



# DEVELOPING 'ELF COMPETENCE' IN LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND TEACHERS

---

DESENVOLVENDO UMA 'COMPETÊNCIA EM ILF' EM  
APRENDIZES E PROFESSORES

Andrew Blair<sup>1</sup>  
*University of Sussex, UK*

**Abstract:** 'Competence' is a contested term, its definition for language learners and teachers challenged by the realities of lingua franca and translingual communication. Similarly, attitudes towards language standards, models, variability and change tend to condition responses to ELF-influenced ideas on pedagogy and teacher education. Educators play a key role facilitating shifts in understanding, enabling teachers to mediate a reconceptualised view of learner/user capability, progress and success inside and outside the classroom. This paper discusses the impact of ELF-aware course content and approach for experienced practitioners, aimed at developing 'ELF competence', and reflects on potential future directions.

**Keywords:** Language Teacher Education; English as a Lingua Franca; Competence.

---

<sup>1</sup> a.m.blair@sussex.ac.uk

---

**Resumo:** ‘Competência’ é um termo contestado, sua definição para professores e aprendizes de línguas é desafiada pelas realidades de comunicação de língua franca e comunicação translíngua. De forma similar, atitudes para com padrões linguísticos, modelos, variabilidade e mudança tendem a condicionar respostas a certas ideias influenciadas pelo ILF no tocante a pedagogia e formação docente. Formadores exercem um papel crucial no sentido de facilitar mudanças na compreensão e na capacitação de professores para mediar uma visão reconceitualizada da capacidade do aprendiz/usuário, progresso e sucesso dentro e fora da sala de aula. Este artigo discute o impacto do conteúdo e abordagem de um curso de ILF para professores experientes, objetivando desenvolver uma ‘competência em ILF’, e busca também refletir sobre potenciais e futuros caminhos.

**Palavras-chave:** Formação de professores de línguas; Inglês como língua franca; Competência.

*competence* noun [C or U]: the ability to do something well.

*Her competence as a teacher is unquestionable.*

*He reached a reasonable level of competence in his English.*

*Opposite: incompetence. Thesaurus synonyms: skill, talent and ability.*

*(Cambridge Dictionaries Online)*

## INTRODUCTION: TERMS AND CONDITIONS APPLY

‘Competence’ is a difficult word, a contested notion, with connotations of management theory and technicist views of human ability. In terms of language learning, it carries shadows from the past: linguistic perfection, complete acquisition, the final state, perhaps the ‘idealised native speaker’ of the ancient theoretical texts. Scare quotes abound. Alternatives might be preferred, such as proficiency, knowledge, skill, capability (WIDDOWSON, 2003), repertoire (BLOMMAERT, 2010); or more simply, effectiveness, progress, success. All are labels attempting to capture the essence of what it is that language learners learn, and that teachers teach. A critically reframed notion of ‘competence’, despite its academic baggage, serves a purpose as an accessible shorthand for the complexity of the construct that we, as language teaching professionals, are striving to understand – whether as classroom teachers, teacher educators or researchers. Similar arguments can be made for essential(ist) markers such as ‘native’, ‘standard’ or ‘correctness’ when referring to language: we can theorise and problematise these concepts all we like from an intellectual distance, but teachers (and learners) may take a more pragmatic, ‘common sense’ view (SEIDLHOFER, 2018).

Examining our terms more explicitly, we can take the two-word collocation ‘teaching competence’: with the stress on *competence* it denotes the

---

goal of developing *learners'* ability to communicate in the target language; with the stress on *teaching*, the ability of *teachers* to enable learners to achieve this. The first meaning focuses on the object of the pedagogic effort – what it is that learners should acquire or develop; the second meaning on what is required in teachers to support this process. Teacher education, therefore, needs to attend to both meanings: to develop an understanding in teachers of *what* they are helping their learners to achieve, and *how* teachers themselves can best succeed in this aim. As a consequence, if we redefine or reconceptualise our notion of 'competence' (or alternative term), we also need to address both aspects of this duality.

Other collocations with 'competence', from the Linguistics and SLA literature, may reveal our intentions and preferences: linguistic, communicative, pragmatic, discourse, intercultural, transcultural, metacultural, symbolic, social – to name a few. So why not lingua franca competence, too? Accommodating these diverse perspectives on human communication entails an understanding of a non-essentialist view of both language and competence. This paper explores the implications and impact of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) for the teaching and learning of English, and by extension the development of teachers, and how what can be called 'ELF-awareness' is developed in a particular educational context. It draws on previous work in this field (e.g. BLAIR, 2015, 2017; DEWEY, 2012; SIFAKIS; BAYYURT, 2018; VETTOREL, 2016) and on several recent ELF conference themes focusing on pedagogy and teacher education. One aim is to investigate experienced teachers' beliefs, attitudes and consequent priorities. The objective is to provide a brief critical review of what the reframed concept of 'competence' now means for English Language Teaching (ELT), drawing on the previous few decades as background to do this; then to present and interpret selected findings from a continuing study of specific teachers engaged in professional development through a postgraduate course.

## 'COMPETENCE' IN THE LITERATURE: FROM LINGUISTIC TO LINGUA FRANCA

Familiar to the academic field of Applied Linguistics, and ELT/TESOL, but arguably less so in language teacher education, are the early attempts to move the debate on competence towards a more socially-oriented persuasion. Hymes (1972) established the concept of communicative competence, set explicitly in contrast to the Chomskyan notion of linguistic knowledge, conceived theoretically as the underlying knowledge of the language system (CHOMSKY,

---

1965), to assert the importance of sociocultural aspects seen as central to 'appropriate' language use (SHARIFIAN, 2013, p. 3). This term 'appropriate', the ability to use language 'appropriately' in specific and often fluid or unpredictable interactional situations, is key to how we might define such competence in the current, lingua franca era. Canale and Swain (1980), in their enduringly influential paper on communicative competence, offered a framework which was adopted, perhaps sometimes rather simplistically, as a basis for a 'strong' form of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in variably relevant contexts. Another branch of language teaching methodology in the 1980s/90s, 'Competency-based language teaching', aimed at focusing on learner outputs and performance rather than teaching inputs, particularly for ESL students (RICHARDS; ROGERS, 2014). However, the concepts are always predicated on (idealised) native-speaker norms. In contrast, taking an 'ELF-aware' perspective on the key area of language assessment, McNamara (2012, p. 202) argues that "current conceptualisations of proficiency in terms of gradual approximation to the competence of the native speaker will need to be drastically revised".

