

Lingua Franca Communication and Language Teacher Education: The Challenge of Change

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One consequence of globalization of particular relevance to the profession of language teaching is that the volume of lingua franca communication using the resources of (particularly) English has vastly increased over recent decades. The development has been further reinforced and enhanced by the availability of online communication and collaboration technologies and the rise and expansion of social media. From leisure to work to education, English as a lingua franca has become pervasive in international communication.

The symposium explored the pedagogical implications of this state of affairs with a focus on English language teaching (ELT) and English language teacher education. Complementary and closely intertwined issues were addressed in four short presentations and in-depth discussions. All contributions and discussions were set against the backdrop of a discrepancy between ELT's traditional focus on fairly stable, conventional encodings of a communally shared ('native') variety and the changing sociolinguistic and communicative realities of English around the world (Seidlhofer, 2011). The overall aim was to explore possibilities of a pedagogical complementarity between ELT and ELF communication and to engage in a real dialogue across diverging perspectives (Sifakis & Tsantila, 2019).

“Teaching people or a language?”

Iris Schaller-Schwane (University of Fribourg, Switzerland) & Andy Kirkpatrick (Griffith University, Australia)

Despite all the scholarship that has described the development of new varieties of English and which has shown how English is being increasingly used as an international lingua franca, the belief that a native speaker model is the ideal target and that a native English-speaking teacher is the most appropriate teacher remains resilient. The presenters described how they approach the teaching of ELF and/or about ELF to students studying to become Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. The focus was on getting across the notion of teaching *people* to become multilingual users of English rather than teaching the English *language* per se (Kirkpatrick, 2021; Schaller-Schwane & Kirkpatrick, 2020).

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“Teaching outside the box. An example of an ELF CPD course in Austria”

Beate Clayson-Knollmayr (University of Vienna, Austria), Eva Knechtelsdorfer (University of Vienna & KPH Vienna/Krems, Austria) & Sandra Radinger (University of Vienna, Austria)

The speakers reported on the conceptualization of and learnings from their four-session continuing professional development (CPD) course in Austria. This course invites in-service teachers to share their experiences with regard to questions like ‘What is the aim of language teaching?’ and ‘Whose English are we teaching?’. In different reflective exercises participants critically engage with ELF research and evaluate their own practice and current teaching policy in ELT. The learnings from this course corroborate the importance of adapting ELF-informed CPD courses to local contexts and more generally of opening a space of theory-practice engagement with the subject of English.

“Reflective change in ELF-aware teacher education: Insights from the ELF-GATE and the ENRICH Course”

Stefania Kordia (Hellenic Open University, Greece)

This presentation focused on the lessons learned from two teacher education courses, namely the ELF-GATE and the ENRICH courses, which aimed at empowering in-service teachers of English to integrate ELF in their classrooms. Emphasis was placed on the ways in which reflection on ELF-related issues in relation to one’s experience as a user, teacher and prior learner of English was promoted in each of these courses. Indicative data from teachers’ reflections and lesson plans they designed for their classrooms were presented to illustrate the extent to which change in their normative mindsets and teaching practices had been brought about. (Kordia, 2016; Sifakis & Kordia, 2021).

“MY English – the art of ELF communication and how to get there”

Kurt Kohn (University of Tübingen, Germany)

Against the backdrop of a social constructivist MY English perspective on communication and language learning, this presentation focused on helping ELT students develop their own requirements and practices of successful intercultural ELF communication. Special attention was given to pedagogical lingua franca immersion through virtual exchange between ELT students of different linguacultural backgrounds using their shared target language as a pedagogical lingua franca. Case study explorations in secondary school contexts were presented providing evidence of authentication and communicative engagement (Gijssen, 2021), speaker-learners’ emancipation and satisfaction, and the need for pedagogical mentoring (Kohn, 2022a).

Discussion

Following the presentations and related discussions, the spectrum of views on ELF inspirations and challenges for ELT development was further enriched by invited respondents Andrew Blair (University of Sussex), Éva Illés (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest), Lucilla Lopriore (University of Roma Tre), Veronika Quinn Novotná & Jiřina Dunková (University of West Bohemia), Natasha Tsantila (The American College of Greece, Athens), and Henry Widdowson (University of Vienna).

The discussions revolved around teachers' resistance to cognitive, affective and behavioural change when exposed to an ELF perspective on ELT. A prominent issue was the extent to which learners could be allowed the initiative to use the language on their own communicative terms given the established conventions of teaching and the institutional requirement for conformity (Widdowson, 2020). Against this backdrop, the focus was on raising teachers' and students' awareness of ELF communication (Sifakis & Kordia, 2021) and of ELF competence being rooted in ordinary communication (Kohn, 2022b). In this connection, fostering teacher agency was considered key to change as well as anchoring reflection in diverse forms of localized pedagogical practices based on a growing pool of ELF-related materials (Lopriore, 2021) including anglophone literatures (Quinn Novotná & Dunkova, forthcoming).

To conclude, the rich and complementary diversity of opinions and voices reminded us of the importance of free debate and keeping open minds and hearts in adapting teacher education for (E)LT to the demands of the contemporary world.

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