

MSC 2020**International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.
COMMUNICATION»****ON THE STUDY OF ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA:
CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES**

Veronika Petrova (a)*
*Corresponding author

(a) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University, Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation
Veronika.petrova@novsu.ru

Abstract

The article presents an overview of modern research devoted to the study of English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF). The relevance of the paper is due to the increasing tendency for cooperation in the spheres of diplomacy, business and education that necessitates the agents of global communication to use a universal tool for mutual comprehension. Empirical data and theoretical analyses obtained within the framework of Applied Linguistics and Corpus Linguistics prove the fact that English as a *Lingua Franca* of contemporary communication has gained its significance as an object of research. However, the process of conceptualization and methodological establishment of this field of science has been accompanied by contradictions and controversies. Despite being obviously a promising area of scientific research for linguists and educators, ELF Studies still raises debate and arguments concerning its basic issues. The purpose of the article is to outline the theoretical framework of ELF Studies, to prove its relevance in modern linguistics, to describe the peculiarities of the use of English as a *Lingua Franca* at phonological, morphological and pragmatic levels, to highlight the areas of research that still provoke dispute among linguists and educators, identify promising research directions. This article is regarded as the theoretical outline for further experimental research in the field under study.

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1. Introduction

Increasing globalization processes and actively developing economic integration provide representatives of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds with enhanced mobility and communication facilities by means of a globally accepted language. The study of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), that is the language used for communication between non-native speakers outside the borders of the countries where it has an official status as a national language, is acquiring undeniable significance for understanding its development trends.

2. Problem Statement

Growing tendency for cooperation in the sphere of diplomacy, business, education and rapidly developing economic mobility necessitate interlocutors to use a common language as a tool for establishing bridges between cultures and ensuring comprehension of the subject matter. The findings obtained within the framework of Applied Linguistics and Corpus Linguistics contain theoretical analyses and empirical data proving the fact that English as a Lingua Franca of contemporary communication has gained its significance as an object of research. Being a promptly developing area of empirical investigation, with prolific publications and abundant findings, ELF studies has undergone the stage of conceptualization and methodological establishment, facing strong opposition and being accompanied by contradictions and controversies. At the present moment, it is rightfully regarded as an independent and promising field of study. Still, there are particular aspects of non-native speaker – non-native speaker discourse that deserve special attention and further research.

3. Research Questions

The main questions touched upon in this article are as follows:

- 3.1. What specific features of English as a *Lingua Franca* have been revealed in modern research?
- 3.2. What issues remain controversial and raise debate?
- 3.3. What are the perspectives of the study of English as a *Lingua Franca*?

The main questions of the research are specified by the following tasks:

- to outline the theoretical framework of ELF Studies;
- to prove its relevance in modern linguistics;
- to describe the peculiarities of the use of English as a *Lingua Franca* at phonological, morphological and pragmatic levels;
- to highlight the areas of research that still provoke dispute among linguists and educators;
- to identify promising research directions.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to make a summary of the scientific works devoted to the research of the use of English as a *Lingua Franca*. The article aims at describing the linguopragmatic features of the English used as a tool for non-native speaker - non-native speaker interaction revealed in previous research, highlighting the existing challenges of the study and identifying the possible perspectives of the research.

5. Research Methods

The research is based on the summarized survey of theoretical publications, empirical research devoted to the study of English as a *Lingua Franca* on a global scale. The findings of Jennifer Jenkins, Anna Mauranen, Barbara Seidlhofer, Braj B. Kachru, Edgar W. Schneider form the methodological framework of the research. Descriptive method and contextual analysis are resorted to for providing the material in this paper.

6. Findings

6.1. The specific features of English as a *Lingua Franca* revealed in modern research

6.1.1. Theoretical framework of ELF Studies

The study of English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF) is a rapidly developing field of research based on the achievements in Applied Linguistics and Corpus Linguistics. The acronym ELF was first introduced by Jennifer Jenkins (2018) to replace the term “English as an International Language (EIL)” in March 1996 to refer to the phenomenon of communication between users of English with different first language backgrounds.

Barbara Seidlhofer in her monograph “*Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*” (Seidlhofer, 2011) points out the unprecedented global spread of English and invalidity of attempts to compare its role in the modern world with the lingua francas of the past (Latin, French, Arabic et al.). Being called one of the three “founding mothers” of ELF Studies (together with Jennifer Jenkins and Anna Mauranen), Barbara Seidlhofer has made a considerable contribution to conceptualization and methodological development of this branch of science. Seidlhofer’s (2011) definition of ELF as “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice” (p. 7) includes native English speakers (NES) as well. In order to avoid criticism of previous definitions for marginalizing NES who are also involved in intercultural communication, Mauranen (2018) also defines English “as a lingua franca to mean a contact language between speakers or speaker groups when at least one of them uses it as a second language” (p. 8). Therefore, it is obvious that the definition of EFL still provokes discussion in scientific circles leading to various approaches.