There have been critical questions raised concerning the degree of real influence such conceptual thinking has on the actual practice of teaching, on teacher education, and the impact of SLA theorising on pedagogy and assessment (see ELLIS, 2009). Similarly, there have been critiques of the extent to which CLT was or is truly 'communicative' in many instances, and the nature of assumptions made regarding native-speaker communities as the goal for language learning. In response to what could be viewed as rather restrictive, narrow perspectives on what constitutes communicative competence, the past thirty years or so have witnessed attempts to rethink these concepts, for instance with the work of Knapp (1987/2015) on intercultural communication, Cook (2002) on 'multicompetence' and the L2 user, and Byram (1997, 2000) on 'intercultural communicative competence' (ICC). This comprises five key components: attitudes; knowledge; skills of interpreting and relating; skills of discovery and interaction; and critical cultural awareness (BYRAM, 2000, p. 10). The work of scholars such as Baker (2015) and Grazzi (2018) has aimed to link ICC models with ELF use, in the process also challenging ideas on norms, Standard English, and definitions of 'culture' as applied to globalised forms of communication.

Canagarajah (2006) referred to 'multidialectical competence', questioning the conventional construct of 'proficiency' in language learning and assessment in light of postmodern contexts and channels of communication, which require

---

the abilities to understand and respond to a wider range of varieties and styles of English (SHARIFIAN, 2013, p. 4). Here we are moving the concept closer to those associated with ELF use and interaction, captured in Widdowson's characterisation as "a continually adaptive pragmatic use of linguistic resources" (2018, p. 108). Kramsch (2008) uses the term 'symbolic competence' to describe the skills involved in language learning and use in multilingual contexts:

Social actors in multilingual settings, even if they are non-native speakers of the languages they use, seem to activate more than a communicative competence that would enable them to communicate accurately, effectively and appropriately with one another. They seem to display a particularly acute ability to play with various linguistic codes and with the various spatial and temporal resonances of these codes. (KRAMSCH, 2008, p. 400).

Sharifian (2013, p. 5) introduces the notion of 'metacultural competence', based on the increasing need for people to "express and negotiate various systems of *cultural conceptualisations*":

The globalisation of English and the dynamics of increased contact between people from different cultural backgrounds, or *transcultural mobility*, call for new notions of 'competence' to be applied to successful intercultural communication. [S]cholars have realised that the main goal in teaching languages should shift away from its focus on the development of native-speaker competence towards more realistic competencies to facilitate communication between speakers from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. (SHARIFIAN, 2013, p 1-2).

Sharifian also develops a case for such 'metacultural competence' for English language pedagogy as essential in preparing learners for "the sociolinguistic reality of the use of English in today's globalised world" (2013, p. 9). This entails a different approach and focus, emphasising intelligibility, flexibility and developing intercultural communication skills in preference to training to acquire a prescribed native accent, for example. On this last point, recent contributions by teacher educators such as Walker (2010, 2015 on pronunciation) are good examples of how a change in emphasis can be accessibly presented in terms of practical applications for teaching within mainstream ELT.

Other sociolinguistic scholars such as Pennycook (2008) and Canagarajah (2013) have argued for a 'translingual' perspective to help overcome a Eurocentric conception of language, and therefore 'competence'. This entails more than 'code-switching', more like 'codemeshing' or 'performative

---

competence', social and practice-based, with co-constructed rules in communicative acts (CANAGARAJAH, 2013), and has roots in both sociocultural theory and conceptualisations of ELF as 'linguaging' (SWAIN, 2006; SEIDLHOFER, 2011). Baker (2015, 2018) discusses ELF in relation to intercultural competence and awareness, stressing the need to use familiar terms for consistency and clarity within the field (as noted above regarding 'competence'); for example, using 'intercultural' rather than the arguably more accurate 'transcultural' communication when considering the fluid and complex communities involved (2018, p. 26). This builds on 'translingual' perspectives, and takes the notion of competence further away from the simplistic, 'native' basis of earlier descriptions of what is meant by 'communicative'.

Seidlhofer (2018) examines resistance to some aspects and implications of ELF research in terms of standard language ideology and variation. This discussion inevitably leads to a critique of the well-established linguistic view, pervasive within language pedagogy, that knowledge of and ability to produce 'correct', 'native-speaker' forms are central to conceptions of 'competence'. She makes the valid point that this perspective on language and learning represents a "common sense" view within the field of SLA research, and by extension within the teaching profession (and presumably most learners), which amounts to a "folk idea" of correctness and nativeness (SEIDLHOFER, 2018, p. 93-94). From this position, languages and the necessary competence to use them are clear, unambiguous and unproblematic entities, rather than the socially-emergent constructs that ELF is predicated upon. Problematising the notion of 'correctness' is something explicitly addressed in part of the study outlined below, where teachers were asked to reflect on their own judgements, attitudes and practice.

Continuing this theme, Anderson (2018, p. 30) argues that 'translingual competence' contrasts with earlier and more familiar ideas on communicative competence, especially as applied to language pedagogy, crucially in abandoning the presumption of a monolingual, native target language community (seen for instance in CANALE; SWAIN, 1980; CANALE, 1983).

