

The English-as-a-lingua-franca approach

Linguistic fair play?*

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English has spread so widely around the world that its native speakers are now outnumbered by its non-native speakers. Recent publications have shown that the dominance of English has led to severe disadvantages for non-Anglophones. Several options of language policy have been presented to find fair and democratic approaches to international communication. Their scope includes different variants of multilingualism, the limitation of the number of languages used in international communication, restriction to receptive skills, the introduction of a system of compensation, initiatives to revive an ancient language (e.g. Latin), and the use of an artificial language. The model English as a Lingua Franca, the idea that the English spoken by non-native speakers is a variety in its own right whose norms are established by its users instead of native speakers, is among these proposals. The paper discusses the extent to which this approach seems to be feasible. Despite its appeal among learners and speakers of English as a foreign language, a number of factors seem to hamper its chances of realization. These factors involve a complexity of issues, such as traditions in foreign language learning and teaching, the heterogeneity of lingua franca communication and psychological reservations.

Keywords: English, international communication, lingua franca, native speaker, foreign language learning

English as a means of international communication

English occupies a position of undisputed leadership among the languages of the world. It has spread so widely that its native speakers are now outnumbered by its non-native speakers. It is widely accepted that this outstanding status has extralinguistic reasons. It is not the properties of a language (be it its euphonic traits, its supposed reputation for being easy to learn or its tendency to include foreign vocabulary) that make it a means of global communication but its speakers'

dominance in military, economic, political and cultural spheres. Language choice is determined by power. This applies to the ruling languages of the past (Latin under the *Pax Romana*, Spanish, English, Dutch, German, and French during the era of European expansion) and it is even more so for English. Following the British colonial period, English did not fade with empire, but has been swept along, because the United States as the next world power was also English-speaking.¹

The term *lingua franca* is commonly used to describe the present position of English. As is well known, the term as a *nomen proprium* (meaning literally ‘Frankish language’) originally referred to a vernacular adopted as an auxiliary language among traders (who spoke different languages) along the Mediterranean coast between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. It was based on a Romance tongue and was mixed with, above all, Arabic and Greek elements (cf. Barotchi 1994: 2211, Beneke 1995: 61).² Today *lingua franca*, as a *nomen appellativum*, describes a language used by people who do not speak the same native language. UNESCO defined *lingua franca* in 1953 as “a language which is used habitually by people whose mother tongues are different in order to facilitate communication between them” (Barotchi 1994: 2211). As this definition shows and as Samarin (1987: 371) emphasises, it is on the basis of function that a language is considered to be a *lingua franca*. His typology includes three types of *lingua francas*: ‘natural’, ‘pidginized’, and ‘planned’ languages. Samarin, however, does not point out that the type of language is decisive for the character of communication that is realized. If natural languages are spoken beyond their native boundaries, this leads to asymmetrical usage for a segment of its speakers. English today is, no doubt, a *lingua franca* in the sense of UNESCO’s broad definition, but it is at the same time a native language of a substantial subset of participants in the communication that is expressed in it. This leads to communicative inequality (Phillipson 2003: 40).

Ammon (1994: 10–11) describes the situation as “unfair competition”, and mentions various facets of the advantage for native speakers:

This advantage [...] is indeed enormous. It includes huge additional incomes through language teaching, translating, interpreting and text correcting, and it also includes communicative superiority in important situations, faster access to decisive information, and the like. In a competitive world, these advantages for the lingua-franca-providing language community are at the same time disadvantages for the other language communities. To illustrate this with just one example: An English official at the political bodies of the EU needs, as a rule, much less energy and time to read the numerous texts in English which are part of the agenda of the meetings than does his/her Italian or German colleague. S/he is less exhausted and finds extra time for other activities. In addition, s/he understands the texts more precisely and can express her/himself more articulately at the meetings.

Recent publications have discussed the problem of linguistic inequality especially in the field of scientific communication. Carli and Ammon (2007) show that English has become the dominant language in science and that scholars are forced to use it if they want to be acknowledged in their fields. Non-Anglophones are put at a disadvantage in this situation as they have to invest a great deal of time, money and energy into language learning and may still communicate with difficulty. Their texts are, at least, not as linguistically refined as those produced by native speakers and, therefore, do not have the same impact on their colleagues, for example during scientific discussions at an international conference. In addition, non-Anglophones encounter problems in publishing their research results, as native speakers often function as gatekeepers (Ammon 2007: 124).

The series of lectures published by Gnutzmann (2008) deals with the use of English in academia. It tackles the question to what extent the global reduction to only one principal language, English, results in a reduction of discourse patterns and a tendency towards a unilateral, Anglo-American-dominated approach to research. Gnutzmann (76) introduces the term ‘cultural imperialism’ and defines it as “a concept representing the practice of promoting the culture of one nation and, very often, actively imposing it on another”.