ELF Studies originate from the theory of Concentric Circles of English (The Inner Circle, The Outer Circle, The Expanding Circle) by Kachru (1990) who is now referred to as the linguist introducing the term “World Englishes” and the Dynamic Model by Schneider (2003), which outlines the five basic stages of

World Englishes evolution: foundation, exonormative stabilization, nativization, endonormative stabilization, differentiation.

Seidlhofer (2011) claims that English penetrates all the Concentric Circles of Kachru's theory. It has been undergoing the process of globalization, which is characterized by a hybrid ways of speaking with the necessity to establish a common linguacultural ground in order to achieve mutual understanding between interlocutors in various speech events such as business meetings, tourist encounters, diplomatic negotiations, conference discussions, etc. According to Seidlhofer (2011) English has established itself as the predominant international language and a genuine *Lingua Franca*.

6.1.2. Peculiarities of the use of ELF at different language levels

Numerous studies focused on identifying and describing the specific features of the use of ELF have resulted in the findings primarily in phonology, morphology and pragmatics. The overview of the major conclusions made in empirical investigations is presented below.

6.1.3. Phonological level

The research of ELF leads us to the three criteria of any new language variation to be functioning successfully, suggested by Jenkins (2009): intelligibility, appropriateness and effectiveness. ELF interactions are heavily dependent on external factors of communication and based on the principle “function rather than form: getting the message across is more important than correctness.

Pronunciation is the aspect of paramount importance concerning intelligibility and effectiveness of communication. Still, there arises a question whether non-native speakers should adapt to native standards of speech that is RP (Received Pronunciation – Great Britain) or GA (General American). In order to answer this question, J. Jenkins suggests a list of phonological features that are crucial and mandatory for ELF interaction and those which are optional, labelling them as the “Lingua Franca Core” and “Non-Core” areas of pronunciation respectively. Table 01 contains the summary of Lingua Franca Core and Non-Core pronunciation features distinguished by Jenkins (2007, 2009).

Table 1. Summary of Lingua Franca Core and Non-Core pronunciation features

Lingua Franca Core	Example	Lingua Franca Non-Core	Example
Length contrast in vowels	pill – peel	Interdental [θ] and [ð] may be substituted by [f] and [v]	think [fɪnk], this [vɪs]
Quantity of the vowel (the vowel is shorter before an unvoiced consonant)	kit – kid	[w] can be replaced by [v]	why [vai]
The [ɜ:] vowel sounds like in American English	girl, first	Consonant clusters can be simplified by elision	postman [posmen]
The [r] consonant sounds like in American English in any position	right, arm, door	A very short schwa vowel may appear between consonants	product [pɹə'ɹɒdʌktətə]

The [t] consonant sounds like in British English, no glottal stop	Better	Elision is acceptable in speech flow	tell him to go [teləm tə gəʊ]
Explosive consonants [p], [t], [k] must be aspirated in the initial position in a stressed syllable	power, table, kite	Assimilation is acceptable in speech flow	don't be silly [dom bə sillə]
The stream of speech should be divided into meaningful tone units with nuclear stress being placed appropriately	“Let's meet NEXT Saturday” versus “Let's meet next SATURDAY”	Contracted forms	isn't, I'll, who's, they'd, haven't

Jenkins (2007, 2009) claims that it is not supposed to be the main goal of the ELFer to sound precisely as a native speaker if their aim is to communicate intelligibly with other non-native speakers. According to Jenkins (2007, 2009), the Non-Core areas of pronunciation make it possible for speakers engaged in ELF communication to pronounce words with their own first language accent regardless of the native speakers' pronunciation patterns. Besides, the suggested pronunciation alterations should not be viewed as phonological errors. The researcher argues with her opponents by reassuring them that such adaptation is inevitable and pragmatically justified.

6.1.4. Morphological level

ELF is characterized by certain lexical and grammatical Non-Core peculiarities identified in the course of empirical research by Jenkins. Table 02 presents the summary of the basic findings mentioned in the publications (Jenkins, 2007, 2009).