In the current era of global and *lingua franca* English(es), and near-instantaneous technology-mediated multimodal communication, this negotiable reality is rapidly becoming more complex. [...] helping learners to notice and interpret (some of) its complexities, and to interact both with them and even in spite of them, is becoming an increasingly important part of our role as language teachers. (ANDERSON, 2018, p. 35).

---

He also reimagines ELT/EFL classrooms as translingual environments, where “translanguaging is recognized as an authentic, rather than deviant, practice” (2018, p. 33). This raises clear implications for teachers and their ‘competence’, in terms of L1/L2 and pedagogic skills, awareness and training, because such a fundamental rethinking of pedagogical concepts is likely to meet with confusion, scepticism or resistance.

This reimagining and reconceptualising of the very nature of language use, interaction and therefore ‘competence’ links coherently with the field of ELF research and attempts to create a pedagogical space for a different approach. From this perspective, ELF is viewed as a communicative function, not a variety or fixed code; as a social practice based on a dynamic system (like other social practices in life); as the pragmatic use of linguistic (and other) resources, a range, a repertoire. ELF users are part of multiple communities of practice, as ‘English-knowing multilinguals’ (ORTEGA, 2013), and the code itself can be perceived as a ‘multilingua franca’ (JENKINS, 2015). ‘English’ (as a named ‘language’) is therefore part of a plurilingual/translingual mix of skills, knowledge and attitudes, an emergent and evolving kind of ‘competence’ for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – ‘ELF competence’.

Influential, widely-used frameworks for defining and benchmarking language ‘competences’ also play a significant role in teachers’ and learners’ attitudes. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (2001; 2018) is perhaps the best known, even outside Europe, with its stated aim to describe language ‘mastery’ at various levels and by component skills, categorised into lists of competences and sub-competences. Even in its revised version (2018), with references to plurilingual/pluricultural competence and mediation skills or strategies, there is implicit linking of such competences to standard language and native-speaker norms. However, there is also a degree of recognition that the rationale may need revisiting, for example in the area of L2 phonology:

Phonology had been the least successful scale developed in the research behind the original descriptors. The phonology scale was the only CEFR illustrative descriptor scale for which a native speaker norm, albeit implicit, had been adopted. In an update, it appeared more appropriate to focus on intelligibility as the primary construct in phonological control, in line with current research, especially in the context of providing descriptors for building on plurilingual/pluricultural repertoires. (CEFR, 2018, p 47).

---

Compensation, monitoring and repair strategies are emphasised within the area of productive skills, and the detail included in the descriptors does suggest a greater awareness of intercultural and arguably lingua franca communicative contexts and needs. The ‘can do’ descriptor for spoken interaction at B2 (Intermediate) level is reasonably typical of the current style and approach:

Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction, and sustained relationships with speakers of the target language quite possible without imposing strain on either party. (CEFR, 2018, p. 83)

Here we see reference to “speakers of the target language”, rather than “native speakers”, focus on intelligibility and ease of communication. In the criteria for pronunciation, there is frequent reference to degrees of “intelligibility” at different levels, but no detailed clarification on who the presumed interlocutor is, and so which phonological features are key to achieving this goal. Elsewhere, accommodation skills and pragmatic or strategic competence are highlighted. The question remains as to how far attitudes and thinking have actually changed, in comparison with previous CEFR versions, and the degree of attention paid to these aspects by those teaching and assessing learners. As the framework covers all languages, it is not designed to describe uniquely lingua franca interaction or competence, but signs of a different orientation from that adopted previously may be visible. However, for the purposes of this paper and the notion of ‘ELF competence’ in the minds of teachers and teacher educators, the true extent of such awareness and impact on ELT practice is still debatable.

Frameworks or assessment criteria, whether designed locally by educational policy makers or schools, or more widely as in the CEFR, usually claim to be a reference source to be adapted to specific purposes and uses. Teachers, course designers, materials and test writers, and consequently teacher educators, nevertheless tend for practical reasons to adopt uncritically such resources for support and clarity. Their influence, as noted, is pervasive in the same way as high-stakes examinations in English and mass-marketed course books tend to condition much pedagogic practice, for good or ill. Definitions of ‘competence’, or ‘proficiency’, or whatever alternative terminology we employ, carry weight in diverse and arguably sometimes inappropriate ways and contexts. Those seeking to implement a change in approach within ELT, to



---

genuinely develop ‘ELF competence’ in language learners and teachers, have to address the complexity of the constructs and issues, at the same time as ensuring that practical concerns and deeply-held beliefs are challenged in a meaningful and accessible manner.

## ‘COMPETENCE’ IN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION: FROM EXPERTISE TO ELF-AWARENESS

If the notion of ‘competence’ can have problematic and complex influences on language learning, what does that imply for the same concept as applied to teaching and teachers? This section aims to address some of the issues relating to how language teacher education is defined and understood, and what kinds of principles underpin practice. If we can agree broadly on these principles, the next step is to examine the degree to which teachers and teacher educators are aware of, and can accept, that a change in perspective on language learner competence entails a correlated change in emphasis and approach for teachers.

Richards (2011) summarises a set of key components of competence and performance for language teachers, comprising: language proficiency; content knowledge (disciplinary and pedagogical); teaching skills; contextual knowledge; language teacher identity; learner-focused teaching; pedagogical reasoning skills; theorising from practice; membership of a community of practice; and professionalism.

Our understanding of the nature of teacher competence shapes the way we conceptualize the nature of teacher learning, and in turn, how we design teacher training and teacher development programs for language teachers. (RICHARDS, 2011, p 3)

Freeman (2016, p. 6) succinctly condenses his philosophy that “learning to teach languages is a social process”, a logical consequence of conceptualising language itself as a social process, as ‘doing’ (citing CANAGARAJAH, 2013).