It is, however, not only in the field of politics or science that communicative inequality becomes noticeable. The privileged position of the English language is ubiquitous in a large number of domains. It permeates everyday life with influences that can be felt practically from the cradle to the grave. Let me conclude this section with an illustrative anecdote. Recently I happened to overhear a conversation between two young women sitting behind me in a tram in my hometown of Leipzig. One of them, obviously an English native speaker, was asked how her son had managed to adapt himself to his new life in Germany and especially to his kindergarten. The young mother answered that Mikey was fine and loved his kindergarten. As it was an international kindergarten, with the majority of children being German, it should be added that ‘international’ means English-speaking, as there is a huge demand from parents for kindergartens with English programs in Germany. She went on to relate that the kindergarten teacher told her that Mikie was very popular because the other parents encouraged their children to make friends with him and play with him, as he spoke proper English and that that would be very good for them.

Approaches to fair linguistic communication

The existence of a global lingua franca, on the one hand, provides a huge advantage to a large number of people. This includes both Anglophones and non-

Anglophones. The latter are willing to learn and use English because they know how indispensable a vehicular language is for international cooperation. This is true of commerce, politics, and many other human activities, but it is especially true for the sciences. As Mühleisen (2003: 117) points out, “all science is useless if it is not accessible to other members of the discipline. This is easier with only one language as a scientific lingua franca.”

On the other hand, the prevalent use of English is increasingly attracting strong criticism. It has been argued, as seen above, that the dominance of a single language as a medium of international communication leads to communicative inequality. The spread of English encourages the development of a general monoculture and favours Anglo-American ideas and authors and leads to severe disadvantages for non-Anglophones as well as to a devaluation of other foreign languages.

Therefore, several options for language policy have been presented to find fair and democratic approaches to international communication. Their scope includes

1. different variants of multilingualism/plurilingualism³ (e.g. Kraus 2008)
2. limiting the number of languages used (e.g. Ammon’s 2006 proposal to select EU working languages)
3. the restriction to passive language skills (e.g. *European Intercomprehension*, cf. Klein and others 2002)
4. reduced variants of English, such as the model *English as a Lingua Franca*, *Globalish* (Ammon 2003) and *English as a Global Pidgin* (Mukherjee 2008)
5. the introduction of a system of compensation (van Parijs 2007)
6. initiatives to revive an ancient language (e.g. Latin) (cf. Waquet 2002)
7. the use of an artificial language (Phillipson 2003: 171–174, Grin 2008, Christiansen 2006).

For reasons of space I cannot address all these approaches here. This paper will focus on *English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)* mentioned in (4). It should be stressed, however, that this model, the idea that the English used in international communication is a variety in its own right whose norms are established by its users instead of native speakers, is considered to be a proposal among others to rationalize international communication. Its emergence has to be seen as a reflection of problems in international linguistic communication. The paper will introduce this relatively new area in the field of applied linguistics, before shedding light on its merits and advantages as well as on its disadvantages, and then discussing the extent to which this approach seems feasible.

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

1. ELF — a burgeoning research field

English in its role as a means of international communication has recently been given a variety of names (see Erling 2005a, McArthur 2004). Labels include *English as an International Language (EIL)*, *World English*, *English as a Global Language*, *World Standard (Spoken) English*, *Euro-English*, *Lingua Franca English* and *English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)*. Some researchers use terms interchangeably (e.g. Seidlhofer 2003), whereas others emphasize differences between them (e.g. Prodromou 2008:xiv, who explains that he uses *EIL* to refer to English in an international context including English native speakers and *ELF* excluding them). The mutually agreed basis for the use of these terms is Kachru's (1985) three-circle schema of the spread of English around the world.⁴ The 'inner circle' comprises the traditional bases of English as a native language (L1), i.e. the USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These have historically been the norm-providing centres. The 'outer circle' involves countries where English is not generally spoken as a mother tongue but plays an important role as L2 in administration, the media and education (e.g. India, Singapore, Nigeria). The 'expanding circle' refers to the use of English as a foreign language. It does not have an official status here (i.e. in countries such as China, Germany, Japan, and Poland) and is learnt because of its significance as an international means of communication and used as a lingua franca. The circles comprise the following estimates on the number of speakers: the inner circle approximately 320–380 million, the outer 150–300, and the expanding 100–1,000 (Crystal 1997: 54).

