CAN (AN) ELF HAVE A LIFE OF ITS OWN?

SYLWIA SCHEUER

Université Paris 3
sylwia_scheuer@yahoo.fr

ABSTRACT

In this paper I wish to look at whether English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is likely to acquire an identity of its own and be universally perceived as a linguistic entity different from, and independent of, native speaker English(es). The discussion begins with a brief overview of certain controversies surrounding the ELF case, before turning to the so-called Latin analogy theme. The fate of Latin, another well-known example of a language of international communication in the history of mankind, was in fact sealed by the emergence – in the early Middle Ages – of a non-native variety of the language, decidedly distinct from the natural language that later developed into Romance. The paper will attempt to present certain aspects of the Latin-English analogy, with a view to obtaining clues as to the possible future development of the modern lingua franca.

KEYWORDS: English as a Lingua Franca; LFC; Latin analogy; codification; intelligibility.

1. Introduction[1]

"Traditionally, native speakers of English have been regarded as providing the authoritative standard and the best teachers. Now, they may be seen as presenting an obstacle to the free development of global English". Graddol's (2006: 114) statement neatly summarises the momentous changes occurring on the ELT scene, which, at the beginning of the new millennium, presents a very different picture from the one that prevailed just a few decades ago. Recent years have witnessed vigorous efforts to highlight the growing importance of non-native speakers – nowadays numerically dominant – in shaping the way English may be perceived, managed and taught in the 21st century. In view of the above, it is small wonder that attempts have been made to sanction the linguistic patterns emerging in English as an International Language (EIL), or English as a

---

[1] I am indebted to the anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and remarks on an earlier version of this paper.

Lingua Franca (ELF).[2] The advocates of the scheme insist that ELF should be viewed and appreciated in its own right, rather than in comparison to ENL (English as a Native Language), as these are "distinct, essentially different entities serving different functions" (Seidlhofer 2005: 59).

What seems to be evident at present is that the idea of English ultimately diverging into ENL and ELF – rather than into British, American, Australian, and other Inner Circle varieties – is no longer universally dismissed as fanciful. Some linguists, like Rajagopalan (2009) or Graddol (2006), go even further and conclude that the split in question has already happened, in that English – as we have conceived of it so far – is now being replaced by this new, international form of the language, as the world's lingua franca. On the other hand, some scholars still agree with MacKenzie's (2002; quoted in Jenkins 2007: 41) claim that there is no such thing as ELF, "but rather a variety of local versions of English, each influenced, as one would expect, by the grammar and vocabulary of the local language or languages". The main goal of the present paper is to address the question of whether ELF – or *an* ELF, meaning a subset of the above, i.e. ELF used in a particular region like Europe – can indeed acquire an identity of its own. In other words, will it come to be perceived – not just by its own users, but also by outsiders – as a separate entity, decidedly distinct from native English(es), and not just as an inaccurate rendition thereof? The immediate answer to the question is that it is too early to tell. Nevertheless, one can engage in speculations about the future, informed by lessons learnt from the past, notably from the story of Latin – another world lingua franca, which experienced a clear split between its native and non-native varieties in the early Middle Ages (Section 3). First, however, I wish to discuss certain problems which beset the pro-ELF discourse, and which have no doubt generated a great deal of controversy as well as confusion, surrounding the whole debate. If the legitimisation of ELF is to succeed, confusion over certain notions certainly does not help.

2.   Confusion

In a bid to liberate the modern lingua franca from the shackles of native speaker standards, and to offer foreign learners an alternative to traditional EFL, a proposal has been presented for a more democratic EIL/ELF paradigm, where the foremost determinant of correctness is international intelligibility. The proposal has sparked off a lively, and sometimes rather heated, debate about the norms, models and targets to be chosen in the teaching process. In the course of the discussion, many scholars who failed to fully embrace the new ideology have been accused of misunderstanding, and/or misrepresenting, the ELF case. What may lie at the bottom of the misunderstanding(s) is the uncertainty as to whether ELF proposals do or do not constitute a model. Accounts are rather

---

[2] I use the terms "ELF" and "EIL" interchangeably, while "EFL" denotes "English as a Foreign Language" – the pedagogical paradigm where native speaker competence is the declared goal.

contradictory in this regard, even between – or within – publications by the same author. This is evident e.g., in Jenkins first referring to her LFC (Lingua Franca Core – the core of phonological intelligibility) as "a model for international English phonology", and later in the same book stating that she prefers "not to describe [her] approach in terms of 'model' at all" (2000: 11 and 131, respectively). In another ELFish manifesto, Seidlhofer (2001: 15; emphasis mine) observes that "we are witnessing the emergence of an endonormative *model* of lingua franca English, which will increasingly derive its norms of correctness and appropriacy from its own usage rather than that of the UK or the US, or any other 'native speaker' country". On the other hand, Jenkins's current stance (2006a: 36) seems to be that "the Lingua Franca Core [is] not a model". Unfortunately, the above inconsistencies do not represent but a minute terminological detail: "model" is a pedagogically loaded term, and confusion in this respect might have led some scholars to interpret the LFC as something meant to be imitated (as models generally are). The following section will present further, crucially interrelated, examples of grey areas within the ELF/LFC paradigm, where the information provided is either limited, not entirely accurate, or somewhat conflicting, thereby making the message significantly less coherent than it could otherwise be.

