

Chapter 4

English as a Lingua Franca: Approaches to Bridge the Gap Between Theory and Practice

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ABSTRACT

English has occupied a unique place in today's interconnected world. The emergence of ELF opens questions revolving around the change of the teaching and learning habitus. Researchers point to the disparity between theory and practice in this new paradigm and the need for bridging gap between them. The suggested study tries to explore this problem. Its purpose is to reflect on new approaches, which go hand in hand with how English is currently being used, and how it can also be integrated in classrooms. It first presents the development of ELF. The monolingual view of language and language use and the plurilingual view are also highlighted. Then, the discussion will be turned to the central topic of the study. It focuses on approaches to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

INTRODUCTION

Heterogeneity is one of the characteristics of today's English. It is a language with “multiple norms and diverse systems” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 199). Graddol (2006, p. 11) claims, “[English is no longer] English as we have known it, and have taught it in the past as a foreign language,” but ‘a new phenomenon’ now known as English as a Lingua Franca. English in the terms of Jenkins (2009) is “being used as a lingua franca, the common language of choice, among speakers who come from different lingua cultural background...” (p. 200).

Some research findings raise questions about English language teaching. Alptekin (2002), for example, “questions the validity of the pedagogical model...The model is found to be utopian, unrealistic and constraining in relation to English as an International language” (p. 57) or English as a lingua franca. Language pedagogy should account for classroom diversity because “an appropriate EIL [English as

International language] methodology presupposes sensitivity to the local cultural context in which local educators determine what happens in the classroom” (McKay, 2003, p. 17).

The overarching objective of the current study is to show the ‘conceptual gap’ between theory and practice in teaching ELF. It also highlights the need to bridge this gap through incorporating some approaches. English now is in a ‘post linguistic’ era. Teachers and researchers should go beyond the traditional approach which can be called the ‘native language approach’ to rethink new ways of teaching.

LINGUA FRANCA

A “lingua franca” refers to a common language used for communication between people who do not share their first language (Seidelhofer, 2005, p. 339). Jenkins (2007) describes lingua franca as “a contact language used among people who do not share a first language, and is commonly understood to mean a second (or subsequent) language of its speakers” (p. 1). Huntington (1996, p. 61), however, states that “a lingua franca is a way of coping with linguistic and cultural differences, not a way of eliminating them. It is a tool for communication, not a source of identity and community.”

UNESCO also provides a definition of the term lingua franca, which is as follows: “a language which is used habitually by people whose mother tongues are different in order to facilitate communication between them” (1953, p. 46). According to Samarin (1987, p. 371), the term lingua franca means “any lingual medium of communication between people of different mother tongues, for whom it is a second language”. Moreover, it is regarded as “a vehicle of communication between interlocutors who do not share their first language, both among non-native speakers and when native speakers interact with non-native users” (Bjorge, 2012, p. 406). It also refers to “a communicative tool of immense power” in the terms of Kachru (1996, p. 910).

Finally, lingua franca is also defined as an “[...] an emerging language that exists in its own right and is being described in its own terms. It is crucial to understand the word emerging. ELF is not a finished product; it is being developed and there exists an ELF corpus called VOICE” (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English, 2014).

ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

Seidelhofer (2011) defines English as a lingua franca as “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (p. 7). Jenkins (2000) also provides her definition of this concept, which is as follows: “ELF emphasizes the role of English in communication between speakers from different L1s, ...” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 11). Moreover, Gnutzmann (2000) explains this phenomenon as “[w]hen used as a lingua franca, English is no longer founded on the linguistic and sociocultural norms of native English speakers and their respective countries and cultures” (p. 358). ELF refers to global English, to a common language of its speakers. It is no longer the language of the natives.

Crystal is one of the supporters of English as a lingua Franca. He is enthusiastic about this phenomenon and this is clearly shown in the following:

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