The communicative role of English is also the starting point for the approach *English as a Lingua Franca*, with the research teams around Barbara Seidlhofer (University of Vienna) and Jennifer Jenkins (University of Southampton) at its helm:

The most wide-spread use of English, i.e. that which from a global perspective actually constitutes the prevailing reality of English, with the largest number of speakers, is English as a lingua franca, an interaction in which more often than not no native speaker participates. Seen globally, this is the English that is a reality for most speakers, and in this sense ELF is the most "Real English". (Seidlhofer 2007: 309)

If in the majority of exchanges where English is used native speakers are not present,⁵ the argument goes, their models and norms as a target of use and correctness are of limited relevance. English "belongs to all its users" (Kachru 1992) or, as McArthur (1999) puts it, it "is the possession of every individual or community that wishes to use it, wherever they are in the world". Widdowson (1994: 385) expresses his idea of "the ownership of English" in the following words:

How English develops in the world is no business whatever of native speakers in England, the United States, or anywhere else. They have no say in the matter, no right to intervene or pass judgement. They are irrelevant.

ELF has recently become a vibrant area of research.⁶ Its focus is the empirical description of English in international encounters among non-native speakers by means of corpus projects.⁷ These have revealed a set of properties of *ELF* on different linguistic levels. Jenkins' ground-breaking book *The Phonology of English as an International Language* (2000) has shown, for example, that in oral communication the interdental fricatives /ð/ and /θ/ are often substituted with alveolar and labiodental fricatives (/z/ /s/; /v/ /f/) or alveolar plosives (/d/ /t/); uncountable nouns such as *information* and *advice* are often used with the plural ending -s; the relative pronouns *which* and *who* are treated as interchangeable for animate and inanimate nouns, and verbs in the third person are often used without the inflectional ending -s (cf. the surveys by Seidlhofer and others 2006, Gnutzmann 2007: 324, Prodromou 2006: 55). The important thing about these uses is that they are usually unproblematic because they do not cause misunderstanding. Being oriented towards intelligibility and communicative efficiency instead of native speaker prestige, *ELF* advocates do not consider these features to be errors but variants or differences (Jenkins 2006: 140). They are characteristics of *lingua franca* English, a variety in its own right which is used by non-native speakers in their own space.⁸

It becomes evident from these descriptions that the term *ELF* within this approach refers more to form than to function. *English as a Lingua Franca* does not mean the use of the English language (of Standard English, as one might think) beyond its traditional, its native settings. The emphasis is placed on *ELF* as an independent, a norm-generating variety (or a set of varieties) of English in the expanding circle along the lines of the indigenized varieties of English in the outer circle. As Jenkins (2007: 2) points out, it is conceived "as an emerging English that exists in its *own right* and which is being described in its *own terms* rather than by comparison with ENL [= English as a native language — S.F.]" (original emphasis). It is a variety that fights for its legitimacy in a similar way as outer-circle varieties did years ago.

There are different attitudes with regard to the implementation of *ELF* data in language teaching. Some researchers argue that subtleties and linguistic complexities such as those mentioned above are an unnecessary burden for the non-native speaker. Therefore, for example, the *Lingua Franca Core* introduced by Jenkins (2000) comprises only the relevant phonological features as pronunciation targets. All those that are not helpful to intelligibility do not have to be observed by learners. According to Seidlhofer (2004), a pedagogical approach that is based on *ELF* norms will better prepare learners for communication with other non-native speakers, as it allows them to express their individual identities through English.

Both Jenkins and Seidlhofer, however, have stressed several times that “there is no intention among ELF researchers to patronize learners by telling them that they do not need to learn native-like English [...] ELF is a matter of learner choice” (Jenkins (2007:23). It is widely accepted that *ELF* has not yet been sufficiently described and defined to present a basis for teaching and assessing English (Elder & Davies 2006). A radical example of an implementation of *ELF* research is Grze-ga’s *Basic Global English*.⁹ Graddol (2006) also seems to regard *ELF* as a teaching model, as he treats it in his Section 2 (*Learning English*, pp.81–91), together with approaches such as *English for Young Learners (EYL)* and *Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)*. Other researchers, such as Gnutzmann (2003, 2007) do not see it as an alternative to a Standard English or native-speaker-based model in English language teaching, among other things, because it is difficult to predict the future needs and communicative purposes of today’s learners and because a new paradigm such as this can only be introduced when it is accepted by its users.

It was argued above that the *ELF* model can be treated as a proposal to ameliorate inequalities associated with the global spread of English. I will now return to this aspect and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the project. To what extent can *ELF* contribute to more equitable international communication? What are the sociolinguistic and political dimensions of a *lingua franca* approach?