2.1. Descriptivism vs. prescriptivism

Closely linked to the above considerations is the issue of imposing certain specific, non-ENL grammatical or phonological forms on the hypothetical ELF learner. It is not entirely clear whether – and if so, to what extent – such a learner, who has consciously selected ELF as his pedagogic option, will be expected to emulate linguistic patterns yielded by the available descriptions of EIL speech, but different from those found in L1 English. Should this be the case, the inauguration of ELFish teaching would be tantamount to supplanting one type of prescriptivism with another: instead of revering the native speaker as the ideal to be pursued, the learner will now have to strive to copy a different set of prescribed forms, so the underlying pedagogical doctrine ("this is how you should speak") remains unchanged.

Concerns of this kind have been voiced right from the start, and have in most cases been emphatically dismissed by the ELF supporters. Cogo (2008: 60), for example, states unequivocally that "the aim of ELF research is describing not prescribing". Description is obviously a wonderful and pretty innocuous thing, but it is extremely hard to believe that this is where the ambitions behind the whole enterprise end. If the aim of projects like the LFC or the VOICE corpus was purely descriptive, they certainly would not have generated such heated debates and emotional responses on both sides of the argument. Since the results of research into ELF communication are hoped to have implications for teaching, Seidlhofer (2006: 45) admits that "[o]f course, any kind of teaching is based on a kind of prescription, and it would be simply disingenuous, and also rather silly, to deny this: when you teach you need to know what you are trying to

teach – and equally importantly, what for, why and to whom". However, she goes on to assert that the specific pedagogic decisions related to the prescription in question, and possibly informed by the ELF studies, would have to be made by the local teacher, rather than by the descriptive linguist like herself.

Nonetheless, one cannot help get the impression that the descriptive spirit of the ELF research is haunted by the prescriptive ghost. As observed by Prodromou (2007: 52), "ELF slides imperceptibly from a legitimate description of variety in the use of language to a position that puts the prescriptive cart after the descriptive horse". Indeed, all too often in the pro-ELF publications one finds a description of linguistic forms found in NNS–NNS interactions, followed by a description of a pedagogic proposal based on those forms, eventually followed by a description of how non-conservative linguists would evaluate this proposal. Although the authors claim to be doing little more than offering an alternative teaching paradigm without imposing anything on any-one, reservations about the scheme, expressed by fellow scholars, are not necessarily well received. In a similar vein, Saraceni (2008: 25), commenting on Jenkins's (2006b) article, highlights "a didactic tone in ELF discourse, which, although not openly pre-scriptive, seems to want to impart directives as to what users of English *should* or *need* to be doing in order to communicate with one another".

2.2. Codification

The long-term objectives of the LFC/VOICE-like endeavours go beyond a simple de-scription and identification of core areas. It is argued that various linguistic forms pecu-liar to ELF (especially to its European incarnation – Euro-English) could become codi-fied and then make inroads into English dictionaries and textbooks, which "may well have important implications [...] for how 'English' is taught for lingua franca purposes" (Seidlhofer 2002: 297).

Unfortunately, the advocates of this scheme are rather vague about the details, and we know very little about the project except that it should be carried out, and that it is a prerequisite for the acceptance of this new concept of English. Consequently, it is rather difficult to have an informed opinion on the subject. It is also hard to venture guesses on how the right balance could be attained between being too general and too specific while codifying ELF use. If the former, the result would be little more than an identifi-cation of core vs. non-core areas, which – so we are told – codification is not meant to be (e.g., Seidlhofer 2001). If the latter happened, the outcome would amount to singling out specific members of a whole set of acceptable – i.e., intelligible – renditions of non-core items, for example interdental fricatives (would it be /s z/, /t d/, or /f v/?). There might be nothing wrong with this procedure in itself; after all, this is what codifications are usually about: managing variation by means of selecting certain options out of a lar-ger number of forms used by speakers. Of necessity, the selection process involves some degree of arbitrariness and is often influenced by extra-linguistic factors, like the

efforts to emphasise and enhance the distinctiveness of the variety in question. However, this approach could hardly be reconciled with the concept of ELF as a democratic mode of communication, where users are encouraged to be proud of *their* lingua franca, and where no speakers, or their norms, are supposed to be a priori superior to others (again, bearing the intelligibility proviso in mind). Disregarding this would bring ELF one massive step towards keeping in check the polymorphous nature of EIL that it prides itself on celebrating.