Language as doing challenges the idea of competence as some kind of unitary, a-situational absolute state. Instead what holds diverse users together are the situations in which they are using that language. (FREEMAN, 2016, p. 77)

Although Freeman is not arguing from a specifically ELF-aware perspective, this statement is a clear position that holds for lingua franca

---

communication, and has resonance and relevance for teachers and teacher educators. Hobbs (2013), evaluating initial training courses, also makes the case for a broader, more sociolinguistic approach:

What is now required of language teachers and language teacher educators is a greater understanding of the links between language and culture and between teaching methods and context, as well as a healthier respect for and awareness of the variations in English found in local and international contexts. (HOBBS, 2013, p 164).

Developing the theme of intercultural awareness as central to language and competence, Kelly (2012) sees an important role for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to support teachers:

There is a growing social demand for intercultural communicative competence, whether or not it is linked to linguistic competence. The challenge to language educators is to respond to this demand by enriching language learning and by integrating it into an informed awareness of intercultural issues. [...] There is a clear need for CPD in these issues for language teachers and for language teacher educators. Educators are well placed to respond to this challenge, but they will certainly need to adapt their professional profile to meet the new needs. (KELLY, 2012, p 419)

Reasonably 'mainstream' recent EFL/ELT texts aimed at new or early-career teachers tend to include some reference to and awareness of Global Englishes or ELF perspectives (e.g. HALL, 2018; HARMER, 2015). More direct attempts to link ELF research and concerns with pedagogy have also started to appear more regularly in academic publications intended for a teacher audience (e.g. GALLOWAY; ROSE, 2018; KIRKPATRICK, 2007; ROSE; GALLOWAY, 2019; WALKER, 2015).

Kohn (2011, 2018) uses a social constructivist perspective on ELF and the notion of 'MY English' to argue for a 'weak' orientation towards Standard English as one way to bridge the gap between ELF thinking and ELT practice. Central to this endeavour is a teacher education approach that helps teachers, trainees and learners to "change their normative mindsets and shed their prevailing ELF apprehension" (KOHN, 2018, p. 8). As reported in other research (e.g. BLAIR, 2017; DEWEY, 2012; VETTOREL, 2016), attitudes and responses to ELF can range from uncertain to sceptical, particularly when it comes to defining pedagogical models, potentially in conflict with real, communicative learning goals. Kohn (2018, p. 9) outlines a four-stage process for changing teachers'

---

“normative mindsets”: improving reflective ELF awareness; recognising their standard/native English orientation and its rationale; persuading them to engage in a social constructivist revision of assumptions regarding learning; helping to explore ELF communication with their students. This amounts to “teaching towards ELF competence” – for both learners and teachers (KOHN, 2018, p. 12-13), and crucially leads to what Kohn describes as the “emancipation” of learners through a developing sense of their own “agency and ownership” (another contested term) (2018, p. 14). In this discussion we see clear links to Widdowson’s ‘communicative capability’ (2003), and how development of ELF awareness and explicit focus and training, with commensurate teacher education realignment, can produce effective communicators with ‘ELF competence.’

Dewey and Patsko (2018) focus on ELF and teacher education, in pre-service initial training and ongoing professional development. Arguing for the need to move beyond pedagogical implications towards real application of new thinking to all aspects of language education, they conclude that focus on ELF in early training is essential, in addition to better engagement between researchers and practitioners, with greater emphasis on ELF alongside critical reflection for teacher educators themselves (2018, p. 453). Some scholars have taken an overtly ‘transformative’ perspective on ‘ELF-aware’ teacher education (e.g. SIFAKIS, 2007; BAYYURT; SIFAKIS, 2015, 2018), exploring the knowledge, attitudes and skillset required in different ELT contexts. The activities proposed in this type of programme can be designed in three phases in relation to Global English/World Englishes/ELF-related texts, research and wider implications: exposure, critical awareness and an action plan (BAYYURT; SIFAKIS, 2018, p. 460-462). This approach to teacher development entails a gradual transformation, enabling teachers to integrate ELF and a broader critical sense into their own practice.

Being an ELF-aware teacher means finding ways to empower one’s learners as competent non-native users of English, essentially prompting them to become ELF-aware users themselves. (BAYYURT; SIFAKIS, 2018, p. 464).

To summarise some of the implications of these themes from the literature, ELF communication implies different learner goals, needs and awareness. If ELF user goals change, so do (or should) pedagogical aims, and if these aims change so does (or should) teacher education. The question of how these changes can be implemented is what needs addressing: how can these attributes, this knowledge and skillset, this ‘competence’ be developed in language teachers?

---

## ELF AND TEACHERS: ATTITUDES AND CHALLENGES

There is evidence of growing awareness of ELF and related ideas among teachers and teacher educators, including a degree of sophisticated understanding of the issues, reported in recent studies (see for example BLAIR, 2017; DEWEY, 2012; BAYYURT; SIFAKIS, 2015). However, these understandings are arguably limited in terms of critical depth and complexity; for example, often referring to varieties of English and globalisation rather than ELF, fixed notions of norms and standards, as opposed to any sense of moving beyond those concepts. Standards and models still seem to be more prominent in teachers' thinking than lingua franca communicative goals, and the instability and fluidity of ELF is still problematic: variability a more confusing notion than named language varieties. Furthermore, there is arguably not much sign yet of a movement from awareness to application in teaching, suggesting that in terms of teacher education, general awareness-raising is not enough to instil real change in classroom practice, assessment, materials or syllabus design.

Previous work also highlighted negative perceptions towards ELF, typical of both NS and 'high-proficiency' NNS teachers with investment in the pedagogical status quo. This implies that a specialist skillset and mindset is required, and that there are continuing questions to explore regarding teachers, ELF and teacher education. What influences teachers' attitudes and responses with regard to ELF and pedagogy? To what extent are these the result of deeper beliefs about language, standards, norms, models, or part of a 'standard language ideology'? How has initial or further training and CPD affected views and practice? Specifically on teacher education courses, what kind of exposure to ELF ideas, sociolinguistic views of language and SLA has been experienced, and with what impact?