2. ELF and its appeal among learners and accomplished speakers of English

The first and probably major appeal of the *ELF* approach is the new position of the language learner and user. Non-native speakers are no longer seen as failed native speakers (‘defective communicators’ — Seidelhofer 2004: 213) who speak their own type of ‘interlanguage’ (Selinker 1972) and try to improve their proficiency in order to proceed along the interlanguage continuum in the direction of native-speaker competence, knowing, however, that this aim cannot be achieved and that, therefore, they will not be members of the language community. Ehlich (1986) described this situation using the phrase “die bleibende Fremdheit des Fremdsprachensprechers” (‘the everlasting foreignness of the foreign language speaker’). Within the *ELF* model, non-native speakers are rather seen as competent speakers with equal rights who apply the language according to their communicative needs. They are productive users of English, which entails having the right to be creative in this language and to retain their own cultural identity. The foreign language is becoming less foreign, as it is not dictated by any native-speaker language use and standard. It is autonomous or, as Seidelhofer (2002: 273) puts it, endonormative. In this way, non-native speakers are no longer defined negatively by what they are not able to do. They can be self-confident members of their community of non-native speakers of English. This new position of the language user reflects the changing

role of English. As McCrum (2010:8) puts it, “global English, floating free from its troubled British and American past, has begun to take on a life of its own” and “is about to make its own declaration of independence from the linguistic past, in both syntax and vocabulary”.

A second appeal of the *ELF* approach is its orientation towards cultural neutrality (or at least a lower degree of cultural loading than is found in traditional English language teaching). Due to the close relationship between language and culture, the dominant use of English in important fields of social interaction leads to the adoption of Anglo-American ways of thinking, communicating and even living (Alexander 2006). Wright (2004: 154) points out that

[...] both written and audio-visual media provide the English language learner with the cultural connotations associated with certain lexical terms, with the way particular concepts are elaborated in the United States, with the social norms of communication of US society, particularly the method for presenting an argument.

This aspect has raised concerns with regard to scientific communication, especially in the humanities, i.e. in fields where scientific research is focused on social and cultural topics. Empirical investigations have revealed the existence of culture-conditioned differences in thought patterns, discourse behaviour and styles in text production (Kaplan 1966; Clyne 1981, 1987, 1991; House 2006). Culturally specific conventions lead to peculiarities of English academic prose with regard to, for example, the organization of macrostructures, the use of citations and avoidance strategies (hedging) (Kalverkämper 2008). Advanced forms of English language teaching include the productive mastery of those discourse strategies as targets of instruction. This means, finally, that proficient users of English do not just have to produce their texts in English to allow international communication and cooperation, but that they also adopt thought patterns and discourse styles that are characteristic for a specific culture, the Anglo-American one. In contrast, the *ELF* model, as I understand it, aims at intercultural communication and pleads for the protection of different language cultures. *ELF* speakers can be creative and innovative in their own use of English. It is desirable that they transfer some of the pragmatic norms of their native language backgrounds to lingua franca English (Kirkpatrick 2006: 80).

A third advantage is that the model of *ELF* is meant to give other languages a chance. As Seidlhofer (2003: 137) points out,

[...] if — and this is a vital condition — English is appropriated by its users in such a way as to serve its unique function as EIL [English as an International Language — S.F.], it does not constitute a threat to other languages but, precisely because of its delimited role and distinct status, leaves other languages intact. Properly conceptualised as EIL, ‘English’ can be positioned, quite literally, out of competition with other languages.

Seidlhofer therefore advocates “an *adaptation into* European English rather than an *adoption of* English for Europe” (2003: 136; original emphasis). If only those features of English are taught for production and reception that are crucial for international intelligibility in lingua franca settings, Seidlhofer argues (136), this will reduce the number of years spent learning it, which is a step towards the European ideal of respect for linguistic diversity. This argument, however, would only be valid if an ELF norm were implemented as an alternative teaching model, which is hotly debated presently, as mentioned above.

The three strengths described above should lead to the conclusion that *ELF* might be an alternative and a solution to current problems of international linguistic communication. In fact, it has been welcomed from the viewpoint of language policy. Phillipson (2003: 163) describes it as a vision of English as a democratic world language towards an ecology of languages paradigm (cf. Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: 657):

ELF is an attractive idea if it facilitates equality in communication [...], and the maintenance and exchange of cultures [...], as well as the promotion of linguistic diversity [...] and national sovereignties [...].

However, the model has also elicited negative responses and criticism, as Jenkins (2007) describes in detail. I shall examine these in the following section.

3. ELF and its drawbacks

Scholars of English, but also many foreign language teachers and students, are finding it difficult to recognize *ELF* as a self-sufficient and legitimate variety. Native-speaker-like proficiency has traditionally been the measure of achievement in language learning. To be taken for a native speaker erroneously because of one's excellent proficiency is the highest distinction a foreign language user can be awarded. The deficit view, according to which deviations from native speaker norms are considered to be errors rather than variants, is especially relevant to language teachers. They are familiar with the theories of fossilization and interlanguage and they pass them on to their students. New developments in language learning (for example, *English for Young Learners*) even support this idea (by arguing that it is possible to speak a foreign language without any accent when it is taught by a native speaker and instruction starts early enough). Against this background, an English teacher's departure from the norm will presumably not be seen as a feature of an independent *ELF* variant, but as English that is defective or has not been sufficiently learnt.