Matters would of course be fairly simple if non-native English speech presented a substantial degree of homogeneity. This, however, is rather difficult to envisage in phonology. The codification work in this area will therefore be drawing on a rather unwieldy mass of linguistic material. Although Jenkins (2006a: 38) looks forward "to the day when dictionaries of English break free from their fixation with RP and GA models and, instead, provide transcripts of words spoken with these local-but-internationally-intelligible accents" [of NNS teachers of English], it is not clear whether she would like to include *all* such transcripts, spoken with *all* such accents in future dictionaries. As a person who phonetically transcribed a sizeable corpus of NNS speech herself (Scheuer 1998), I am well aware that the rendition of a single word can vary from one occasion to another even in the same individual, let alone across different speakers from various L1 backgrounds. In contrast to capturing ENL variation, where at least the phonemic representation of a lexical item is generally unproblematic, recording all types of non-native productions in pronunciation dictionaries seems utterly impracticable. If a selection process were necessary then, what would it be based on? Whatever criteria one adopted, the result would come dangerously close to implying that certain non-native accents are superior to others, and therefore are more worthy of inclusion in the printed media.

2.3. Teaching

As was evident in the previous sections, English language teaching figures prominently among the areas to be revolutionised by the arrival of the new paradigm. It is argued that the ELF usage patterns, rather than being merely an interesting and somewhat amusing new phenomenon, could potentially provide norms for ELT, and consequently "be offered as a pedagogic alternative to (but not necessarily a replacement for) traditional EFL" (Jenkins 2007: xii). However, in terms of the pedagogical substance, ELF is not nearly as revolutionary as its proponents may want to present it. Whereas the ideology and the conceptualisation of non-native English as a valid linguistic entity is fairly new, certain practices advocated in the pro-ELFish proposals have been with us – tacitly and unofficially – for a long time.

The bleak picture of the ELT scene at present, painted in those proposals, is essentially that of an EFL classroom where an exonormative model is relentlessly imposed on the learners, who are expected, or indeed forced, to slavishly copy native speaker

patterns in an ultimately vain effort to achieve (near)-native competence. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to this paradigm as Classroom A. On the other hand, one of the declared aims of ELF research is to finally provide learners with a choice, so that those who are only interested in using the language as a communicative tool can opt for a classroom where the teaching objective has shifted from compliance with the native speaker norm to international intelligibility (here, Classroom B). The reality, as usual, is not exactly black and white. In my opinion, there is at least one more important item in the collection of ELT classrooms in operation: Classroom C, which preaches A, but does B, i.e., officially enforces the NS model, but in practice adapts it substantially to the needs and skills of the students.

In terms of pronunciation, Classroom C may even represent the dominant teaching paradigm when it comes to the way English is taught in primary and secondary schools, or language courses – the environments where learners have no professional concern with phonetic accuracy. The state of affairs in the Polish ELT classroom (and I see no reason why all the other European countries would be vastly different in this respect) is perhaps best summarised by the following replies, elicited by the present author from her students in a questionnaire regarding the way they had been taught pronunciation in secondary school (Scheuer 1998):

(1) "On the whole, my teachers laid more emphasis on grammar and writing than on pronunciation";

(2) "My teacher was only concerned with the fundamental differences [between Polish and English], e.g., the correct pronunciation of <th>";

(3) "The quality of English sounds was reduced to their closest Polish equivalents, e.g., /æ/ to /ɛ/".

Clearly, the teaching practice depicted above is a far cry from a dogged persistence in foisting native speaker norms on the learners. In fact, it may be labelled a "sugar coating" tactic (cf. Jenkins 2004) in reverse: the pedagogical product actually sold in Classroom C is a local version of English, although it is marketed with a sugar coating of ENL on top.

Classroom C constitutes a sort of middle-of-the-road approach to teaching English pronunciation, where many ELFish proposals are already implemented: teachers use their judgement in trying to keep L1 transfer in check, thus neither permitting the "anything goes" scenario, nor stubbornly insisting on emulating NS speech. Naturally, they could use some help with their judgement formation, in that their choices of phonetic items to be prioritised may not necessarily be the right ones (e.g., the <th>s mentioned in comment 2), but the procedure itself seems to be largely consistent with that advocated for the ELF purposes. Admittedly, Classroom C approach is rather hypocritical, but probably no more so than is the case with Classrooms A and B: A, which implicitly lures learners into believing that native speaker competence is within their reach, and B,

which vitally depends on native speaker norms, while officially denying their relevance (which will be discussed further in Section 3.1).

The important question that presents itself at this point regards the fortunes of Classroom B, once it is officially available on the ELT market. There is obviously no way of knowing whether it will gain widespread acceptance and popularity until it actually happens, and no "would you like to…?"-type questionnaires are likely to be insightful at the present moment. While some learners may not like the idea of not aiming at native speaker English (although they very much enjoy producing their own vowels and consonants while speaking the language), some others might choose the ELF paradigm precisely because of that. This may happen, for example, in countries where resentment of English cultural and linguistic imperialism is particularly deep. However, not all students who opt for Classroom B will necessarily do it for the "right" reasons – it may simply be regarded as English made easy (which it should not be, according to its proponents), rather than English emancipated from native speaker rule. Jenkins (e.g. 2005: 205) vehemently denies charges that the LFC items are meant to be easier than the non-core items; instead she regards her proposal as an attempt to reduce the number of pronunciation features to be learnt in the EIL/ELF classroom, thus reducing the size of the task facing the student. However strongly Jenkins insists on this distinction, minimising the learning task will no doubt be consistent with most learners' definition of "easier", even though in a technical sense they may be mistaken. Therefore, even if learners flock to ELF courses, one should beware of reading too much liberation ideology into their pedagogical choices. Having two distinct classrooms, A and B, will not automatically mean perceiving ELF and ENL as separate linguistic entities, although it will widely facilitate such a conceptual split.

