The Language Teacher

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English as a Lingua Franca and current issues in language teaching: An interview with Martin Dewey

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English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has not only generated a lot of interest among applied linguists and researchers, it has also attracted a great deal of attention among language teachers in recent years. What is particularly noteworthy is that ELF research has radically altered our way of thinking about language and the use of English in today's globalized world (see, e.g., Dewey, 2013a, 2013b; Sung, 2013a, 2013b). It is therefore important for language teachers to understand more about ELF and its relevance for language teaching. In this interview, Martin Dewey, an expert in English as a Lingua Franca from King's College, London, shares his ideas about the potential impact of ELF research on language teaching and teacher education. He previously taught English as a second language in Italy, Mexico, and the UK, and has trained language teachers on several pre-service and in-service programmes of teacher education. He is currently investigating ELF, and compiling a corpus of spoken ELF discourse for the purpose of describing and theorising current developments in the lexis, grammar, and pragmatics of English in lingua franca settings. He has published extensively on work in ELF, and is co-author with Alessia Cogo of *Analyzing English as a Lingua Franca: A Corpus-driven Investigation* (2012).

MATTHEW SUNG (MS): To start off, can you briefly tell us about what ELF is and what are the key findings in ELF research?

MARTIN DEWEY (MD): ELF cannot be seen as a variety or group of varieties of English. From a functional perspective, ELF is viewed as the use of English in a contact language setting, predominantly between speakers who do not share a first lingua-cultural background, but this can also of course include speakers who would conventionally be defined as native speakers of English. The main consensus among researchers working on ELF is that the way English is used in ELF contexts is particularly dynamic, emergent, diverse, and often multilingual. So speakers in ELF settings do not adhere to a particular set of norms but will transform English in certain ways as they draw on the resources available to them. As to the ontological status of ELF, i.e., what is the English language that ELF users share, this is still a relatively open, empirical question. However, this is certainly not unique to ELF research. Much sociolinguistic research has been concerned with accounting for language in multilingual and multicultural

settings in which the traditional categories and associations of language, culture, country, and native speakers appear to break down. I believe that an ELF perspective on language and communication offers a more empowering view of English communication than a native speaker idealisation of language.

MS: In general, how do you think ELF research can make a contribution to language teaching?

MD: In real terms, so far ELF hasn't impacted on language teaching in the way it should. I think this is largely to do with the language ideologies underpinning existing principles and practice. Clearly there are many implications of ELF research for language teaching, and these have been debated and discussed at length. Moving beyond implication towards application though is a difficult matter, as the way language is conceptualized in education is still very much based on a rather static notion of pre-determined language forms. There is a need to move beyond the conventional modeling of language in classrooms, by for example expanding the number of models presented, such as say Malaysian English and Singaporean English, perhaps alongside British English, if this is relevant. However, as ELF is not a variety in the conventional sense and is not tied to a particular setting, and because it tends to be rather transient, transformative, and dynamic in nature, we need to rethink the way we orient to language models. So I think there is a need to model the language in the classroom in way that is much less norm focused, and certainly much less attached to established prestige varieties (British and American English), and I believe there should be more of a focus on communicative strategies.

MS: What do you think about the current awareness of ELF among language teachers and teacher educators? How do you think language teachers are coming to terms with the idea of ELF?

MD: Awareness of ELF among language teachers and teacher educators is undoubtedly on the increase—more so in some contexts than in others, and among some practitioners than others. However, even when awareness of ELF is actively promoted in teacher education, the level of engagement with an ELF-oriented pedagogic perspective has typically been limited. Uptake of ELF in terms of practical pedagogic relevance has in my view been restricted by longstanding conventions in the profession, which seems constrained by existing practices that make it difficult to implement change in language education (especially with regard to what is included in the syllabus). In short, the transformative potential of ELF is in many contexts not being realized as a result of a strong normative orientation to language.

MS: In what ways should language teachers adopt an ELF approach in their language teaching?

MD: Teachers should be given the opportunity and be encouraged to adopt a critical approach to any characterisation of language, communication or pedagogy. However, such a critical perspective would make clear the mismatch between the ideology of much (but not all) ELT in its focus on an idealised educated monolingual native speaker of English, and the reality of English language use and teaching for the majority of its multilingual educated non-native users.

MS: Textbooks often play an important role in classroom teaching. What impact does ELF research have on materials development in the ELT industry and on the use of these materials by language teachers?

MD: Textbooks continue to be largely based on a syllabus that is determined by grammatical structures. There is a need for a much stronger focus on pragmatics, rather than just grammatical structures. We certainly need to go beyond presenting students simply with British or American English based grammar and lexis to expand the number of models of English currently presented in published materials. The textbook market is now dominated by a handful of large UK and US publishers, which inevitably promote a particular kind of English, but which may not be particularly international in outlook, and which therefore are not a particularly accurate representation of the way English is used in so many of the settings in which it is being learnt. What we need therefore are far more locally developed materials.

MS: Language testing often has a considerable influence on both language teaching and learning. What changes do you think should be made to current language testing practices in light of the ELF research findings? What recommendations would you like to make to international testing bodies such as IELTS?