Teachers can be seen or see themselves, as "guardians of Standard English" (SIFAKIS, 2007, p. 369), or as agents of change (for instance in learners); how does this perception influence beliefs and practice, for instance on specific classroom skills such as error correction or giving learner feedback? Could some teachers in fact be 'language change deniers' (BLAIR, 2017)? Some teacher (and learner) resistance to ELF may come from negativity towards language change more generally, or from a sense of identity linked to their own perceived competence. Most teachers, and those participating in this and similar studies, are not sociolinguistically-trained, unlike many researchers, so what is the impact of that in terms of CPD or openness to new ideas?

---

Conventional standards and models are powerful, and alternatives are difficult to access or explain, so again the role of effective teacher education is central. There is still a tendency to conflate and confuse pedagogical models and learning/teaching goals (a point which KOHN, 2018 also addresses), and definitions of ‘competence’ and language learning success are strongly embedded in attitudes towards standard varieties and norms. Challenging teachers’ perceptions of these broader concepts can influence their response to ELF as a relevant issue in practice. Enhanced awareness of ‘Changing English’ (the ELF10 conference theme) can indeed change teachers: this can also lead to change in terms of pedagogical focus and priorities, or at least that is the aspiration when designing and implementing ‘ELF-aware’ teacher education.

### CASE STUDY: ALWAYS A WORK IN PROGRESS

This study is part of a continuing action research effort to apply ELF-related thinking to language teacher education and (through teachers) to pedagogy. One aim is to investigate experienced teachers’ beliefs, attitudes and consequent priorities. The educational context is Higher Education in the UK, specifically an MA ELT programme where the intention is to embed ELF awareness into the course content. There is no explicit Sociolinguistics or ELF module, but instead a rather ‘subversive’ approach throughout various elements, particularly on SLA and Principles and Practice in ELT. ELF perspectives, awareness of the factors involved in teaching and learning a ‘global’ language, critical problematising of concepts such as standard language, nativeness, multilingualism, models and norms are incorporated into the syllabus. ELF-related dissertation projects involving small-scale empirical studies are also encouraged, with several high-level and insightful pieces of work emerging as a result. Several previous graduates from the course have gone on to present their ideas at conferences or as part of local CPD activities, and in some cases published accounts of how the course has changed their practice and outlook. In this sense, they have become ‘ELF ambassadors’ (BLAIR, 2017), and continue to contribute to wider professional and academic debates in our field. This process has been developed over the past few years, with what in hindsight has been an incremental approach to broadening the basis for teacher education at this level.

Other recent studies and teacher education programmes with a specific ‘ELF-awareness’ focus (e.g. BAYYURT; SIFAKIS, 2015; GRAZZI’s, 2018 survey

---

on ELF, competence, standards and models) have adopted a more structured design. In this case, for practical reasons inherent in an essentially action research orientation, much of the work has been carried out on an ad hoc basis, opportunistic in the sense of attempting to integrate actual teacher education content with small-scale research ambitions. The student-teacher cohort tends to be a mixture in terms of teaching experience, as are the study participants, from diverse contexts and first languages, providing a source of strength and collaborative interest on the programme. The more experienced teachers' contributions are highlighted here, with selected examples presented without individually identifying them, with a view to illustrating the beliefs and responses seen as reasonably typical of this group of ELT practitioners

The summarised findings emerged from a two-stage process, as part of the ongoing action research model. During the first stage, data were taken from online forum discussions, emails, feedback comments and responses to the 'Standard English' task (see below) used as part of the SLA module. The second stage involved semi-structured interviews with a smaller group of teachers on the course, using predominantly open questions, and taking an interpretivist, qualitative research approach. In addition, some of the student-teachers chose to undertake ELF-related dissertation projects, providing further insight into the development of their thinking, as well as offering another perspective from their study participants; two of these are briefly reported on below.

The initial guiding themes for the study can be expressed in the following questions:

- *How might greater awareness of language change and challenges to the use of standard models affect experienced teachers' thinking and actions?*
- *How do they perceive the link between variability or instability in 'native' language use and typical ELF communication?*
- *How can an increased understanding of both changing ('native') English and ELF use influence their attitudes and teaching?*

---

As a group, the teachers were given a discussion task to elicit reactions and promote critical discussion, entitled 'Standard English' – right or wrong? An edited sample of the task follows:

*To what extent do you think that the following examples should be regarded as non-standard or incorrect use of English, and why?*

1. Less men think like that these days.
2. She is taller than me.
3. If I'd have known it was on, I'd have gone to see it.
4. When you meet someone for the first time, what do you say to them?
5. None of us are perfect.
6. There's more students this term.
7. The situation is becoming more clear. [...]

*All the above examples are reasonably typical of some current native speaker use of English, yet all could also be regarded as 'incorrect'. As a teacher, think about your views on the following questions, and how these have changed (or not) during your time studying on the MA course:*

- *How would you / do you respond to learners using the above examples in their speaking (and writing)?*
- *What criteria do you use to judge what is acceptable or 'correct'? How important is the (real or imagined) context of communication?*
- *How do ideas on (native) language variation and change affect your attitudes towards accuracy, correction and feedback to learners?*
- *To what extent does your awareness of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) influence your approach?*
- *How have your views on 'standard' languages, and their function as models in ELT, been affected by some of the arguments presented on the MA course (e.g. SLA, Principles and Practice)?*

The ensuing discussions, as on previous occasions using the task, were lively and productive, highlighting inconsistencies of view, disagreements and doubts. In several cases, participants could not see anything 'wrong' with many of the language examples, or could not identify what others deemed 'incorrect'; in others, there was a range of opinion regarding how to respond as a teacher, though a fairly high level of consensus on using intelligibility criteria to decide, rather than strictly following standard norms. There was much discussion of communicative context, including that of a classroom setting or formal assessment, and some divergence of opinions on differences between spoken and written production, though not all concurred that writing is necessarily more formal, and therefore requires a more 'correct' use of language. Moving on through the discussion questions, it was interesting to notice how generally the teachers could easily make connections between questioning their own beliefs on language variation and how they perceive their practice with learners. The more reflective among them tended to wonder how they could maintain a hard-line

---

position regarding, for instance, oral error correction in class, when their growing awareness of the sociolinguistic realities of both ‘native speaker’ English and ELF use appears to challenge such an approach.

