

“Towards a transformative framework for the professional preparation of ELF teachers”

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Introduction—Background

The paper presents an innovative and comprehensive framework for ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) teacher education. It begins by highlighting the historical and disciplinary processes that have focused on the study of successful communications between non-native speakers of English and have helped establish the ELF field (e.g., Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2004; papers in Gnutzmann & Intemann, 2005; papers in Rubdi & Saraceni, 2006). It then goes on to present a brief overview of the current status of the ELF teacher education literature (e.g., Snow *et al*, 2006).

In spite of the fact that studies of the international use and influence of English have been around in the ESOL literature for a substantial amount of time, (at least since Smith, 1976), the vast complexities of the issue are still very ‘new’ and far from resolved. This is probably why there is still a lot of debating concerning basic terminology (see, for example, the discussion on the proper terming of the different facets of non-native speaker English in Seidlhofer (2004, p. 210ff.)). Nevertheless, a lot of research in the past few years is providing increasing evidence of lingua franca discourse (Mauranen, 2003) that gives important insights on ELF lexicogrammar (Seidlhofer 2001, 2004), pronunciation (Jenkins, 2000) and pragmatics (House, 1999). There are also substantial contributions on teaching (McKay, 2002; Pennycook, 1999) and language teaching policy (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999, 2005; Phillipson, 2003).

While there is a lot of information on the international spread of English, there seems to be much less debate regarding the education of teachers who would be interested in teaching English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), i.e., English intended for communication mainly between non-native users (Jenkins, 2006, p. 169; Sifakis, 2004). Nevertheless, the demand for a comprehensive orientation for ELF teacher development is increasing (see, for example, Jenkins, 2005; Seidlhofer, 2004; papers in Gnutzmann & Intemann, 2005). No specific proposals have been made to date (but see Seidlhofer, 1999; Sifakis, 2007), as prominent ELF scholars such as Jenkins and Seidlhofer seem to believe that more data should be gathered before specific suggestions for teacher education are put forward. While this is certainly true, current ELF research already raises issues that could challenge many established beliefs and preconceptions of ESOL practitioners, and this is unlikely to change with more research. The need for a general framework for ELF teacher education that would inform and sensitize ESOL practitioners about ELF matters is eminent.

The framework

In view of the strong attitudes held by EFL teachers and learners (see Jenkins, 2007), an ELF teacher education should stand for a radical change in the worldviews of ESOL teachers. To achieve this, it is my position in this paper that a truly transformational approach to ELF

teacher education is called for. By ‘transformational’, I am referring to teachers’ need to confront and change a whole range of long-held and deeply rooted viewpoints about, for example, the importance of standard English, the role of native speakers and the negotiation of non-native speakers’ identities in cross-cultural communication. For such a transformation to occur, mere exposition to and awareness of the relevant literature will not be enough. It should also involve a seriously critical outlook and a reflective overview of their past learning experiences and previous and current teaching (i.e., curricular and pedagogical) situations (Freeman and Johnson, 1998). It goes without saying that, for such a transformation to be successful, it is likely to be time-consuming and far from easy-going (Holliday, 2005). Teachers will be expected to become exposed to excerpts of authentic lingua franca communication and understand for themselves the processes involved. It is likely that different teachers will have strong viewpoints about these issues and that these reactions will bring forth elements of their linguistic insecurity (Labov, 1966), which will have to be further explored and analyzed (Sifakis & Sougari, 2005). It has been reported that even proponents of ELF may find it quite difficult to fully embrace certain ELF tenets (this phenomenon has been termed ‘linguistic schizophrenia’ by Seidlhofer; for some examples, see Jenkins, 2005).

In following a transformative approach to ELF teacher education, I am adopting the perspective put forward in the transformative learning framework of Jack Mezirow. Mezirow’s theory of transformative or transformational learning (originally put forward in 1978) builds on and expands Freire’s emancipatory model of ‘social transformation’ (Freire, 1970) and Boyd’s analytical ‘transformative education’ perspective (Boyd, 1991) and has been implemented in many diverse domains that involve adult learning, that vary from peacemaking to aids education, and from social justice to spiritual education (see case studies in Mezirow and Associates, 2000). It has also been extensively adopted in many programs in adult ESOL literacy and numeracy (e.g., Comings, Garner, and Smith, 2004) and cultural awareness (e.g., Silver, Klyne, and Simard, 2003), and to some extent in ESOL teacher education (e.g., Pickering, 2003). It aims at bringing trainees to confront and change their established viewpoints about a particular issue by providing hands-on information and asking them to (a) realize and critically examine their assumptions, (b) openly explore new terrains by trying new roles, (c) plan a course of action, (d) acquire knowledge and skills for implementing that plan, (d) build self-confidence in the new roles and (e) become reintegrated on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective (Mezirow, 1991).