MD: There needs to be much more acceptance of non-native varieties to begin with. But also, as I said in relation to language models, we have to move beyond such a normative attachment to language in the way we assess learners' use of English. We need to be less fixated on accuracy and a lot more interested in how we go about determining communicative effectiveness. The present problem with testing is that it has been concerned with a notional top end, which usually results in descriptors in Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), etc., making rather vague reference to native-like accuracy/fluency/command/speed, etc., but without defining what this means—partly because nativeness itself is notional and cannot really be defined in linguistic terms. The concept is an idealized construct. Of course, there needs to be clarity and consensus about what is being tested and about how proficiency should be defined and measured. But I am entirely unconvinced that the CEFR and our current attachment to native-speaker norms provide that. Again, we need to think imaginatively about devising alternative approaches. Therefore, ELF requires us to radically rethink current testing practice.

MS: Inevitably, the phenomenon of ELF has impacted on language teacher education, especially in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. What do you think is the impact of ELF research on language teacher education?

MD: Again, this is similar to what I have said about the implications on pedagogy more generally. However, there have been some developments here: for example, the main teaching awards accredited by Cambridge University now contain reference to World Englishes and ELF in their current syllabus guidelines, both for pre-service and in-service programmes. There might not have been much uptake yet, but at least having these topics written into syllabus documents is a good starting point. We need, in my view, much more of a focus on sociolinguistics in initial teacher training qualifications, and there certainly needs to be some discussion of linguistic diversity. I believe that it is important to promote greater critical language awareness among teachers and greater critical reflection on dominant approaches. In particular, ELF research can contribute to the continued dialogue between practice and theory in offering approaches to understanding language and communication that deal with the complexity and fluidity of communication in global settings. In my view, theory and research are valuable not because they can directly inform current practice, but because they offer practitioners the opportunity to develop greater awareness of a set of issues, thus contributing to their own theories of practice and enabling teachers to make informed decisions. I also feel that ELF research has been valuable in opening up the debate about current approaches, objectives and models of learning/teaching.

MS: What changes do you think should be implemented in current pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes in order to prepare teachers to cope with challenges posed by ELF?

MD: Based on my experience of pre-service teacher training, pragmatic awareness is one of the areas novice teachers struggle with the most. It should in my view therefore be important for all teacher education programmes to include somewhere in their syllabuses a focus on the importance of these strategies in communication, such as repetition, paraphrasing, recasting, use of body language and other pragmatic strategies. In most of the present teacher training programmes, however, there seems unfortunately to be little space for pragmatics.

MS: Coming to the final question, what are some of the future research directions in ELF?

MD: I think ELF research is now diversifying in a number of interesting ways. For example, researchers are beginning to look into several new contexts of use, collecting empirical data regarding the use of ELF in for example the Middle East and other Arabic speaking contexts. ELF research has to date predominantly been based in Europe, and more recently in East and South East Asia. We are now beginning to move away from this traditional base into new contexts. As well as the Middle East and other settings, this will involve looking very specifically at say ELF in business interactions in Saudi Arabia or at investigating ELF in relation to academic writing and so on. Also, in terms of pedagogy, there needs to be a lot more research that involves language teachers, and research that looks closely at how adopting an ELF perspective would work in practice. In particular, we might consider how ELF corpus data could be drawn on as a resource in the language classroom. We need to encourage teachers to look at how they might devise materials and learning tasks that better reflect the realities of the role of English in lingua

franca interaction. And this would also involve encouraging teachers to reflect further on how they orient to English and how they conceptualize their subject knowledge as language teachers. In particular, I feel ELF provides an interesting opportunity to further reduce the perceived gap between theory and research on the one hand and current practice on the other. And for me it is a valuable way of rethinking that relationship.

MS: Thank you very much for your time and your very insightful ideas! I am sure that ELF research will have a lasting impact on language teaching in the years to come.

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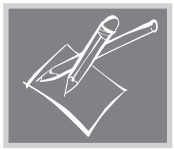

TLT RESOURCES
MY SHARE

…with Glenn Magee & Jonathan Reingold

To contact the editors:
<my-share@jalt-publications.org>

We welcome submissions for the My Share column. Submissions should be up to 700 words describing a successful technique or lesson plan you have used which can be replicated by readers, and should conform to the My Share format (see <jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare/guidelines>).

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Welcome to another edition of *My Share*. This month introduces two new co-editors for the *My Share* column. Glenn Magee is from the United Kingdom and lives in Ise city. His current research interest is the implementation of foreign language policy in Japanese elementary schools. Jonathan Reingold is from the United States and currently resides in Taki, also in Mie Prefecture.

There are probably lesson ideas out there you're fascinated by, those rare strokes of genius that you frequently search for and are compelled to gather, save, and treasure. Whatever they may be, collecting these ideas together and sharing them with others is a great way to connect with other teachers and lesson plan enthusiasts, even if it is just to show off your creativity and expertise. (Here at *My Share* we are all for showing off.)

In this month's issue, Jamie G. Sturges introduces us to a university level creative-writing