*Over the course of this MA, I have come to view certain ‘errors’ as less important and would be much more inclined to ignore them in favour of prioritising communicative efficacy than I used to be.*

Several participants expressed a reasonable awareness of the issues involved, and their inherent complexity, for example:

*I still think that it makes sense to stick to a single model for speaking and writing skills but this could be based on whichever is the most relevant model to the context. For reading and listening, students should be exposed to as many varieties as possible and I think it makes a lot of sense that listening texts should include ELF communication, especially for higher levels.*

Perhaps because the discussion task explicitly referred to ‘Standard English’, there was some exploration of what the concept means, especially as it affects the teacher’s role:

*I think that you (the teacher) have to use yourself as the standard, regardless of whether the English you speak is considered ‘standard’ or not.*

*It seems to me that a ‘standard’ is a useful framework. There’s not much point in replacing it with another, given the vast range of ‘Englishes’, but that doesn’t stop you making students aware of the different ‘standards’ in other communities of speakers.*

Such comments may represent more of a World Englishes-type position than an ‘ELF-aware’ one, which is consistent with earlier work in this area, where identifiable varieties and therefore ‘standards’ can be linguistically compared or contrasted for pedagogical purposes. However, some teachers here had clearly engaged with the literature and begun a process of using ELF perspectives to re-evaluate their position:

*I’m definitely now of the opinion that we should be making learners aware of the issues that ELF raises and moving away from the idea of only using NS texts in the materials. I also think that the findings from ELF research can help us to better prioritise the important elements of language and focus less on communicatively redundant forms. All of these beliefs have come about since reading about English as a Lingua Franca and had never really occurred to me before I started my MA.*



---

Others took a stronger, perhaps more optimistic view on the potential impact of explicit (and implicit) coverage of ELF perspectives, claiming that such an approach “will have the overall effect of gradually changing teachers’ attitudes and empowering them to give their learners more realistic goals.” One particular teacher echoed the ‘transformative’ position on ELF-aware teacher education proposed by Sifakis (2009) and others, taking a bolder line on changing attitudes: “it’s a perspective shift, an ideology... it’s like challenging racism.”

As in previous studies, some participants noted the problematic issue of practical relevance and application, essentially the ‘yes, nice idea, but how can I use this in my teaching?’ argument: “a discussion of the theoretical benefits of ELF will never change the realities of teaching if teachers’ practical concerns are not addressed”, as one put it. However, teachers generally did respond positively to ELF-related literature and course reading materials, and came across as sympathetic towards ELF ideas, research, and crucially the relevance to their own teaching. From this admittedly small-scale set of activities and study of how teachers reacted, it appears that fixed views of competence can be challenged, reflected upon and perhaps modified. If Standard English can be shown to be variable, contested and unstable, as in the task above, what does that tell us about learner language, ELF use and pedagogical models? If teachers’ views of standards and legitimate, natural language change can be questioned, that can also lead to changes in attitudes and practice. In answer to one of the main questions identified: awareness of variability can create more tolerance and understanding of ELF use in language learners, which is a start.

The second phase of the study involved semi-structured interviews with selected teachers on the course, more focused on the theme of ‘competence’, and includes extracts from two of their ELF-related dissertation papers. The questions for teachers covered the following points:

- *What is your own understanding and definition of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)?*
- *How relevant is ELF for teaching and learning English, in your view and experience?*
- *How significant do you feel ELF is for the notion of ‘competence’ in learning or using English, and why?*
- *How significant do you feel an understanding of ELF is for language teacher ‘competence’ and development, and why?*
- *How could teacher development courses such as an MA in ELT be designed to enhance ‘ELF awareness’?*

---

One of the more experienced participants made interesting comments regarding learners' pronunciation goals, which led to a dissertation project on the role of the teacher in supporting individual goals and identifying priorities, for instance concerning intelligibility over 'nativeness':

*One role of the teacher is to raise awareness that maybe there are different ways to look at this – not necessarily to say to students 'your goal is wrong', but to open up their ideas about what they're working on pronunciation for, what is a realistic goal. I think they are able to reflect on that.*

In this discussion, the NS or teacher model "is not necessarily something to aspire to", and classroom practices on error correction, accuracy and fluency were undergoing a process of revision. Learners seemed aware of the need for accommodation skills, negotiation, and the responsibilities of both speaker and listener to achieve successful communication, as in most ELF interactions. Therefore, a key teacher role is to get them to think about who they will be using English with, and "giving students some strategies to help", for example with understanding different accents and styles of speech. These comments refer to fairly low-level, practical pedagogic concerns, precisely the kind of questions that teachers often wish academic research could address more directly.

Another teacher referred to "communicative confidence" in learners, a useful term perhaps, as a key attribute to be encouraged (arguably the opposite of the 'linguistic insecurity' created by the endless struggle to 'master' native-speaker forms). The risk of "alienating teachers" with ELF ideas also emerged as an issue; an echo of the dangers of 'ELF evangelism' (BLAIR, 2017). This teacher also led class work and student reflective journals about pronunciation, intelligibility and learner autonomy, developing better awareness of their own 'competence' and goals.