Table 2. Summary of Lingua Franca Non-Core lexical and grammatical peculiarities

Lingua Franca Non-Core lexical and grammatical peculiarity	Example
The use of uncountable nouns in plural form	“furnitures”, “advices”, “feedbacks”, “informations”, “staffs”
Zero marking of the 3d person singular form in Present Simple	“He look very sad”
The use of relative pronouns <i>who</i> и <i>which</i> interchangeably	The people which...”; “The book who...”
The use of the “isn't it?” tag in disjunctive questions as a universal pattern	“You're very busy today, isn't it?”
Absence of articles	“Countries have signed agreement”
The use of the infinitive instead of the gerund after certain structures	“I look forward to see you tomorrow”
The use of subordinate clauses instead of infinitive constructions	“I want that we go”
Redundant explicitness	“black colour” instead of “black”
The lack of small talk starters	Would you like to ...? I'm afraid, I don't understand... Excuse me, but...

6.1.5. Pragmatic level

In its pragmatic aspect, ELF might be regarded as a functional variation adapted to modern conditions with the tendency for nativization and simplification of phonetics, grammar and lexis. Communication in such limited format is still effective but can it be sufficient without the beauty and abundance of Standard English? However, the research of the pragmatic use of ELF (Klimpfinger, 2009) has shown that the above-mentioned code switching does not aim at filling in lexical or grammatical gaps. On the contrary, the ELF users apply code switching for signalling cultural identity and promoting a sense of solidarity with the interlocutor by demonstrating “a special bond to another language or culture” (Klimpfinger, 2009, p. 361). The code switching is used as an additional linguistic tool that serves four main functions:

- specifying an addressee
- introducing another idea
- signalling culture
- appealing for assistance (Klimpfinger, 2009)

The major findings of the leading researchers in the field are related to the specific features of pronunciation, lexis and grammar, pragmatics. These have been predominantly empirical investigations into naturally occurring conversations rather than constructed tasks or elicited talks. It was noted that, being confronted with the challenge of overcoming the communicative barriers, people develop communicative creativity. Thus, multilingual ELF speakers introduce grammatical and lexical deviations into their speech specifically for signalling their cultural identity, plurilingual solidarity, mutual assistance helping them communicate effectively.

6.2. The issues that remain controversial and raise debate

Despite the fact that the past two decades have witnessed a rapidly growing interest to the study of English as a Lingua Franca resulting in prolific publications, dissertations, conferences, specialized journals devoted to the topic, still this phenomenon remains relevant as it raises controversial opinions, provokes discussion of its conceptual and methodological base. However reluctant the opponents of ELF Studies might be, it is impossible to deny that English as a global language has gained the specific property of being primarily learnt and used for communication not with its native speakers but for non-native speaker with non-native speaker interaction.

In the course of the research, it has been revealed that the definition of EFL still raises debate caused by methodological differences. Among the existing approaches it is possible to distinguish the one that regards only those users of English for whom it is not the first language (Jenkins); others suggest communication in widely varying combinations of participants (Seidlhofer). There observed a tendency for including native speakers interacting with non-native speakers to the community of ELF users.

As regards phonology, lexis and grammar, the question of the norm and acceptable deviations and possible alterations remains disputable. From pragmatic point of view, ELF speakers tend to demonstrate communicative creativity and cross-cultural solidarity.

6.3. The perspectives of the study of English as a *Lingua Franca*

The ELF research has been abundant and already thoroughly covered the following aspects:

1) Conceptualizing and positioning of ELF Studies as an independent branch of science. Attitudes, approaches, conceptualisation, universality and comprehensibility are traditionally regarded as the fundamental issues in ELF Studies. The leading ELF researchers have made significant efforts to illuminate the conflicting and controversial attitudes expressed against ELF as a self-sufficient field of research;

2) World Englishes or regional spread of ELF with the focus on how speakers of different first language backgrounds are influenced by English. The descriptive research of “Outer Circle” varieties, “New Englishes” or “World Englishes” conducted in order to highlight and raise the awareness of their specific features included: evolutionary aspect of new varieties’ emerging; phonetic investigations of accents and speech rhythm, description of lexical and grammatical peculiarities, study of sociolinguistic and linguacultural aspects;

3) Business is one of the main (alongside with education) domains for ELF Studies. A substantial proportion of research has already been carried out;

4) The use of ELF in university settings of various countries is investigated from different perspectives remaining on of the main research trends;

5) Language pedagogy: teacher education and development; teaching materials and difficulties of introducing ELF into classroom; content and language oriented learning.