The proposed perspective is viewed within the broad teacher education framework put forward by Freeman and Johnson (1998). It integrates current theorizing in ESOL action research and critical social theory (Fairclough, 1989; Pennycook, 2001) and adopts the model of narrative reconstruction of teachers’ experiences suggested by Golombek (1998). It will be argued that, if appropriately implemented in ELF teacher education, transformative learning will result not only in the whole-hearted engagement with the issues raised in ELF research but, more importantly, in the trainees’ essential empowerment as users of English and as pedagogues. Such an approach to teacher education will have a great experimental and research interest, in that it can contribute substantial information on teachers’ varied practices in different local contexts, ultimately helping to establish an ELF teacher community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Johnson, 2006).

The proposed transformative model

The model incorporates the following five phases.

Phase 1: Preparation. Before the start of the actual training session, trainees are asked to respond to some questions concerning their own professional background, studies and interests. They are also asked to briefly sketch how they use English, which skills are usually involved (e.g., some may use it to send emails, others to chat with their friends on the phone), who they use it with (native or non-native users) and for what reason (e.g., to attend

conferences or just to teach English). The questions can be answered following Golombek's (1998) narrative orientation. Their purpose is to help the trainer form a comprehensive idea not only of individual participants but of how coherent trainee groups can be formed.

Phase 2: Identifying the primary issues of ELF discourse. Trainers get to know one another (by using typical icebreaking techniques) and engage in content reflection, i.e., slowly become aware of both (a) what is involved in ELF communication and (b) their own interpretations of and reactions toward it. This is an important, yet subtle, phase because it aims at involving trainees in the discovery of ELF, sensitizing them about the primary issues involved in it (e.g., in the elements of ELF discourse) and preparing them for the more extensive, secondary issues that it raises (e.g., the roles of the native speakers and the importance of acknowledging a standard variety in NNS-NNS communication). For this reason, the methodology adopted here should carefully consider trainees' background and needs, the local ESOL tradition, etc. At this stage, trainees are exposed to extensive excerpts of authentic spoken ELF discourse. The idea here is to integrate elements of the international character of English usage, which involves examples of as many forms of NNS-NNS communication as possible. Depending on the case, samples of NNS-NS and even NS-NS communication can also be integrated as it can shed light on interesting communication-oriented differences (Chun, Day, Chenoweth, and Luppescu, 1982).

Phase 3: Fostering trainees' informed awareness about ELF discourse. In this stage, trainees are asked to read selected articles or chapters on ELF that (a) problematize the primary elements involved and (b) debate the ELF case for the secondary elements. In this way, trainees gain a more comprehensive understanding of the ELF issues that are immediately and easily discernible and refer to linguistic and communication concerns, while being slowly and progressively introduced to those that require deeper and more localized reflection. Depending on the training situation, it should be possible to progressively integrate, for example, readings from the history of English as a global language, Jenkins' lingua franca core, the 'World Standard English' orientation (e.g., Crystal, 2003) and research on native speakers (Brutt-Griffler and Samimi, 2001) to material from post-colonial studies and critical discussions regarding policy issues (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999, 2005).

Phase 4: ELF and pedagogy. As the sessions progress, the issues discussed will start to become more and more centralized on trainees' individual teaching situations and influences and choices that have formed their professional identity. Following the narrative orientation, trainees should be prompted to extensively reflect on the elements that have helped them form their professional identity. Questions to pose: What made me choose this profession? What are its rewards and difficulties? How autonomous have I been/am I in what I do? To what extent am I happy with such a progress? What are my aspirations for the future? What kind of learners have I taught? What were their motivational levels? How effective communicators were/are they? Which teaching methods have I been using/do I use? Trainees are expected to become fully aware of their own deeper perspectives about English and ESOL pedagogy and engage in critical reflection.

Phase 5: Formulating an ELF action plan. Once trainees are aware of all the major issues involved in ELF discourse and pedagogy and have grasped the implications for their own teaching context, they should be ready to put that knowledge into practice by designing, implementing and evaluating an ELF action plan. Such a plan would integrate instruments from current ESOL research (see above) with the difference that the basis for action would be the ELF principles as trainees understand them. In this way, trainee teachers are reintegrated into their own practice and are prompted to implement the new ELF perspective where necessary. It is important that teachers have a full understanding of what is involved in ELF, as they may have to use many of the transformative techniques that they themselves have experienced with their own learners.

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