be studied both in terms of its linguistic features (at phonological and lexicogrammar level) and of its communicative potential (at semantic, pragmatic, discourse and sociolinguistic level). Mauranen[21] explores the complexities of this sociolinguistic phenomenon, which she describes as follows:

> «all pervasive trends of global culture find their way to every part of the world, but simultaneously and in parallel get altered by local particularities and develop into local variants of imported cultural trends. [...] Communities assimilating global influences adapt them to their local circumstances, thereby generating new heterogeneity. [...] Linguistic complexity in ELF communities and groupings is enhanced by the wider environments where ELF is spoken, which are usually multilingual. [...] Therefore, ELF might be termed "second-order language contact": a contact between hybrids. [...] Second-order contact means that instead of a typical contact situation where speakers of two different languages use one of them in communication ("first-order contact"), a large number of languages are each in contact with English, and it is these contact varieties (similects), that are, in turn, in contact with each other. Their special features, resulting from cross-linguistic transfer, come together much like dialects in contact. To add complexity to the mix, ENL speakers of different origins participate in ELF communities. The distinctive feature of ELF is nevertheless its character as a 'hybrid of similects' [emphasis added]».

In a nutshell, the evolution of ELF largely depends on the co-occurrence of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic phenomena that are typical of language contact situations, whereby language changes take place. The variation, adaptation and reshaping of ELF is carried out as a 'natural process' by their speakers, in their attempt to communicate in multicultural and multilingual settings. As Mauranen[22] says: «In cognitive terms, lingua franca speech orients to achieving mutual comprehension».

My understanding of the expression 'natural process' is that the emergence of ELF should be approached from a Vygotskian perspective and be intended as the outcome of a broader cognitive process that is specific to human beings and includes the evolution of verbal languages as sociocultural human artifacts. Therefore, in the following section of this article I

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[21] Mauranen, *Exploring ELF: Academic English shaped by non-native speakers*, cit., pp. 28-30.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

am going to apply Vygotsky's[23] sociocultural theory (SCT)[24] to the study of ELF and take into consideration its implications as regards the development of the ELF user's languacultural identity.

2. Sociocultural theory and ELF

Vygotsky's genetic method of research shows that the evolution of thought and speech are strictly interrelated. As Lantolf and Thorne[25] explain:

> «the "genetic method", emerges from the stance that Vygotsky adopted for overcoming the mind-body dualism that had in his view affected psychology and other social science for years. [It applies to] phylogenesis (the evolutionary development of a group of organism - here primates), [...] sociocultural history, ontogenesis (the development of an individual), and microgenesis (the development of a specific process during ontogenesis)».

As regards the study of L2 development, ontogenesis and microgenesis are the two primary domains of the Vygotskian genetic method of research that can also shed light on the *sociogenesis* of ELF. Tomasello[26] points out that:

> «The process of sociogenesis may be clearly seen in two very important cognitive domains: language and mathematics. I begin with language. Although on a general level all languages share some features, in concrete terms each of the thousands of languages of the world has its own inventory of linguistic symbols, including complex linguistic constructions, that allow its users to share experience with one another symbolically. This inventory of symbols and constructions is grounded in universal structures of human cognition, human communication, and the mechanics of the vocal-auditory apparatus. The

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[23] L.S. VYGOTSKY, *Mind and society: The development of higher psychological processes*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1978.

[24] Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) is also called cultural-historical psychology. Lantolf (quoted in J.P. LANTOLF, S.L. THORNE, *Sociocultural Theory and the Genesis of Second Language Development*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006, p. 1) explains that: «despite the label "sociocultural" the theory is not a theory of the social or of the cultural aspects of human existence. [...] it is, rather, [...] a theory of mind [...] that recognizes the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artifacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking».

[25] LANTOLF, THORNE, *Sociocultural Theory and the Genesis of Second Language Development*, cit., pp. 25-29.

[26] M. TOMASELLO, *Human Cognition*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1999, p. 42.

particularities of particular languages come from differences among the various peoples of the world in the kinds of things they think it important to talk about and the ways they think it useful to talk about them –along with various historical "accidents", of course. The crucial point for current purposes is that all of the symbols and constructions of a given language are not invented at once, and once invented they often do not stay the same for very long. Rather, linguistic symbols and constructions evolve and change and accumulate modifications over historical time as humans use them with one another, that is, through processes of sociogenesis. The most important dimension of the historical process in the current context is grammaticization or syntacticization, which involves such things as freestanding words evolving into grammatical markers and loose and redundantly organized discourse structures congealing into tight and less redundantly organized syntactic constructions».

