ELF One, two, and three!

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1 Introduction - an area of personal ignorance

In June this year (2016) I discovered an area of professional ignorance. I read Robin Walker's blog about a presentation by Lewis Lanford at the IATEFL 2016 conference in Birmingham. Lewis is one of the authors of the Keynote series of textbooks, and Robin first praised him for his description of ELF, but then chided him for referring to it as a 'variety':

> [this was] something researchers stopped doing some time ago, preferring the concept of community of practice (although that, too, is about to be questioned). Walker, 2016
> *His blog is here*

I have to confess that this was news to me (for reasons I explain below cf. 4.0). I had thought ELF academics were still trying to identify either a single variety which was common to people from many different L1 backgrounds, or a series of varieties - one for each language background. But apparently not. So I felt the need to update myself, and Robin pointed me towards a recent paper by Jennifer Jenkins (2015) which is available here. What follows is an attempt to explain this paper to myself. All references below are to Jenkins (2015), unless otherwise specified.

2.0 ELF 1 - World Englishes

As far as academic research is concerned, the ELF that I thought I knew is now in the past. Jenny refers to it as ELF1 (English as a Lingua Franca One). ELF1 focused on forms, particularly phonology. The most tangible outcome of this focus was the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) - a priority list of essential items to teach for international intelligibility. ELF1 then acquired a lexico-grammatical focus - with the work of Barbara Seidlhofer - who suggested that common features of ELF communication might coalesce into a variety of English that could be described and codified.

2.1 The Lingua Franca Core - LFC - a reminder

The LFC consists of lists of core ('crucial if pronunciation is to be intelligible' Jenkins, 2000: 136) and non-core features (non-crucial for intelligibility). The core features included: vowel length, one item of vowel quality (the nurse vowel |ɜː|); rhotic pronunciation; aspiration of |p t k|; BrE intervocalic |t| rather than AmE |ɾ|; all consonants except |θ ð l| - for which speakers could make a number of different substitutions.

There were also major theoretical underpinnings and principles:

- an emphasis on accommodation
- a recognition that globally, most interactions in English take place between non-native speakers
- therefore Native Speaker models are not appropriate for these interactions
- an accent is a feature, not a deficit
- Native Speakers do not own English.

Importantly, ELF1 was academically aligned with World Englishes - varieties of English which are 'linguistically identifiable, geographically definable' (p. 55).

2.2 The end of the varieties project of ELF1

But the varieties project is now over. Jenny writes:

> ...entirely true to say that during the early 2000s, ELF researchers, influenced by the example of World Englishes believed it would be possible to eventually describe and possibly even codify ELF varieties. … for several years, this was seen ... as a necessary step in legitimising ELF use (p. 54). [but] The quest for varieties was abandoned (p. 77).

2.3 The current state of LFC

One of the most contentious aspects of ELF1 was the Lingua Franca Core (LFC). Jenny says:

> Never intended as a model ... or even a fixed core … it was a small number of pronunciation 'repertoire' features that ... should be available for use as and when needed'. (p. 53)

Of course, that was not how many people received it (cf. 4.1 below).

Currently, the use of the LFC is now associated with the work of Robin Walker (particularly his classic Walker, 2010), David Deterding (e.g. Deterding, 2013), Laura Patsko and Katy Simpson's elfpron blog here, and Simon Andrewes (e.g Andrewes, 2011). But Jenny and her academic colleagues have moved on from the LFC, and the other aspects of ELF1. That is not to say that research which references the LFC is not continuing, it is just that Jenny herself no longer regards it as central to ELF. Jenny now describes ELF1 as a period of a focus on form - pronunciation specifics, and specific exponents, in contrast with the later phases of ELF where the focus is much more sociolinguistic, on the underlying processes.