3. The Latin analogy[3]

A conceptual split between the native and non-native varieties of a language, in the wake of which the latter successfully acquires a life of its own, is not without a historical precedent. Latin experienced such a rupture when its international version became standardised and parted company with its native varieties in the early 9th century.

According to Wright (2002 and 2004), whose perspective – not necessarily uncontroversial – I adopt in this paper, the perceptual distinction between Latin and Early Romance was an accidental and artificial outcome of the spelling and pronunciation reforms undertaken during the so-called Carolingian Renaissance. Most importantly, it was decreed that in Gaul (a native-Latin-speaking country), in official contexts, Latin texts should be read out as if they represented phonetic script, i.e., giving a separate sound to every single written letter, which was no longer the case in natural speech.

---

[3] For reasons of space I am unable to properly explore the Latin analogy theme here. A fuller treatment of the topic will be offered in Scheuer (forthcoming).

This – so Wright (2002: 125) points out – was tantamount to the creation of a bilingual situation almost overnight, in that a divide was established between the language that was actually spoken at the time, versus the "new" pronunciation, which corresponded to traditional writing. From then on, the two kinds of Latin starting living their separate lives. While the former, i.e. native-speaker Latin, went on to diverge into the respective Romance languages (and in this sense remained very much alive and well), the latter, i.e., Medieval Latin, became the language of international communication, which was no longer anyone's mother tongue. Paradoxically, it was precisely this learned, and to a large extent artificial, linguistic creation that preserved the original name, and ultimately became what we now tend to think of as Latin proper, regarding it as a natural extension of the classical language.

Although the circumstances and the mechanisms underlying the functioning of the two world languages are obviously very different, we may be witnessing harbingers of major changes in the status of foreigners' English, not entirely unlike the fortunes of Medieval Latin. What follows is a brief comparison between some crucial aspects of the operation of Latin, versus English, as an International Language.

3.1. Attitude to native speaker varieties

3.1.1. English as an International Language

One of the recurrent arguments against using the native speaker paradigm in ELT is that the very concept of native speaker is fuzzy: "if [...] there is no satisfactory characterization of the term native speaker, then it is foolish to accept the construct of native speaker as a model of competence" (McKay 2002: 31). However, if the concept of a native speaker is unclear and hence inappropriate as a reference model, it is hard to see why a model drawing on linguistic data stemming from non-native speakers should fare much better in this respect. After all, if it is so difficult to define a native speaker and his norms, it should be just about as difficult to define a *non*-native speaker and his norms, but – remarkably – in the pro-ELF discourse this is rarely, if ever, presented as an obstacle to producing a valid description of non-native English.

The linguistic behaviour of L1 speakers of English – the general sound patterns, basic grammatical structures and vocabulary, etc. – constitutes the essence of ELF. By Jenkins's (2000: 131) own admittance, the Lingua Franca Core "is grounded in RP and GA". This grounding is perfectly understandable, as nobody claims to be creating a new linguistic code from scratch here. However, what is much less understandable is why it comes in one parcel with the insistence on clear distinctness of ELF from ENL, and the demands that lingua franca use of English should not be regarded as a function of ENL (cf. Cogo 2008: 60). One way to look at Jenkins's LFC is to consider it as a list of concessions on the use of ENL, i.e., where, how, and to what extent the user may depart from native speaker norms without jeopardising intelligibility. This, however, implies

familiarity with, and acknowledges the relevance of, native speaker norms. To take the example of vowel quality (a non-core area): the ELF speaker can employ his L2 regional – but consistent – realisations (Jenkins 2007: 24). This obviously does not specify anything in itself. Under-specification of this kind is, again, understandable ("the Lingua Franca Core is not a model"), but it also means that in order to produce his own L2 regional approximation of an ENL vowel, the learner first has to know what the ENL vowel sounds like. Art students encouraged to paint their own versions of Picasso's works must first get acquainted with Picasso's works, or with previous copies thereof, but this still means that Picasso's works are relevant to their task. Presumably, a Polish ELF student trying to pronounce a word like 'make' will be expected to produce something resembling the closing diphthong /eɪ/, rather than an open vowel like /a/, which demonstrates that native speaker habits are indispensable in providing ELF with phonetic shape.