This attitude is closely related to the general image that the topic 'foreign language use' has among the wider public and especially in the media. The deficient language user is a frequent character in comedy programs and due to its

predominant position English ranks first. Many examples can be found inside English-speaking cultures. In the popular cartoon series *The Simpsons* there is the character of Apu, representing the common stereotype of the South Asian convenience-store owner. He speaks English with syllable-timed intonation and viewers cannot help but find it funny. *Good moaning* and *I shall say zis only once!* from the comedy *Allo! Allo!* have become winged words imitating the German pronunciation of English (see *The Sunday Times [Malta]* March 22, 2009, p. 44). Examples can also be found in the countries of the expanding circle. Collections of unintentionally hilarious translations on Chinese shops and signs can be found on the Internet; politicians or other personalities in public life are ridiculed because of their poor English.¹⁰ *Senk yu vor trävelling wis Deutsche Bahn* has become a catch phrase in Germany illustrating the topic.

Another reason for the negative responses to the model *ELF* is the fact that the use of English as a lingua franca in the expanding circle is extraordinarily heterogeneous. “Diversity is inherent in ELF,” as Prodromou (2008: 246) points out. Asian *ELF* is different from European *ELF*. Within Europe, Scandinavian users of English differ from those with a Slavic or Romance language as their mother tongue. As Jenkins (2007) shows, these different types of *ELF* are met with different degrees of acceptance or negative orientation. James (2005: 140) describes different “ELFs” as temporary and potentially variable phenomena. They show “great heterogeneity in local function and form”. Structural features which differ from UK/US standard varieties, as he shows, are often a product of the level of language proficiency of the users. Even within one regionally defined type of *ELF*, say *ELF* used in Germany, there are huge differences in “non-nativeness”. The majority of people learn the foreign language in their home country; others acquire or improve their knowledge abroad.

That might be a reason why lingua franca interaction is not automatically cooperative communication. Knapp (2002: 238), drawing on data from a simulated United Nations conference in English with school students aged 15 to 19, showed that in non-native/non-native lingua franca communication, “linguistic deficiencies or even just simple imperfections made by the ‘true’ NNS were exploited in order to dominate the discussion by those who were more fluent”. Foreign language skills are acquired at great expense; they are a privilege, and people normally enjoy having privileges or prestige.

As we see, there are a number of factors that make *ELF* difficult to accept. Acceptance, however — the willingness to consider *ELF* to be a variety or at least legitimate form of English and not merely a collection of errors — is the key factor for success. As Bamgbose (1998: 4) has pointed out with regard to outer-circle varieties, “the acceptability factor is the ultimate test of admission of an innovation”. Surveys have shown that this acceptance is widely lacking both among native

speakers and among the users of *ELF*. As for native speakers, results are inconsistent. On the one hand, Jenkins (2007), in her chapter on language attitudes, presents a number of studies and data that make evident that non-native English is discriminated against by native speakers and that accents are especially relevant in this context. Tonkin (2003: 153), on the other hand, claims that Americans are “relatively tolerant of foreigners’ use of English”. Comrie (1996: 49) even claims that it is “precisely its tolerance of sociological variation” that is “one of the reasons for the success of English as an international language”:

English as an international language has in some respects started to live a life of its own independent of that of native-speaking English communities. I have experienced a number of occasions when nonnative speakers of English have rejected my opinions as to what constitutes correct English, precisely on the grounds that English as an international language no longer belongs exclusively to its native speakers. Indeed, one could even argue that a success of a language as an international language may depend precisely on the willingness of first-language and established second-language speakers to be tolerant of variation introduced by nonnative speakers. (1996: 49)

As for the users and teachers of English, the picture is rather clear. Data from various studies reveal a definite preference for native-speaker norms, especially British and American English (Jenkins 2007: 186, Monroy 2008, Erling 2005b: 227, Wright 2004: 176). These varieties, respondents said, were considered to be prestigious and represented “real” and “authentic” English. With respect to Euro-English, by means of a questionnaire study among 400 academics from 21 European countries, Mollin (2006: 199) found that “only 5% of respondents chose ‘English as it is spoken in mainland Europe’ as their target variety”. She concludes, “The overall picture that presents itself is thus that European speakers wish to achieve a native standard.”