The same considerations apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the emergence of ELF, which can be seen as strictly interlaced with the contextual circumstances that characterise our historical age. Banking on the assumption that the sociogenesis of ELF is a process that is likewise ingrained in today's global sociopolitical, economic and cultural changes, Vygotsky's genetic method and SCT can shed light on the mediational dimension of ELF as a «cultural affordance»[27] that can be «appropriated»[28] through meaning-making pragmatic activities. This tool is developed by its multicultural community of users as an artefact to carry out communicative tasks in international contexts, as well as on the Web. It results from the constant dialogic reshaping and adaptation taking place in language contact settings at all language levels (phonologic, lexicogrammar, discoursal and cultural), whereby the occurrence of loan words, calques, code switching, grammatical replication and the implementation of communicative

[27] E.S. Reed, *James J. Gibson and the psychology of perception*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT 1988, quoted in L. van Lier, *The Ecology and Semiotics of Language learning: A Sociocultural Perspective*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Norwell MA 2004, p. 94.

[28] B. Rogoff, *Observing sociocultural activity on three planes: participatory appropriation, guided participation, and apprenticeship*, in *Sociocultural Studies of Mind*, eds. J.V. Wertsch, P. Del Rio, A. Alvarez, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999, pp. 150-151) defines participatory appropriation as «the process by which individuals transform their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their own participation. [...] The basic idea of appropriation is that, through participation, people change and in the process become prepared to engage in subsequent similar activities. By engaging in an activity, participating in its meaning, people necessarily make ongoing contributions (whether in concrete actions or in stretching to understand the actions and ideas of others). Hence, participation is itself the process of appropriation».

strategies, such as language transfer and accommodation, become markers of the languacultural identity of the ELF user.

Let us consider, for example, how Jenkins[29] presents the role of phonological transfer in English as an International Language:

> «We should not lose sight of the fact that transfer does not only interact with universal processes, but is itself a universal process. Much research has demonstrated the facilitative effects of perceived similarity on SLA [second language acquisition], in terms of both reduction in errors and rate of learning. [...] Pedagogically, then, it is crucial to accept L1 phonological transfer as a universal, a fact of life and, for the purposes of EIL, to respond to it selectively, as it interacts with intelligibility and teachability».

Let us also take into consideration what Heine and Kuteva[30] observe with regard to grammatical replication in contact languages, which could very well apply to ELF. They go as far as to suggest that

> «there is another perspective of looking at contact-induced language change that appears to be more important. Rather than viewing replication as leading to a "deviation from the norm" or as a disruption of an existing state, we view it as leading to a new state that is simply different from the early state but is not necessarily less coherent, less "systematic", or less complete than the earlier state of the language concerned. And rather than viewing speakers as receivers, imperfect language learners, etc., we find massive evidence for a perspective according to which speakers are more appropriately analyzed as actors and "language builders" as Hagège (1993) proposes. [...] In situations of language contact, speakers create new structures by drawing on universal strategies of conceptualization. [...] We are dealing – at least to some extent – with a creative process: speakers [...] do not simply imitate grammatical categories, or produce imperfect copies of such categories: rather, they are likely to develop new use patterns and new categories on the model of other languages».

To exemplify Heine and Kuteva's point, let us consider the case of a syntactic calque that is quite common in the use of English by Italian speakers: «I am agree». This non-canonical expression is a replica of the Italian lexical phrase: «Sono d'accordo» that is a routinized formula whose

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[29] JENKINS, *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, cit., p. 104.
[30] B. HEINE, T. KUTEVA, *Language Contact and Grammatical Change*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, pp. 34-37.

functional use is to express agreement. It corresponds to the English lexical phrase: «I agree». These Italian and English canonical chunks are pragmatically equivalent, whereas their syntactic patterns differ considerably:

Italian syntactic string: (NP) + V + Adv
English syntactic string: N + V

In Italian, the copular verb *essere* (be) is followed by a stance adverbial locution expressing agreement. In English, instead, we have the use of the performative verb 'agree'. Therefore, the non-canonical ELF expression 'I am agree' could be considered a structural calque of the Italian chunk, where a grammatical word class shift has taken place: the English verb 'agree' is turned into an adverb. In this case, therefore, we could say that the phenomenon of language transfer has resulted into a process of syntacticization[31], which is also typical of pidgins and creoles.