There is a dearth of information concerning the details of exactly how English as a Lingua Franca would function as a valid pedagogical alternative in its own right. The majority of publications on the subject seem to be devoted primarily to theoretical and ideological considerations, rather than to the down-to-earth teaching process envisaged for the future ELF classroom. Fortunately, Jenkins has recently filled in an important blank by explaining that "[o]ne frequent misinterpretation of the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) is that it is a model for imitation. This is not at all the case. [...] The model, then, is not the LFC but the local teacher whose accent incorporates both the core features and the local versions of the non-core items" (Jenkins 2007: 25). It is not entirely clear, however, which speakers and which models have inspired the local teacher's accent. Since the ELF teacher does not seem to be a product of the ELF classroom himself, it is quite likely that he will have ENL as the source of his reference accent, which – although not faithfully reproduced – will determine his rendition of the non-core areas. Therefore, it looks like the ghost of the native speaker is still lurking in the shadows. On the other hand, if the above argument is refuted – i.e., if the impact of ENL on the teacher's accent is indeed limited – one may stumble at the following problem: why should the learners be made to imitate this (= the teacher's) particular subset of available ELF options? Would that not imply that his personal choices of phonetic realisations of English vowels and consonants are somehow superior to others? After all, it should be borne in mind that "if [...] EIL belongs to its users, there is no reason why some speakers should provide standards for others" (McKay 2002: 126). It is worth reiterating that we are talking here about *imitation* of specific ELF accents and idiolects, rather than simple exposure to them, which – it is generally agreed on both sides of the discussion – should involve as many types of accents as possible.

To sum up, the account of the relationship between ELF and ENL, offered by pro-ELF scholars, is rather incomplete and not entirely consistent. The fundamental paradox seems to be that native speakers and their norms are officially rejected as irrelevant to lingua franca English, although the whole mode(l) of international communication is based on their speech.

3.1.2. Latin as an International Language (LIL)

Learned Latin was initiated by Charlemagne's reformers, who essentially "invented" it "as an artificial and mainly literary entity distinct from spoken Romance" (Farrell 2001: 15). As such, it was genuinely independent of native speaker Latin of the day, so it could – or indeed, had to – be considered in its own right from the very beginning. In an effort to restore Classical Latin, the grammar and vocabulary of the reformed language were based on ancient texts, although new lexical creations – different in different countries – were gradually developed, as Medieval Latin spread to areas outside Gaul. Most crucially, LIL pronunciation was derived directly from the written form, in terms of assigning a sound to each and every letter. Since speakers from various L1 backgrounds had different notions of exactly what sounds these written letters represented, failures in international intelligibility (tackled below) were inevitable.

The split between LIL and native Latin was also enhanced by the fact that within a few decades after the reforms began, the two codes were making use not only of different rules of pronunciation, but also of divergent written forms, which stemmed from the early attempts at writing Early Romance phonetically (Wright 2002).

3.2. International intelligibility

3.2.1. English

Since the very concept of English as a Lingua Franca – both in terms of a pedagogical paradigm and a mode of communication between NNSs of English – is constructed on the foundations of international intelligibility, which therefore features prominently in various publications on the subject, there is no need to dissect the notion here. That intelligibility depends on a complex array of factors – some of which have to do with the listener, rather than the speaker – is a platitude: here one could mention the listeners' proficiency level, their familiarity with a particular accent, and even their willingness to understand the speaker (Chambers and Trudgill 1998: 4). Therefore, when adopting contribution to international intelligibility as the main inclusion criterion in the ELF/LFC research, the fact must not be overlooked that it will always remain a fairly subjective and somewhat elusive phenomenon.

3.2.2. Latin

In spite of being devoid of "baby talk", Learned Latin was not a monolith. Each country gradually developed its own patterns of usage, to the point of compromising intelligibility across national boundaries. One of the stories illustrating this breakdown in communication involves Arthur, Prince of Wales (King Henry VIII's elder brother), and his

bride-to-be, Catherine of Aragon. They had successfully corresponded in Latin prior to meeting in person in 1499, when it turned out that they were unable to speak to each other, since they had learned different pronunciations of Latin (Fraser 1993). This ties in with Mayer's (1997) assertion that various local accents of LIL had grown mutually unintelligible by the beginning of the 16th century. An effort to improve the situation was made by Erasmus of Rotterdam, who proposed a model for LIL pronunciation, grounded in certain ideas about Classical Latin phonetics. The model was adopted by some radical academicians at Cambridge University, where it met with such great resistance that it was entirely forbidden by a university edict in 1542 (repealed 16 years later), "with penalties that included the beating of offending students and the expulsion of offending masters" (Mayer 1997: 15). Of prime interest is the motivation behind the imposition of the edict: followers of the Erasmian model were apparently unintelligible to their elders. As for the "modern" Latin phonetics, no common international standard ever emerged, although, in the non-Protestant world, the Vatican version of Italo-Latin was influential (Mayer 1997: 15).