The main obstacle to *ELF* is the very existence of a native speaker of English. Intercultural interactions often include non-native speakers of English as well as its native speakers. “[T]here may be constellations where monolingual native speakers, fully competent bilinguals, near-natives with respect to verbal fluency, and non-native speakers interact,” as Knapp (2002: 221) describes it. “[N]ot to consider them,” Knapp goes on, “would simply mean ignoring the reality.” *ELF* advocates do not exclude L1 speakers:

My own position on the NS-*ELF* question and the one taken throughout this book, is very much in line with Seidlhofer’s. That is, *ELF* does not exclude NSs of English, but they are not included in data collection, and when they take part in *ELF* interactions, they do not represent a linguistic reference point. (Jenkins 2007: 3)

The existence of a native speaker as potential interlocutor (and as a permanent reminder that there is a more proficient variant of English) causes inequality. English cannot simply be detached from its origin. In a situation where the lingua franca is at the same time a mother tongue for a segment of its users, the newly emerging variety is automatically judged by the existing one, especially because the latter one is seen as prestigious and hard to attain by non-natives. Arguing for lingua franca English in this situation inevitably puts its non-native supporters into a position of weakness. They might be suspected of going in for the model because of their own problems in mastering the subtleties of English. To me this psychological factor seems to be a serious obstacle of *ELF*.

The fact that *ELF* is not a genuine lingua franca is also the reason why some of the factors hindering equality in international communication will not be removed by the model. This is particularly so of the economic advantages. *ELF* is still a variety of English providing English-speaking countries enormous additional income (Phillipson 2003, Wright 2004, Grin 2005, Tonkin 2008). The *ELF* model might alleviate the economic inequality slightly, as international language materials representing broader cultural contents could be designed and used (Kirkpatrick 2006: 79), but it will not fundamentally change the situation as *English as a lingua franca* is still English.

Prodromou (2008), in line with Bourdieu (1991), sees language as symbolic and intellectual capital. In a network of power relations including economic, social and cultural forms of power, language can be seen as an important form of symbolic power through which to gain access to economic and social power. Knowledge of English plays a major role in this context. It is a “weapon in the hands of the oppressed” (Prodromou 2008: 249) that gives them privileged access to formal education and job prospects. A reduced form of English, *ELF*, provides people only with a “broken weapon”, with “reduced linguistic capital” (250). The relationship between language and power must receive sufficient consideration.

Referring to Pool (1991), Wright (2004: 172) argues that there are only two alternatives to ensure equality in multilingual communicative situations. The first is that everyone learns everyone else’s language. The second one is that everyone learns a language that is external to the group. Quality and success in the learning of foreign languages vary hugely, but in general one has to admit that competence in several languages will probably be restricted to an elite of the intellectual and gifted few (Bliesener 2003: 96, Phillipson 2008: 133, Ammon 2003).¹¹ The second alternative puts artificial or planned languages on our agenda, which indeed would offer a relatively neutral solution.

When Seidlhofer (2003: 136), arguing for *ELF*, points out that “this option will only be available when the *idée fixe* has been overcome that any notion of ‘language’ has to equal ‘native language’” (original emphasis), we might for a moment

believe this to be a plea for an artificial language as the solution. The parallels are obvious. Apart from the fact that some authors use the term 'lingua franca movement' (Berns 2009, Elder & Davies 2006, Holliday 2008),¹² both options include the goal of democratic and equal international communication with self-confident partners who have their position as non-native speakers in common, yet can nevertheless retain their indigenous cultural identity. Parallels also exist in the way the two approaches are treated. Jenkin (2007: 37) summarizes this with regard to *ELF*:

[...]linguists [...] employ three main 'techniques': they ignore it altogether in places where they might be expected to refer to it; they marginalize it by discussing it dismissively or over-briefly; and they disparage it directly.

In my experience, these are exactly the forms of argument in the literature referring to planned languages. The use of planned languages as well as the use of non-native forms of English are sociolinguistic realities that cannot be ignored. Another parallel is the emotional tone that can be observed in the relevant disputes. The difference between *ELF* and the approach through planned language is, however, that the latter approach consistently strives for fair communication to the end, proposing a genuine lingua franca that offers equal chances to its users because it is nobody's mother tongue.¹³

Conclusions

Several options for language policy have recently been presented in an effort to find fair and democratic approaches to international communication, *ELF* being one of them. With respect to the question that has been chosen as the title of this paper, it can be concluded that *ELF* is directed towards balanced communication and cultural diversity and, therefore, is a step towards communicative fairness. It does not, however, guarantee equality because the English language is not a genuine lingua franca and a segment of its users, its non-native speakers, are treated unfairly.

The mainly negative responses to *ELF* do not give grounds for believing that the emergence of a more democratic model of using English is feasible in the near future. Given these responses, we should not forget that language is an important constituent of people's identity. Linguistic issues are therefore highly controversial questions.¹⁴ Furthermore, the situation in which the native speakers of an ethnic language are outnumbered by its non-native speakers is unique in our linguistic landscape. New ideas and innovative approaches have always had a difficult start. This is particularly so with solutions that have the reputation for being "easy" or "primitive" (cf. Piron 1994). Such attitudes also seem to have been a reason for the initial resistance to pidgin and creole languages (Hymes 1971: 3).