The most immediate consequence of supporting ELF theory is that it could have a strong impact on the institutional models of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), which still take the linguistic and communicative competence of the ideal native speaker as their ultimate target and as the yardstick of the student's success in English. In the next section, I will therefore shift the focus to the considerable pedagogical implications deriving from the integration of ELF into the English classroom.

3. ELF in the English classroom

With ELF, the focus on the learner's competence shifts to the pragmatic dimension of communication in authentic bilingual settings, and the L2-user's performance is considered as part of a social event which is not subordinate to the SE paradigm. Following Mauranen[32], an entirely different angle should be taken in considering ELF verbal interactions outside the EFL classroom, whereby deviations from established NS norms are in fact the norm:

«Instead of seeing this underuse as a problem merely because it deviates from comparable NS use, such features, if typical, are regarded as acceptable characteristics of the variety unless there is

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[31] T. GIVÓN, *On Understanding Grammar*, Academic Press, New York 1979, p. 208; TOMASELLO, *Human Cognition*, cit., p. 42.
[32] MAURANEN, *The Corpus of English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings*, cit., pp. 514-517.

evidence that they lead to misunderstandings and communicative dysfluencies in ELF discourse. In addition, L2 speakers who manage important parts of their lives using ELF fluently are not construed as learners as if they were on the way toward the (unattainable) goal of nativeness. [...] Speakers should feel they can express their identities and be themselves in L2 contexts without being marginalised on account of features like foreign accents, lack of idiom, or culture-specific communicative styles as long as they can negotiate and manage communicative situations successfully and fluently. An international language can be seen as a legitimate learning target, a variety belonging to its speakers. Thus, deficiency models, that is, those stressing the gap that distinguishes NNSs from NSs, should be seen as inadequate for the description of fluent L2 speakers and discarded as the sole basis of language education in English».

The difference between EFL and ELF presupposes that the roles of the foreign language learner and of the L2-user are distinct too, notwithstanding they coexist within the same person and converge by means of the speaker's performance. This distinction is crucial, because it shows that two different approaches are required whenever we focus on the process of English teaching/learning in educational environments, and on the process of communication in authentic bilingual contexts. However, in spite of the fact that EFL and ELF are intended as independent areas, we could say that recognizing the importance of the L2-user's languacultural identity in discourse is a unifying element, which leads both to a deeper conception of the process of EFL teaching/learning, and to a better understanding of ELF.

Batstone[33] observes that in recent years there has been a growing tendency in academia to believe that «The processes of language use, language learning, and language teaching all involve interconnections between social and cognitive elements without which they cannot be adequately understood». For instance, Duff and Kobayashi[34] describe:

«L2 socialization as a theoretical perspective that can be applied in research on classroom-oriented L2 learning. Because L2 socialization research brings together an analysis of social, cultural, and cognitive dimension of situated language learning, it is highly compatible with a *sociocognitive* perspective that considers the cognitive and the social to be

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[33] R. Batstone, ed., *Sociocognitive Perspectives on Language Use and Language Learning*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010, p. VI.

[34] P.A. Duff, M. Kobayashi, *The intersection of social, cognitive, and cultural processes in language learning: a second language socialization approach*, in *Sociocognitive Perspectives on Language Use and Language Learning*, ed. R. Batstone, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010, pp. 75-76.

intricately interwoven and mutually constitutive. [...] We use the term "sociocognition" to refer to the complex of dynamic interrelationship and interaction between psychological and sociocultural processes that shape – both enable and constrain – L2 learners' engagement in a variety of activities and associated learning processes and outcomes».

Kramsch's[35] critical point of view on the way language teaching has been conceived so far not only reinforces the argument against the traditional NS model in EFL, but also envisions a scenario whereby the reality of ELF would not be disregarded by language educators:

«In part because of the rationality of its grammar and the logic of its vocabulary, language has been taught and learned mostly as a tool for rational thinking, for the expression and communication of factual truths and information, and for the description of a stable and commonly agreed-upon reality. It has not been taught as a symbolic system that constructs the very reality it refers to, and that acts upon this reality through the categories it imposes on it, thereby affecting the relation between speakers and the reality as they perceive it».