3.3. Derision and judgement

3.3.1. English

One of the concomitants of native speakers currently enjoying a superior status within the English-speaking community is that they are in a position to pass judgement on non-native use, and the non-native user, of the language. In extreme cases, the non-native speaker and his speech may become objects of derision. Needless to say, these types of attitude are distressing, especially if displayed by a person who has never made an effort to learn a foreign language himself. If the official inauguration of the ELF paradigm – which is aimed at democratising the ELT industry in terms of minimising the advantageous position of native speakers – eliminated such behaviours on the part of NSs, that would be marvellous, but it is difficult to see how this could be achieved. There are no laws against discrimination on the basis of foreign accent, so if some native speakers choose – regrettably – to be rude about foreign-accented English, why would they make a generous exception in the case of an ELF accent? After all, as Seidlhofer (2002: 272) observes, ELF speakers will still be "making use of a code which is recognizably English (since we *are* talking about *English* as a lingua franca)", so they will still run the risk of being set down simply as linguistic foreigners attempting – unsuccessfully – to sound like native speakers.

It looks like the most important weapon intended to shield ELF users from native speakers' derision might ultimately be their self-confidence. Presumably, the learners (and their non-native teachers) would be encouraged to take no notice of the unfriendly reactions their language may provoke, for the simple reason that those reactions are sorely misplaced: EFL and ELF are two different entities with different criteria of cor-

rectness, therefore it is not a native speaker's place to pass judgements on ELF (I raised a similar point in my 2005 article). The change of the teaching paradigm will automatically reassure NNSs as to the validity and appropriateness of their speech, in that "[i]nstead of being considered speakers of sub-standard varieties, the teachers now become speakers of the target standard" (Kirkpatrick 2006: 76).[4] Attractive as this prospect sounds, it bears a lot of resemblance to a magic wand scenario, according to which ELF users' self-esteem will rise dramatically overnight. The ELF paradigm would undoubtedly create a very pleasant, sheltered classroom experience for NNS learners and teachers alike. While a non-threatening classroom environment is certainly conducive to learning, giving too much emphasis to affective factors like these, and ignoring certain unpleasant aspects of reality, all too often make ELF pronouncements look like a manifesto of a motivational course rather than a new syllabus proposal. In the world outside the classroom, ELFish users may not be sheltered from derision, whether justified or not. I am not claiming that the new pedagogical proposal would necessarily *create* these problems, but I do not believe it is likely to solve them, part of the reason being – once again – that it is too heavily grounded in native varieties, and it runs the risk of being perceived and judged in reference to ENL.

Related to the above issues is the question of how native speakers in general will be meant to behave in conversational exchanges with non-natives, once a distinction is introduced between EFL vs. ELF learners. The two groups will have very different expectations, and also very different notions of what constitutes polite behaviour, in this respect. While the ELF speaker will expect productive adjustments and no correction from the native interlocutor, his EFL counterpart will generally appreciate explicit correction (provided it is done in a thoughtful way), and could interpret obvious productive adjustments as patronising, if not downright offensive. However, the problem that emerges at this point is: how is the native speaker to know whether his interlocutor is an EFL or an ELF speaker, other than through asking explicit, and rather awkward questions? After all, the linguistic output may be very similar for both types of learners. For example, forms like "an information" or [zis] (<this>), which are considered correct in ELF but not in EFL, are frequently produced by learners who *do* aim at ENL. In other words, the speech of a given individual will not always serve as proof of identity.

The image of the non-native speaker community conveyed in some of the earlier ELF publications was largely that of one big loving family, united by a common purpose – to communicate with one another – and faced with the same problem – native speakers' unquestioned hegemony. Jenkins (2000: 160) expressed the belief that "L2 speakers tend to be rather less judgmental over each other's pronunciation of English [...] than do L1 speakers". Achieving inter-speaker acceptability among ELF users was principally taken for granted – Jenkins suggested that if a problem arose at all, it should be minimal. This statement might have come as a surprise to a reader with first-hand

---

[4] Kirkpatrick's comment refers to Outer Circle countries, but later in the same article he applies the same kind of reasoning to ELF (Kirkpatrick 2006: 79).

experience of being a non-native speaker of English. Teasing, ridicule and irritation at the way speakers from other (and sometimes even the same) L1 backgrounds use English have always been common within the international community. Germans laughing at the French, the French laughing at Italians, Poles maintaining that all L2 speakers have strong foreign accents in English... except for Poles – none of these reactions would be hard to come across, however unjustified they may be. Jenkins's initial optimism seems to have evaporated in view of her further empirical research, which revealed critical attitudes towards other speakers' English expressed by NNSs. However, she puts it down to "standard NS English language ideology", which "may be affecting NNSs' attitudes to and beliefs about their own Englishes" (Jenkins 2007: 59).

While this statement may certainly be true, it has the potential to be rather misleading. The reader is given to understand that there is something unique about standard NS *English* language ideology in that it places native speakers on a pedestal. Personally, I have never heard about any living language ideology that would not make native speaker standards the models to be aimed at by L2 learners. It is one thing to say that certain practices are undesirable in the case of the teaching of English (although they may be perfectly acceptable in the case of the teaching of other languages, like Spanish), it is quite another to imply that these practices are actually *limited* to the teaching of English. To quote Rajagopalan (1999: 205), "it is in the very nature of human languages, all of them, to be driven by power inequalities". It would thus be another instance of "monstrification" of the ELT reality to claim that the advantageous position enjoyed by (at least some) NSs is a distinct feature of English; whether one considers it fair or not is quite a different matter.