The growing use of English by non-native speakers is a sociolinguistic reality and, therefore, worth investigating and describing. *ELF* research and the reactions to it, which have revealed a number of problems caused by the dominant use of English as a global lingua franca, should become an integral part of current policy suggestions for increasing fairness in international communication (Ammon 2007). In addition, some of the results of *ELF* research should be reflected in foreign language teaching, not least because English is no longer only used to communicate with British and American native speakers, as some teaching materials would have us believe, but also in intercultural situations with non-native speakers. Learners have to be prepared for these real-world needs. Furthermore, the data on the main features of *ELF* and their influence on intelligibility should be borne in mind in language testing.

Notes

* A shorter version of this paper was given at the Second International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca (6–8 April 2009, University of Southampton). I would like to thank the anonymous *LPLP* reviewers for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

1. The global spread of English has been well documented in publications such as Crystal (1997), Wright (2004, ch. 7), Graddol (2006), Schneider and others (2004), McCrum (2010).
2. The use of *Lingua Franca* among the names of other languages in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* can be seen as an indicator for its existence: "His Imperial Majesty spoke often to me, and I returned answers, but neither of us could understand a Syllable. There were several of his Priests and Lawyers present (as I conjectured by their Habits) who were commanded to address themselves to me, and I spoke to them in as many Languages as I had the least Smattering of, which were *High and Low Dutch, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, and Lingua Franca*, but all to no purpose." (Swift 1726: 17, original emphasis)
3. The term *multilingualism* is mainly used with reference to languages spoken in a certain area, whereas *plurilingualism* (or *individual multilingualism*) characterizes people who are able to speak more than one language.
4. The model has recently been modified by several authors, who point to the fact that the borderlines between the circles are not clear-cut due to different degrees of language proficiency. Meierkord (2006: 27) describes a "continuum starting from the rudimentary competence with highly unstable forms to fully indigenized varieties, with fossilized L2 Englishes". Graddol (2006: 110) proposes a modification of Kachru's model with high proficiency in the centre and low proficiency along the periphery. For a criticism of Kachru's schema see also Bruthiaux (2003).
5. According to an estimate by Beneke (1991: 54) this is true in about 80% of all communicative events involving the use of English as a second or foreign language. Seidlhofer (2005) gives the following figures: "At the beginning of the 21st century, as a result of the unprecedented global

spread of English, roughly one out of every four users of the language in the world is a native speaker of it.”

6. The growing body of *ELF* research includes several doctoral dissertations, monographs and a large number of articles (especially in academic journals such as *English Today*, *World Englishes*, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, and *Intercultural Pragmatics*) which have been published during the last 15–20 years. Conferences on English, linguistics, and language policy have recently included workshops and seminars or plenary lectures on *ELF*. A series of international *ELF* conferences was started in Helsinki in 2008 (with successor conferences in Southampton 2009, Vienna 2010, Hong Kong 2011). A new journal, *The International Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, will be launched in 2011.

7. These include *VOICE* (*Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English*), a corpus created at the University of Vienna (available online as a free-of-charge resource: <https://www.univie.ac.at/voice> [accessed 10 June 2010]), *ELFA*, a corpus of English used as a lingua franca in academic settings (Mauranen 2003), and a number of corpora resulting from *ELF* PhD research projects.

8. The main features of *ELF* have also been compiled on a special page (R92) explaining *ELF* in the seventh edition of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, which is the classic monolingual dictionary for learners of English as a foreign language worldwide (Seidlhofer 2005).

9. *Basic Global English* is a reduced and adjusted form of English based on *ELF* data. *BGE* courses have been taught by Joachim Grzega at elementary schools in Bavaria, Germany, since 2007. For further information see <http://www.basicglobalenglish.com> [accessed 10 June 2010].

10. Recent media events in Germany are an indicator that the wider public is not willing to accept non-native-speaker-like forms of English. When the new German Foreign Minister, Guido Westerwelle, refused to accept a BBC reporter's question in English in his debut press conference in September last year, this was automatically interpreted as an admission that he was not able to do so. Within hours, YouTube clips could be watched proving the poor quality of his English. The *Hamburger Morgenpost* (30 September 2009) showed a photograph of him decorated with a speech balloon saying “Hello, I'm Guido Westerwave, the new Outminister of Germany”, and his party's election slogan *Deutschland kann es besser* ('Germany can do better') became *Deutsch kann er besser* ('German he can [speak] better'). Another politician, Günther Oettinger, who was elected EU-Commissioner at the beginning of this year, was ridiculed in a similar way when he was shown speaking English with a strong German-Swabian accent (*Die Zeit Magazin*, 11 February 2010).