The position taken in Kramsch's book regarding ELF is to consider its evolution as part of a natural process enacted by its speakers/learners, who appropriate this language cooperatively in authentic, albeit mostly Web-mediated communicative contexts, and use it as an affordance to carry out communicative tasks in a real intersubjective and intercultural dimension, whereby the interlocutors' identities concur in their attempt to construct and share meanings. Therefore, the basic assumption in this conception of ELF – which owes a lot to van Lier's[36] seminal work in the field of ecological research[37], to Lantolf and Thorne's[38] sociocultural theory in second language development, and to Tomasello's studies[39] on language and human cognition[40] – is that in order to implement a student-centred communica-

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[35] C. Kramsch, *The Multilingual Subject*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, p. 2.
[36] van Lier, *The Ecology and Semiotics of Language learning: A Sociocultural Perspective*, cit.
[37] van Lier (*Ibid.*, p. 4) explains that «Ecological linguistics (EL) focuses on language as relations between people and the world, and on language learning as ways of relating more effectively to people and the world. The crucial concept is that of *affordance*, which means a relationship between an organism (a learner in our case) and the environment, that signals an opportunity for or inhibition of action. [...] The environment includes all physical, social and symbolic affordances that provides ground for activity».
[38] Lantolf, Thorne, *Sociocultural Theory and the Genesis of Second Language Development*, cit.
[39] Tomasello, *Human Cognition*, cit.; Ead., *Constructing a Language*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA/London 2003.
[40] Apropos language and human cognition, Tomasello, *Human Cognition*, cit., pp. 6-9

tive approach to English, ELF should not be excluded altogether from language syllabuses, as it represents a viable option particularly when learners are involved in authentic interactions through online learning.

As Lantolf and Thorne[41] say, this approach has proved to be particularly appropriate «for those interested in cross-cultural and intercultural processes». Most importantly, in studying the use of ELF within an authentic Web-mediated communicative environment, it is possible to explore new ways and practices in an open online English classroom, to more fully engage high-school students in cooperative activities with their fellow learners that may establish deep and meaningful learning experiences.

All this poses a significant challenge to more traditional approaches in the English classroom and suggests that a different conception of language education should be embraced in order to cope with the immense changes that are taking place in the area of global communication, brought about by the rising phenomenon of ELF and the growing importance of social networking. In line with Wenger[42]:

> «communication technologies have changed the time and space constraints of identification. The success of worldwide computer networks, for instance, is due not only to the access to information that they afford but also to the possibility of connecting with people who share an interest – developing, in the process, relations of identification with people all over the world. Thus our identities are expanded, spreading (so to speak) along the tentacles of all these wires and taking, through imagination, planetary dimensions».

Hence, Wenger concludes by underlining the importance of Web-

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affirms that «only human beings understand conspecifics as intentional agents like the self and so only human beings engage in cultural learning. [...] Human beings evolved a new form of social cognition, which enabled some new forms of cultural learning, which enabled some new processes of sociogenesis and cumulative cultural evolution. [...] Linguistic symbols are based [...] on the ways in which individuals choose to construe things out of a number of other ways they might have construed them, as embodied in the other available linguistic symbols that they might have chosen, but did not. Linguistic symbols thus free human cognition from the immediate perceptual situation not simply by enabling reference to things outside the situation [...], but rather by enabling multiple simultaneous representations of each and every, indeed all possible, perceptual situations».

[41] LANTOLF, THORNE, *Sociocultural Theory and the Genesis of Second Language Development*, cit., p. 57.

[42] E. WENGER, *Communities of Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, p. 194.

mediated communication as a learning tool, as it has the potential of fostering the conditions in which the student's intercultural identity can take root.

According to Byram[43]: «The individual becomes an "intercultural person" when intercultural experience becomes the focus of his/her attention, analysis and reflection. [...] The intercultural person [...] reflects on the commonalities and differences and acts according to principles of human comity.» We can assume, therefore, that ELF can play a fundamental role in enhancing the development of the L2-user's intercultural competence. As Byram[44] observes:

> «Learning a foreign language is above all useful. It might seem that English as a lingua franca is a particularly useful "tool" for communication, and one that is not attached to any specific country or culture. [...] "citizenship" is a term that conveniently embodies the issues that arise: the need for self-aware judgement, the willingness to become engaged, the skills and knowledge which facilitate engagement. This is a move "from" FLT [foreign language teaching] within education "to" FLT that brings a specific additional contribution to education for (democratic) citizenship. That contribution is captured in the term "intercultural citizenship"».