*The reason why ELF interests me is because it feels like it fits in terms of 'can students communicate' – and that's all I'm really interested in.*

Regarding the impact of these activities, the teacher added:

*I've looked at my students with a different and more impressed light. One of the things the MA course has made me think about is just how good some of my low-level language learners really are...*

---

However, there was also frustration at the lack of opportunity for effective CPD, regarding ELF-awareness and other areas of language pedagogy, in many schools or other institutions:

*Which is why I'm irritated that as a profession we don't support people to continue their education, their development as language teachers.*

One teacher referred to the influence of exams and assessment, arguing that “if ELF competence can be part of those assessments then it will be part of teaching.” This participant also works as a spoken language examiner for an international testing board, part of his motivation for talking about assessment, leading to an insightful dissertation project on the subject. He has since presented a CPD session on his findings, and plans to submit a paper for publication. The small-scale study of teacher-examiners concluded that there were clear tensions between a positive view of variation and the demands of norm-based test criteria, a desire for a degree of codification of ELF (a contradiction in terms, given more recent conceptualisations), practical obstacles to designing ‘ELF exams’, and a perceived lack of face validity from stakeholders (MENSAH-COKER, 2018). The notion of ‘examiner competence’ is called into question with regard to ELF-awareness and attitudes towards norms and communicative goals, to sit alongside revised definitions of competence for learners and teachers.

Another teacher on the programme, as part of the dissertation project, investigated attitudes towards ELF in Nigeria. This survey revealed an interesting ambivalence, or arguably a pragmatism born of experience and contextual knowledge in some respondents, representing:

[...] a dilemma in the sense that they believe and want to teach Standard English, and at the same time having a positive attitude towards ELF. Given the opportunity, they will allow their students to explore ELF for easier communication. [...] Their responses all point to a preference for Standard English and a little bit of ELF – not in all situations. (OZUGHA, 2018, p. 43).

An emphasis on grammatical accuracy measured against Standard British English (StBrE), more than intelligibility, was cited as the prime concern among teachers, though with a degree of awareness of ELF and some of the social and pedagogical ramifications (OZUGHA, 2018).

As noted above, this study and many like it tend to be continual works in-progress. However, some tentative conclusions and thoughts about potential

---

next steps can be introduced, in terms of future action research ideas and further modifications to the teacher education course under discussion.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK: 'ELF COMPETENCE' FOR LEARNERS AND TEACHERS

The teacher education approach outlined above, and the responses from participants, represent a potential new trajectory through which to explore and integrate ELF perspectives and more broadly sociolinguistic, functional dimensions to ELT. This requires ideas that resonate and influence, with a clear mediation role for teacher educators (ELLIS, 2009); in part it is a process of "sensitising" teachers to the potential of ELF in practice (GRAZZI, 2018). ELF-aware approaches must embrace initial and further teacher training, as well as opportunities for targeted CPD, as noted by some participants in this study. Future and ongoing studies may need an expanded or alternative focus, perhaps different questions, other methods (for instance, teacher observations as a way to investigate classroom approaches and practical concerns). In terms of the specific course and context involved, ELF perspectives and awareness will continue to be promoted wherever possible, through discussions with colleagues and teacher-students, module content and tasks, research projects and following up on how careers develop and ideas are disseminated in the field.

From what we can observe from the world outside, and online, in actual interaction, real communicative competence is 'ELF competence' now. The 'can do' statements promoted in the CEFR could be interpreted in this way, if they embrace a truly ELF-aware perspective on the constructs being described. This would lead to a reframed, functional notion of competence and 'languaging' to be applied to teaching, learning and assessment. However, 'ELF ambassadors' are needed for this purpose (perhaps for example some of the teachers studied here), not evangelists. Spreading the word, but not preaching, through talks, conference attendance, publications, professional development activity, with an ELF mindset. As Kohn (2018) argued, there are several stages to this process of change, moving through awareness and recognition of existing orientations, to engaging in a more socially-focused revision of beliefs on learning, and then exploring the diversity and strength of ELF communication with students. This represents 'ELF competence' in both teachers and learners, however problematic

---

or contested the notion may be, and is something worth developing through all the varied forms of language teacher education.

## REFERENCES

- ANDERSON, J. Reimagining English language learners from a translingual perspective. *ELT Journal*, v. 72, no. 1, 2018, p. 26-37.
- BAKER, W. *Culture and identity through English as a lingua franca: rethinking concepts and goals in intercultural communication*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2015.
- BAKER, W. ELF and intercultural communication. In JENKINS, J.; BAKER, W.; DEWEY, M. (Eds.) *The Routledge handbook of English as a lingua franca*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018. p. 25-36.
- BAYYURT, Y.; SIFAKIS, N. ELF-aware in-service teacher education: a transformative perspective. In BOWLES, H.; COGO, A. (Eds.) *International Perspectives on English as a Lingua Franca*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. p. 117-135.
- BLAIR, A. Evolving a post-native, multilingual model for ELF-aware teacher education. In BAYYURT, Y.; AKCAN, S. (Eds.) *Current Perspectives on Pedagogy for English as a Lingua Franca*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2015. p. 89-101.
- BLAIR, A. Standard language models, variable lingua franca goals: How can ELF-aware teacher education square the circle? *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, v. 6, no. 2, 2017, p. 345-366.
- BLOMMAERT, J. *The Sociolinguistics of Globalisation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2010.
- BYRAM, M. *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 1997.
- BYRAM, M. Assessing intercultural competence in language teaching. *Sprogforum*, v. 18, no. 6, 2000, p. 8-13. Cambridge Dictionary online. Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/competence>>. Access: June 03, 2019.
- CANAGARAJAH, A.S. Changing communicative needs, revised assessment objectives: Testing English as an International Language. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, v. 3, no. 3, 2006, p. 229-242.
- CANAGARAJAH, A.S. *Translingual Practice*. New York: Routledge. 2013.
- CANALE, M. From communicative competence to communicative language

---

pedagogy. In RICHARDS, J.; SCHMIDT, R. (Eds.) *Language and Communication* London: Longman, 1983, p. 2-27.

CANALE, M.; SWAIN, M. Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, v. 1, no. 1, 1980, p. 1-47.