11. Recent statistics on the matter are sobering. According to the European survey *Eurobarometer* (2006), 56% of the EU population are fluent in a language other than their mother tongue and 28% are fluent in two languages in addition to their mother tongue. In considering these figures, several things should be taken into account (Phillipson 2003:9). First, the survey is based on the data that people report on their own use of languages. Secondly, people who speak a regional minority language at home are often bilingual. Thirdly, there is enormous variation between the Member States. Nearly everyone speaks a foreign language in the Netherlands, Denmark or Luxembourg.

12. *Movado* (Esperanto ‘movement’) is a common term in planned language speech communities.
13. The fact that there are Esperanto native speakers can be ignored in this context because, first, their number is small compared with the speech community and, secondly, they have no standardizing influence on the language (Schubert 1989: 11). An occasional criticism is that Esperanto is not a really fair solution because of the Indo-European character of its lexis and the various distances from learners’ mother tongues that result from this. Grin’s (2008: 81) answer to this argument is: “(...) rejecting it (= Esperanto) in favour of English is rather like claiming that feudalism is superior to social democracy on the grounds that social democracy can never *totally* equalise opportunities.”
14. When some years ago an orthographic reform of German was introduced — one that was not really worth calling a ‘reform’ because only minute changes were proposed and the main problem, the capitalization of nouns, was not even touched — it caused debates that might be best described with the English term ‘moral panic’.

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Zusammenfassung

Das Modell English as a Lingua Franca — ein Weg zu fairer sprachlicher Kommunikation?

Englisch hat in der Welt derart viel Verbreitung gefunden, dass die Anzahl der nichtmuttersprachlichen Nutzer die der Muttersprachler übertrifft. Neuere Publikationen zeigen, dass die Dominanz dieser Sprache zu ernsthaften Nachteilen für nichtanglophone Sprecher geführt hat. Verschiedene sprachpolitische Lösungswege sind vorgeschlagen worden, um faire und demokratische internationale Kommunikation zu ermöglichen. Zu diesen gehören verschiedene Formen des Multilingualismus, eine Begrenzung der in der internationalen Kommunikation verwendeten Sprachen, die Beschränkung auf rezeptive Sprachfertigkeiten, die Einführung eines Systems von Ausgleichszahlungen, Initiativen zur Wiederbelebung des Lateins sowie die Einführung einer Plansprache. Das Modell English as a Lingua Franca, die Idee eines von Nichtmuttersprachlern gesprochenen Englisch als eigenständige Varietät, deren Norm von den Nutzern anstelle von Muttersprachlern bestimmt wird, gehört zu diesen Vorschlägen. Der Beitrag diskutiert, in welchem Maße ein solcher Lösungsweg realisierbar ist. Trotz der Anziehungskraft des Modells für Lerner und Sprecher des Englischen als Fremdsprache scheinen eine Reihe von Faktoren seiner Durchführbarkeit entgegenzustehen. Zu diesen gehören so komplexe Probleme wie die Traditionen des Fremdsprachenunterrichts, die Heterogenität von Lingua-Franca-Kommunikation sowie psychologische Vorbehalte.

Resumo

La modelo English as a Lingua Franca — ĉu vojo al egalrajta lingva komunikado?

La angla trovis tiom grandan disvastigon en la mondo, ke la nombro de la nedenskaj uzantoj de tiu lingvo estas pli granda ol tiu de la denaskuloj. Novdataj publikaĵoj montras, ke la dominado de la angla kondukis al gravaj malavantaĝoj por nedenskaj parolantoj. Diversaj lingvopolitikaj alirvojoj por egalrajta kaj demokrata internacia komunikado estas diskutataj nuntempe. Inter ili estas diversaj formoj de multlingvismo, uzado de limigita nombro de lingvoj por internacia komunikado, sinlimigo al ricevaj fremdlingvaj konoj, la pago de kompensoj al landoj, kiuj havas malavantaĝojn pro la hegemonio de la angla, revivigo de morta lingvo (precipe de la latina) kaj apliko de planlingvo. La modelo English as a Lingua Franca, la ideo pri formo de la angla parolata de nedenskuloj kiel memstara varianto kun propra normo, estas inter tiuj proponoj. La artikolo diskutas, kiomgrade tiu modelo estas realigebla. Malgraŭ ĝia ĉarmo el la vidpunkto de la lernantoj de la angla, kelkaj faktoroj ŝajnas malhelpi la realigon de la propono. Inter ili estas

kompleksaj problemoj, kiel la tradicioj de fremdlingvoinstruado, la heterogena karaktero de komunikado per lingvofrankao kaj psikologiaj rezervoj.

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