3.0 ELF2 - Why the move away from World Englishes?

The guiding principles are carried forward into ELF2 (and indeed into ELF3) but the alignment with World Englishes ended. Why? As time went on there was increasing recognition that ELF was characterised by incredible variability, and its properties were not pre-existing (therefore not amenable to codification) but **emergent**. It emerged from the specific interaction, the specific context, and the specific combination of speakers. Prompted particularly by work by Barbara Seidlhofer who argued that there was 'inherent fluidity … in the ad hoc, situated negotiation of meaning' (2009b: 242 - cited p. 55) Jenny concluded that ELF was 'beyond description' in terms of a limited number of codifiable forms. Here are two key quotes:

> Instead, ELF, with its fluidity and 'online' negotiation of meaning among interlocutors with varied multilingual repertoires, could not be considered as consisting of bounded varieties, but as English that transcends boundaries, and that is therefore beyond description. (p. 55)

> The quest for ELF varieties was abandoned in light of Seidlhofer's recognition that ELF use transcends boundaries and therefore that the notion of varieties was a contradiction in terms. (p. 77)

4.0 Keeping my head down led to ignorance

Why did I not know of these ELF developments? I was keeping my head down, trying not to get involved. In the early 2000s, I was once asked: 'Are you an ELF person?' I avoided giving a direct answer, as I feared that doing so would land me in trouble, so fierce did I believe the debate to be. I have been an ELF outsider - hardly daring to comment or commit myself to a position in relation to ELF. And when I do try and build an ELF dimension into my work, it's difficult. The most difficult chapter of my book *Phonology for Listening* to write was the one on Global Englishes. Nevertheless the principles of ELF1 have influenced my thinking (cf. Cauldwell, 2013). But why this shyness? Well I got the impression that the debate around the value of the LFC (in particular) was very aggressive/defensive, with all sides becoming entrenched in their initial positions, refusing to consider amending their points of view, or allowing them to evolve. It seemed that no-one was listening to the other side - but I was wrong about this (cf. 4.2 below).

4.1 The 'debate'

On the one hand - people valued it as a welcome, attempt to de-throne the sacred status of the NS models, particularly advocating the end of the requirement to emulate native speaker models of pronunciation. The ability to master RP or GenAm pronunciation had been (is still) regarded as a professional requirement, a yardstick, particularly for NNS teachers and university lecturers. Unfortunately these models have been used as sticks (metaphorically) with which to beat people: the more distant your pronunciation from the NS model, the less professionally competent you were believed to be.

Thus the arrival of the ELF1 academic publications advocating the LFC gave many people a huge sense of relief that there was now academic backing, academic validation for their achievements in getting to their level of English, however accented they were.

On the other hand, there was (and still is) immense hostility to the proposals of ELF1. For some, it is as if the head of the Catholic Church in the UK had mooted abandoning the first of the ten commandments. (I am the lord thy pronunciation model thou shalt not have false models before me). And that false models in the form of LFC models were now being advocated over the NS models.

The RP and GenAm models have been articles of faith, and around the world there are many who have succeeded in emulating these models. They have incredible personal achievements in matching the model in their fluent pronunciation skills and - for many in teaching and academic circumstances - equally incredible grasp of the theory and mechanisms that underlie these skills.

I believe that many of these people felt that the LFC and ELF1 devalued both their personal achievements, and their expertise in teaching others to match these achievements. My sense is Jenny believes that such feelings are based on a misapprehension of the LFC proposals (cf. 2.1.1 above)

4.2 Nobody listening? No!

But one of the things that becomes really clear on reading Jenny's paper, is that she has amended her position significantly as she has considered the accumulating evidence of ELF as it revealed the need for

more appropriate theoretical orientations. She didn't like some of the criticism, but she listened, evaluated it for potential usefulness.

See in particular the following paragraphs in her paper:

- p. 54 last paragraph beginning 'Nevertheless ...'
- p. 62 last paragraph beginning 'The direct catalyst ...'
- p. 62 paragraph beginning 'Fifth, and finally...
- p. 63 paragraph beginning 'We turn now to...'

Anyway, the debate was furious, and it continues to be so. (cf. O'Regan, 2015; Widdowson, 2015; Baker & Jenkins, 2015) and I wanted to keep my head down. Doing so led me to my position of ignorance.

5.0 ELF2 - Communities of Practice

So what is (or was) ELF2? Well here's Jenny:

> The study of ELF's variability thence became central, with variability soon being understood as a defining characteristic of ELF communication. (p. 55)

ELF2 marked a break with the concept of World Englishes (p. 55) - with which, it became clear, ELF did not share the characteristics of being 'linguistically identifiable, geographically definable' (p. 55).