CHOMSKY, N. *Syntactic structures*. London: Mouton. 1965.

COOK, V. *Portraits of the L2 User*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 2002.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR)*, 2018. Available at: <<https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors/2018/1680787989>>. Access on: Aug 05, 2019.

DEWEY, M. Towards a post-normative approach: Learning the pedagogy of ELF. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, v. 1, no. 1, 2012, p. 141-170.

DEWEY, M.; PATSKO, L. ELF and teacher education. In JENKINS, J.; BAKER, W.; DEWEY, M. (Eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of English as a lingua franca*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, p. 441-455.

ELLIS, R. Second language acquisition, teacher education and language pedagogy. *Language Teaching*, v. 43, no. 2, 2009, p. 182-201.

FREEMAN, D. *Educating Second Language Teachers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

GALLOWAY, N.; ROSE, H. Incorporating Global Englishes into the ELT classroom. *ELT Journal*, v. 72, no. 1, 2018, p. 3-14.

GRAZZI, E. *Trajectories of Change in English Language Teaching. An ELF-Aware Approach*. Trento: Tangram Edizioni Scientifiche. 2018.

HALL, G. *Exploring English Language Teaching: Language in Action*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn.) Abingdon: Routledge. 2018.

HARMER, J. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. (5<sup>th</sup> edn.) Harlow: Longman. 2015.

HOBBS, V. "A basic starter pack": the TESOL Certificate as a course in survival. *ELT Journal*, v. 67, no. 2, 2013, p. 163-174.

HYMES, D. On communicative competence. In: PRIDE, J.; HOLMES, J. (Eds.) *Sociolinguistics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. 1972.

JENKINS, J. Repositioning English and multilingualism in English as a lingua franca. *Englishes in Practice*, v. 2, no. 3, 2015, p. 49-85.

- 
- KELLY, M. Second Language Teacher Education. In JACKSON, J. (Ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2012, p. 409-421.
- KIRKPATRICK, A. *World Englishes: Implications for international communication and English language teaching*. Cambridge: CUP. 2007.
- KOHN, K. English as a lingua franca and the Standard English misunderstanding. In: DE HOUWER, A.; WILTON, A. (Eds.). *English in Europe today: Sociocultural and educational perspectives*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2011, p 72-94.
- KOHN, K. MY English: a social constructivist perspective on ELF. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, v. 7, no. 1, p. 1-24, 2018.
- KNAPP, K. English as an international lingua franca and the teaching of intercultural communication. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, v. 4, no. 1, p. 173-189, 2015 [1987].
- KRAMSCH, C. Ecological perspectives on foreign language education. *Language Teaching*, v. 41, 2008, p. 389-408.
- MCNAMARA, T. English as a lingua franca: the challenge for language testing. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, v. 1, no. 1, 2012, p. 199-202.
- MENSAH-COKER, G. *An exploration of ELT professionals' attitudes towards English as a Lingua Franca and language variation in high-stakes oral exams*. Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Sussex, 2018.
- ORTEGA, L. Ways Forward for a Bi/Multilingual Turn in SLA. In MAY, S. (Ed.) *The Multilingual Turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL, and Bilingual Education*. New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 32-53.
- OZUGHA, U. Non-native English language teachers' attitudes towards teaching English as a Lingua Franca. Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Sussex. 2018.
- PENNYCOOK, A. Translingual English. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, v. 31, no. 3; 2008, p. 30.1-30.9.
- RICHARDS, J. Exploring teacher competence in language teaching. *The Language Teacher*, v. 35, no. 4, 2011, p. 3-7.
- RICHARDS, J.; RODGERS, T. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. (3<sup>rd</sup> Edn.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2014.
- ROSE, H.; GALLOWAY, N. *Global Englishes for Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2019.

---

SEIDLHOFER, B. *Understanding English as a lingua franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2011.

SEIDLHOFER, B. Standard English and the dynamics of ELF variation. In JENKINS, J., BAKER, W. & DEWEY, M. (Eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of English as a lingua franca*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, p 85-100.

SHARIFIAN, F. Globalisation and developing metacultural competence in learning English as an International Language. *Multilingual Education*, v. 3, no. 7, 2013, p. 1-11.

SIFAKIS, N. The education of the teachers of English as a lingua franca: a transformative perspective. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, v. 17, no. 3; 2007, p. 355-375.

SIFAKIS, N.; BAYYURT, Y. ELF-aware teaching, learning and teacher development. In JENKINS, J.; BAKER, W.; DEWEY, M. (Eds.) *The Routledge handbook of English as a lingua franca*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, p. 163-174.

SWAIN, M. Languaging, agency and collaboration in advanced second language proficiency. In BYRNES, H. (Ed.) *Advanced language learning: The contributions of Halliday and Vygotsky*. London: Continuum, 2006, p. 95-108.

VETTOREL, P. WE- and ELF-informed classroom practices: Proposals from a pre-service teacher education programme in Italy. *Journal of English as a lingua franca*, v. 5, no. 1, 2016, p. 107-133.

WALKER, R. *Teaching the Pronunciation of English as a Lingua Franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2010.

WALKER, R. The globalisation of English: implications for the language classroom. *Modern English Teacher*, v. 24, no. 4, 2015, p. 44-46.

WIDDOWSON, H. *Defining issues in English language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

WIDDOWSON, H. Historical perspectives on ELF. In JENKINS, J.; BAKER, W.; DEWEY, M. (Eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of English as a lingua franca*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, p. 101-112.



---

### **Andrew Blair**

Andrew Blair is Director of the MA in English Language Teaching and doctoral research supervisor at the University of Sussex, U.K. His main research interests include language teacher education, Global Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca and intercultural communication, and he has written and reviewed several publications in these areas, in addition to contributing to various academic conferences and seminars.

Nota do editor:

Artigo submetido para avaliação em: 28/03/2019.  
Aprovado em sistema duplo cego em: 07/11/2019.