3.3.2. Latin

The story of Latin demonstrates that the phenomenon of English occupying a position of power among other languages represents a difference of degree, but not of principle, as "social and linguistic struggles to resist the encroachments of English are not battles against demons never seen before. [...A]ll these things have happened before, and will no doubt happen again: it is an old play we are looking at here, a play whose plot endures while the cast changes – a kind of eternal *Mousetrap*" (Edwards 2001: 5).

Similarly, the phenomenon of native speaker standards being revered as the model of perfection is also well documented for Latin. The concept of standard speech, however, was extremely monocentric in the case of the ancient language, as "correct latinity [was] measured by the standards established by a few generations of the ruling class of a single city" (Farrell 2001: 40), and this state of affairs was to continue forever afterwards. Condescending, or even hostile, attitudes towards non-standard spoken usage – in the speech of foreigners, but also native Latin speakers from Italian regions outside Rome – are well attested in some accounts dating from the Republican or early imperial period (Adams 2003).

What is of prime importance in the present context, however, is that the tradition of denigrating the speech of fellow Latin speakers survived the language itself. Mayer (1997: 15), commenting on the problem of lack of international intelligibility, which became evident at the beginning of the 16th c., asserts that the influence exerted by the respective national vernaculars on Italo-Latin, Franco-Latin, Anglo-Latin etc. pronunciation was powerful enough to cause "confusion, amusement and derision at international gatherings". This clearly demonstrates that even if native speakers are considered extinct or simply non-existent (Learned Latin by definition had no NSs), judgement and derision may still be alive and well. In the absence of a living native model to serve as a point of reference, speakers are likely to pass value judgements on others, using their own notions of how things "should" be done. There is therefore little justification for entertaining the hope that once a native-speaker-free kind of English emerges, all notions of ridicule and inequality will magically disappear.

4. Conclusion

While some scholars view proposals for the new teaching paradigm as attempts to make "a model out of the muddle of deviant forms to be found in ELF" (Prodromou 2007: 52), I see them essentially as attempts to have your cake and eat it: to make ELF an entity independent of ENL, while at the same time relying on ENL for vital linguistic substance; to offer learners an alternative to the existing model without offering them a *model*; to have all the advantages of adopting, and adapting, a natural language as the lingua franca (as opposed to an artificial code like Esperanto) without having any of the downsides, like the burden of native speakers. As we learn from the Latin case, there is always a price to pay for the full independence of an international language. ELF – as it is conceptualised at the present moment – does not appear to be self-sufficient or independent enough to escape comparisons with English as a Native Language. L2 learners of English are still likely to see the two – ENL and ELF – as instantiations of the same entity, without necessarily wanting or trying to copy the linguistic behaviour of native speakers.

Grounding a mode(l) of communication in a living language and simultaneously decreeing that native speakers are irrelevant seems rather excessive. In my opinion, it is precisely this heavy ideological baggage, evident in the vociferous "beware native speaker norms" ideology, that has unfavourably disposed many people towards what could have been a very welcome and a perfectly sound proposal to (a) describe and document NNS–NNS speech, and (b) pinpoint the areas that are the most crucial to international intelligibility. I argued myself (Scheuer 2007) a serious need for a list of priorities in teaching English phonetics, as even highly motivated students and teachers will necessarily have to be selective in terms of which areas of the L2 sound system they attend to in particular. A fully-fledged, codified ELF model (or a host of different, regional models like Euro-English) could become an important actor on the ELT scene

of the future, and also pave the way for a conceptual separation between international and native Englishes. But in order for this to happen, speakers would first have to accept ELF as a *model*. Trudgill and Hannah (2008: 8) argue that if ELF varieties – relatively stable and different form ENL – indeed develop, they could be "used as teaching models if teachers and learners wanted this". However, the latter does not automatically follow from the former: the development of distinct ELF varieties does not in itself preclude the possibility of non-native speakers still looking to ENL varieties for models. Needless to say, time will show which route(s) English and ELT, as we know them today, will ultimately follow.

A fact that is often lost from sight is that we have virtually no data on how ELF-educated speakers interact and how easy they find it to communicate with one another. The subjects of corpora like VOICE are obviously ELF speakers in terms of their linguistic background (they are NNSs of English), their communicative needs (mostly to talk to other NNSs) and their linguistic output (in many ways different from that of NSs), but not in terms of how they have been *taught* English. If we follow one of the central arguments advanced in favour of the elaboration of a new paradigm – i.e., that the only model that has so far been offered to learners is ENL – we reach the logical conclusion that all the NNS speech data recorded so far are products of the old educational regime. Therefore, one cannot dismiss out of hand the possibility that certain non-core items that the speakers control passively (and which therefore do not surface in their actual productions registered in the corpora) are crucially important, or at least helpful, in their interactions with fellow NNSs. The exclusion of such items from the new pedagogical paradigm might make international communication more difficult. Therefore, no strong conclusions can as yet be drawn as to what truly does or does not underpin international intelligibility.