Being rightfully regarded as a thriving field of research, ELF Studies include the investigation into the latest trends and promising perspectives of this branch of linguistics. The analysis of the collections of works devoted to highlighting the current achievements and foreseeing the future objectives of the study (Archibald et al., 2011; Jenkins, Baker et al., 2018; Mauranen & Ranta, 2009) makes it possible to distinguish the following directions of research:

I. Latest trends in ELF Empirical Discourse Studies

Modern ELF Studies focus on:

- Variability as a key feature of ELF communication in the context of the specific community’s interaction (for example a meeting of an international group of physicists or environmentalists). Speakers develop a common repertoire to adapt their specific purposes to that specific occasion.

- Multilingualism as ELF’s framework but not just one of its characteristics: translanguaging as an intrinsic part of ELF communication.

- Social context (close / family relationships) with multilingual background.

- Humour is seen as an interactive tool for achieving power balance and solidarity in, for example, business setting and an effective means for establishing a common ground for ELF communication;

- ELF in electronically mediated communication.

- Corpus Linguistics achievements are beneficial for the development of applied linguistics (machine translation, language teaching). Currently, ELF Studies have two million-word corpora of spoken ELF completed: 1) the ELFA corpus of academic ELF, compiled in Helsinki, 2008 (www.eng.helsinki.fi/elfa) and 2) the VOICE corpus, compiled in Vienna, 2013 (www.univie.ac.at/voice). In 2015 The Corpus of Written English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings was completed in Helsinki (<http://www.helsinki.fi/elfa>). These large databases allowed to study of ELF on a new scale and ushered

in a new era in ELF research. They provide corpora of English being spoken by the non-native speaking majority who successfully use it on a daily basis in their personal, professional or academic lives.

- Translingual practices in business (BELF).
- ELF in translation and interpreting are also of great interest for researchers today.

II. Latest trends in Pedagogy and Language Teaching

- ELF teaching materials and assessment standards

Currently, the implication of ELF findings to classroom activities is highly relevant. Numerous research emphasizes the contradiction arising from the fact that the use of ELF around the world has risen drastically and still the greatest part of English language teaching and testing materials are prevailingly oriented towards native speakers of English. It is worth mentioning that now we already have some course books that adopt an ELF-oriented approach and raise the awareness of the existence of non-native Englishes (“New English File”, “Real Lives”), nevertheless, English learners are still being encouraged to aim for the kind of English that British or North American English speakers use among themselves. After completing the course, their skills are assessed in accordance with the Standard English Native Speakers’ norm. However, the English they speak is mainly used as a communication tool for non-native discourse, subsequently, the deviations in speech, especially lexico-grammatical and even pronunciation-wise are suggested not to be treated as errors if they do not impede comprehensibility. Besides, the teacher can use reformulation as a corrective device in EFL classrooms, that is to reformulate a learner’s ‘incorrect’ utterance regardless of its communicative effectiveness, and the learner then repeats the ‘correct’ form.

- Learner’s motivation

Crucially, some empirical research, reveals that younger non-native English speakers are developing an awareness that the English they are taught in their classrooms often does not reflect the kind of English they need to communicate in their intercultural lives outside.

- Integrating an ELF pedagogy into the changing world

Specific features of non-native English teachers’ work; teaching English for international understanding; writing English as a Lingua Franca, accommodative ELF talk; perceptions of ELF in secondary schools, etc.

7. Conclusion

The foregoing makes it possible to draw the following conclusions:

ELF Studies remain a thriving and rapidly developing area of research, which provides opportunities for linguists and practitioners to exchange theoretical analyses and empirical data on its conceptualization and methodology.

English has truly established itself as the predominant international language and a genuine Lingua Franca. As a global language, it has gained the specific property of being primarily learnt and used for communication between non-native speakers. Still, there remains a question whether native speakers should be regarded as users of ELF.

Intelligibility, appropriateness and effectiveness are the main criteria of ELF interactions with the focus on “function rather than form” meaning that getting the message across is more important than

correctness. However, the issue of the permissible limit for functional efficiency to influence the language leading to significant deviations from its norm is under discussion.

Lexico-grammatical deviations from standard form of English are introduced by ELF speakers not so much due to insufficiency of their language skills but for the sake of signalling their cultural identity and manifesting pluricultural solidarity.

Describing the latest trends in ELF Studies, it is possible to distinguish 2 main directions of research:

I) ELF Empirical Discourse Studies and II) Pedagogy and Language Teaching.

Thus, the study of English as a Lingua Franca is a promising research trend.

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