> Instead ELF, with its fluidity and 'online' negotiation of meaning among interlocutors with varied multilingual repertoires, could not be considered as consisting of bounded varieties, but as English that transcends boundaries, and that is therefore beyond description. (p. 55)

So ELF researchers were no longer trying to describe varieties of English. Attention to forms gave way to interest in the diversity, fluidity, and variability in the new data (p. 50) and became academically aligned with the notion of Communities of Practice (CoP, see here for a definition). Key terms included 'similect' (Mauranen, 2012: 29-30)

So ELF2 was more about observing processes in Communities of Practice - how people of different language backgrounds, sharing a particular context or situation, used their English-language resources to communicate. The focus had moved from description of forms, to observation of processes used by groups of people sharing a common purpose for communication.

But Jenny now argues that the CoP alignment cannot adequately account for typical ELF interactions which are characterised by transient, ad hoc, and even fleeting ELF groupings. She identifies other problems with ELF2:

- English was viewed as the superordinate language
- Insufficient attention was paid to the emergent nature of ELF (p. 64) in transient encounters
- It was unrealistic for researchers to focus exclusively on stable groupings of ELF users
- Definitions of ELF2 did not allow for situations in which English is available, but not used

So Jenny is proposing an ELF3, which I attempt to explain in the next section, which I begin with an anecdote.

6.0 ELF 3 Introduction

In the 1980s I worked at 神戸大学 (Kobe University, Japan) as a teacher of English. Towards the end of my time there, I was invited to a university party hosted by the president of the university. It was for the international students who were about to return home after varying periods of study - usually a year, sometimes more. I was amazed at how many there were (they weren't there to learn English, so I hadn't come across any of them) and at the range of countries they were from. I walked up to a group, and we did introductions all around in English. They were from Brazil, Hungary and France. They then - probably assuming that I could manage linguistically - resumed their conversation in Japanese - their lingua-franca of choice. I was amazed. It was wonderful, electrifying experience for me to witness a language other than English being used as a lingua franca. It was obvious from the introductions that they were all good at English, but it was not the language that they relaxed into. Quite naturally, after a year or more in Japan, Japanese was their go-to language.

From my understanding of Jenny's paper this is an example of ELF3, of which the Jenny gives the working definition 'Multilingual communication in which English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen' (p. 73). As you will notice from this definition, ELF now aligns itself academically with Multilingualism. How did this happen?

Well, ELF first aligned itself with World Englishes, and sought to identify ELF varieties in a period that Jenny refers to as ELF1 (cf. 2.0 above). But having recognised that the infinite variability of the evidence researchers subsequently aligned themselves with Communities of Practice in ELF2. But Jenny has now realised that there were problems with ELF2's orientation with CoP (cf. 5.0 above):

- English was viewed as the superordinate language
- Insufficient attention was paid to the emergent nature of ELF (p. 64) in transient encounters
- It was unrealistic for researchers to focus exclusively on stable groupings of ELF users as the norm
- Definitions of ELF2 did not allow for situations in which English is available, but not used.

Jenny proposes that the solution to these problems is to place multilingualism 'at the forefront, its raison d'etre' (p. 63). She suggests viewing ELF as 'within multilingualism rather than the current view which sees multilingualism as an aspect of ELF'. She suggests the term 'English as a Multilingua Franca' which she defines as:

> Multilingual communication in which English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen.

Later in the paper (pp. 75-76) Jenny lists four key aspects:
1. Multilingualism is the superordinate
2. The other languages of everyone present ... are also present in the interaction.
3. Need to rethink the notions of multilingual repertoires/resources - JJ suggests 'repertoires in flux'
4. Not communities of practice, but 'contact zones'. (The notion of English as a Multilingua has to be able to characterise transient, ad hoc, and even fleeting ELF groupings).

In the case of my Kobe interaction we can now describe it using some of the terms of this list of key aspects. Our group of four people at the party became a 'contact zone' which was a transient ad-hoc grouping, in which English played a role in the introductions phase - but not the main role in the interaction

as a whole. For the principle parts of the interaction, Japanese was used. The languages known (I assume) by all four of us to be available were: English, French, Japanese, Hungarian, Portuguese. But each of us might have other languages in our repertoires that the others did not know about - in my case, there was Cantonese.

So here we are in the era ELF3. For more, you must read Jenny's paper here.

Acknowledgement

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