The VOICE corpus is obviously a much needed linguistic product and tool, but one of the most important things it demonstrates is how traditionally educated learners of English find a way to communicate with each other without faithfully copying the speech habits of native speakers, but with the help of accommodation strategies and negotiation of meaning. Like they always did, even long decades before anyone decided to throw them a lifeline in the form of (an) ELF.

REFERENCES

Adams, J.N. 2003. *Bilingualism and the Latin language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chambers, J.K. and P. Trudgill. 1998. *Dialectology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cogo, A. 2008. "English as a Lingua Franca: Form follows function". *English Today* 24(3). 58–61.

Dziubalska-Kołaczyk, K. and J. Przedlacka. 2005. *English pronunciation models: A changing scene.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Edwards, J. 2001. "No good past Dover". *English Today* 17(4). 3–12.

Farrell, J. 2001. *Latin language and Latin culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fraser, A. 1993. *The wives of Henry VIII.* New York: Vintage Books USA.

Graddol, D. 2006. *English Next.*
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/files/documents/learning-research-english-next.pdf> (Last accessed 15 Nov. 2009.)

Jenkins, J. 2000. *The phonology of English as an International Language.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. 2004. "Beware the natives and their norms". *The Guardian*, 22 Jan. 2004.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2004/jan/22/tefl.wordsandlanguage>

Jenkins, J. 2005. "Misinterpretation, bias, and resistance to change: The case of the Lingua Franca Core". In: Dziubalska-Kołaczyk, K. and J. Przedlacka (eds.). 199–210.

Jenkins, J. 2006a. "Global intelligibility and local diversity: Possibility or paradox?" In: Rubdy, R. and M. Saraceni (eds.). 32–39.

Jenkins, J. 2006b. "Current perspectives on teaching world Englishes and English as a lingua franca". *TESOL Quarterly* 40. 157–181.

Jenkins, J. 2007. *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and identity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. and B. Seidlhofer. 2000. "Global English: The European lessons". *The Guardian Weekly – Learning English.* 19–25 April 2000.

Kirkpatrick, A. 2006. "Which model of English: Native-speaker, nativised or Lingua Franca?" In: Rubdy, R. and M. Saraceni (eds.). 71–83.

MacKenzie, I. 2002. "Language teaching and the uses of so-called English as a Lingua Franca". Paper presented at the seminar "English as a Lingua Franca in Europe", ESSE 6, Strasbourg, 3 Sep. 2002.

Mayer, R. 1997. "Metropolitan Latin". *English Today* 13(2). 11–17.

McKay, S.L. 2002. *Teaching English as an International Language.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Prodromou, L. 2007. "Is ELF a variety of English?" *English Today* 23(2). 47–53.

Rajagopalan, K. 1999. "Of EFL teachers, conscience, and cowardice". *ELT Journal* 53(3). 200–206.

Rajagopalan, K. 2009. "'World English' and the Latin analogy: Where we get it wrong". *English Today* 25(2). 49–54.

Rubdy, R. and M. Saraceni (eds.). 2006. *English in the world. Global rules, global roles.* London: Continuum.

Saraceni, M. 2008. "English as a Lingua Franca: Between form and function". *English Today* 24(2). 20–26.

Scheuer, S. 1998. Interference-motivated pronunciation errors in Polish students of English. A corpus-based study. (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań.)

Scheuer, S. 2005. "Why native speakers are (still) relevant?" In: Dziubalska-Kołaczyk, K. and J. Przedlacka (eds.). 111–130.

Scheuer, S. 2007. "Why certain errors seem to matter more than others, or: what is wrong with native speakers being right?" *Speak Out!* 38. 17–21.

Scheuer, S. Forthcoming. "How could English *really* become a new Latin?" In: Henderson, A. (ed.), *English pronunciation: Issues and practices. Conference proceedings of EPIP I.* Chambéry: Presses de l'Université de Savoie.

Seidlhofer, B. 2001. "Towards making 'Euro-English' a linguistic reality". *English Today* 17(4). 14–16.

Seidlhofer, B. 2002. "The shape of things to come? Some basic questions about English as a Lingua Franca". In: Knapp, K. and C. Meierkord (eds.), *Lingua franca communication*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 269–302.

Seidlhofer, B. 2005. "Language variation and change: The case of English as a Lingua Franca". In: Dziubalska-Kołaczyk, K. and J. Przedlacka (eds.). 59–75.

Seidlhofer, B. 2006. "English as a Lingua Franca in the Expanding Circle: What it isn't". In: Rubdy, R. and M. Saraceni (eds.). 40–50.

Trudgill, P. and J. Hannah. 2008. *International English. A guide to the varieties of Standard English.* (5th ed.) London: Hodder Education.

Tucker, G.R. 2003. "Language contact and change: Summary observations". *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 23. 243–249.

Wright, R. 2002. *A sociophilological study of Late Latin*. Turnhout: Brepols.

Wright, R. 2004. "Latin and English as world languages". *English Today* 20(4). 3–19.

Address correspondence to:
Sylwia Scheuer
Institut du Monde Anglophone
Université Paris 3
France
sylwia_scheuer@yahoo.fr