This leads to Wenger's[45] conclusion, who affirms that: «education must strive to open new dimensions for the negotiation of the self. It places students on an outbound trajectory toward a broad field of possible identities. Education is not merely formative – it is transformative». And as regards the role of foreign language education, Kramsch[46] conceives of language students as 'multilingual subjects':

> «The recent interest in ecological theories of language has prompted researchers to view the use of another symbolic system as a semiotic, historically and culturally grounded, personal experience. As a sign system, language elicits subjective responses in the speakers themselves: emotions, memories, fantasies, projections, identifications. Because it is not only a code but also a meaning-making system, language constructs the historical sedimentation of meanings that we call our "selves". In our times of increased migrations and

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[43] M. Byram, *From Foreign Language Education to Education for Intercultural Citizenship: Essays and Reflections*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon 2008, p. 186.
[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 228-229.
[45] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, cit., p. 263.
[46] Kramsch, *The Multilingual Subject*, cit., p. 2.

displacements, when globalization enhances what Pratt (1999)[47] calls the "contact zones" and the "traffic in meaning" (2002)[48] among individuals and communities, it is important that we look in richer detail at the lived experiences of multiple language users».

Thus, Kramsch investigates the very essence of the process of second language learning with a student centered approach. Her critical point of view about traditional schooling and her broad understanding into the nature of the L2-user's identity can be illuminating with regards to ELT and the use of ELF at school. Therefore, I would like to end this section with a thought-provoking quotation, where Kramsch[49] contends that

«We are fooling ourselves if we believe that students learn only what they are taught. While teachers are busy teaching them to communicate accurately, fluently, and appropriately, students are inventing for themselves other ways of being in their bodies and their imaginations. Success in language learning is an artefact of schooling, of the need by institutions to demarcate those who know from those who don't, but the language-learning experience itself is neither successful nor unsuccessful. It can be lived more or less meaningfully and can be more or less transformative, no matter what level of proficiency has been attained. Without an understanding of what they associate with the music of the new language, its sounds and rhythms, shapes and syntaxes, we cannot grasp the identities students are constructing, consciously or unconsciously, for themselves. [...] Language for them is not just an unmotivated formal construct but a lived embodied reality. It is not simply an agglomeration of encoded meanings, that are grasped intellectually, cognitively internalized, and then applied in social contexts; rather, it is the potential medium for the expression of their innermost aspirations, awarenesses, and conflicts».

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to point out that it is not the intention of ELF researchers to suggest that NS varieties of English should be neglected and that students should be reoriented towards ELF. In fact, the essential

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[47] M.L. Pratt, *Arts of the contact zone*, in *Ways of Reading*, eds. D. Bartholomae, A. Petrofsky, 5th edn., Bedford/St Martin's, New York 1999, pp. 582-596.
[48] M.L. Pratt, *The traffic in meaning: translation, contagion, infiltration. Profession 2002*, Modern Language Association, New York 2002, pp. 25-36.
[49] Kramsch, *The Multilingual Subject*, cit., p. 4.

pedagogic principle that applies to ELF is that learners should be educated about the value of language varieties as long as these reflect the sociocultural diversity of the communities that use English globally. Hence, at the heart of language education there should be an open-minded attitude toward language change, so that students are able to select the options that better suit their communicative needs and glocal languacultural identities.

I leave the final considerations to Jenkins[50], whose words place the relationship between ELF research and ELT in the right perspective:

> «ELF is a matter of learner choice. [...] It is entirely for learners to decide what kind of English they want to learn, be it EFL (in effect ENL) for communication with NSs, an ESL [English as a second language] [...], or an ELF variety for international communication (for example, China English, Spanish English, Japanese English, etc.) – or, indeed, more than one of these. In this way, ELF increases rather than decreases the available choices, while it is the insistence on conformity to NS norms [...] that restricts them. ELF researchers merely suggest that learners should be put in a position to make an *informed* choice by means of having their awareness raised of the sociolinguistic, sociopsychological, and sociopolitical issues involved».

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[50] Jenkins, *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*, cit., pp. 21-22.