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English as a Lingua Franca and Intercultural Awareness: Insights and Implications

Abstract

This paper investigates English as a lingua franca and intercultural awareness, as two relatively new concepts in the field of applied linguistics. The main goal of the study is to raise English language teachers' professional awareness and explore potential practical classroom insights and implications congruent with developing their English language teaching pedagogy and learners' effective intercultural communication competence.

Keywords: English as a lingua franca, intercultural awareness, symbolic competence, intercultural speaker, identity

"اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة مشتركة والوعي الثقافي: رؤى ومضامين تربوية"

الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث قضيتين من قضايا اللغة الإنجليزية، وهما اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة مشتركة والوعي بالثقافات المختلفة باعتبارهما ميدانين حديثين نسبياً في مجال اللغويات التطبيقية. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى رفع الوعي المهني لمدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية ومحاولة الاستفادة من هذين المفهومين في الجانب التطبيقي لتطوير مهارات الطلبة في التواصل الفعال مع أبناء الثقافات المختلفة، ومن حيث تطوير طرق تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة مشتركة، والتركيز على الجانب الوظيفي للغة، مع الاحتفاظ بالمبادئ والقواعد المعيارية للغة الأم من جهة وتنمية الوعي الثقافي المشترك من جهة أخرى.

كلمات مفتاحية: اللغة الانجليزية - الوعي الثقافي - مضامين تربوية

Introduction

In a globalized world characterized by multilingualism and multiculturalism, there has been a remarkable growth of interest in English as a lingua franca (ELF), as a productive field of research in the fields of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. According to Baker (2018), ELF research provides invaluable pedagogical insights into intercultural communication and the intertwined relationship between languages, communicative practices, and cultures. Predominately, ELF research suggests recognizing pedagogical priorities and focuses on how learners can most effectively use language and practice the communication processes in different linguacutural contexts.

Further, Gradole (2006) maintains that the rising interest in (ELF), particularly in applied linguistics, may influence mainstream language teaching and assessing practices in the future. There has been sound calls to investigate ELF, in terms of its work and implications for the language teaching and learning (Seidlhofer, 2012). English as a lingua franca and intercultural communication share interest in interaction and communication among participants from different linguacultural backgrounds (Hua, 2015).

In the context of the Middle East, ELF is an area that has not been investigated yet (Alharbi, 2018). ELF is deeply intercultural both as a means of communication and as research field (Baker, 2018). Consequently, this paper attempts to explore the phenomena of ELF and intercultural awareness to capture potential pedagogical insights and implications congruent with the English language teaching and learning, particularly, helping teachers and teacher practitioners to develop learners' intercultural communication competence. This can be achieved, for instance, through exposing them to ELF diverse and flexible communication activities including effective communication strategies such as paraphrasing, checking, requesting clarification, confirming, signaling non-understanding and repetition. By and large, in response to EFL and intercultural awareness phenomena, the study endeavors to provide opportunities to raise awareness and understanding and develop teaching and learning practices, with focus on intelligibility and acquisition of pragmatic strategies, bearing in mind the importance of the educational context. According to Baker (2018), these strategies display pragmatic competence by efficient multilingual and intercultural communicators.

English as a Lingua Franca

The term *lingua franca* comes from an Arabic origin 'lisan-al-frang', which simply means an intermediary language used by speakers of Arabic with travelers from Western Europe (House, 2003, p. 557). ELF, a rather young field of study, is gaining outstanding momentum and rising interest in the fields of business and academic settings (Jenkins et al., 2011). Interestingly, it has a relatively clear focus and research agenda: questioning native speaker authority, understanding the dynamics of ELF usage, and conceptualizing English as an international language.

Further, ELF is part of a more general phenomenon of English as an international language or World English. Bolton (2004) maintains that the World English functions as an overarching approach for studying all varieties of English worldwide, especially those associated with Kachru. ELF paradigm focuses fundamentally on modern-day connectivity in the Expanding Circle of English speaking countries. English as a lingua franca can be defined as "any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often only option" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p.7). ELF perceives the linguistic output of non-native

Given the central role of ELF, Kachru (1996) argues that “English as a lingua franca has become a communicative tool of immense political, ideological, and economic power” (p.910). Additionally, Baker (2016) explicates that English is currently spoken as a lingua franca by non-native speakers more than native speakers of the language. According to Cogo (2010), ELF may include native speakers; nonetheless, the vast majority of communicative exchanges take place among bilingual users of English. The significant point, though, is that when native speakers engage in ELF communication, they do not set the linguistic agenda (Jenkins, 2007).

Kachru (1992) has modeled World English in three main concentric circles. The Inner Circle refers to countries where English is spoken as a native language (e.g. the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand). The Outer Circle comprises countries where English is used in non-native setting; however, the language has become part of the country's major institutions and plays an essential second language role. This circle encompasses countries such as India, Singapore, Malawi, and over 50 other countries. Finally, the Expanding Circle designates countries that recognize the importance of English as an international language. English is increasingly used as a lingua franca in countries belonging to the Expanding Circle, e.g., China, Japan, Greece, and Poland (as cited in Crystal, 2003, p. 61).

English as a Foreign Language vs. English as a Lingua Franca

Obviously, scholarship in the field of applied linguistics is quite overwhelmed with many terms and notions, for example, International English (IE), World English (WE), English as a foreign language (EFL), and English as a lingua franca (ELF), just to mention some. International English refers to the variety of English language that is often used in writing and speaking in formal instruction (Pakir, 2009). WE, on the other hand, refers to the wide-ranging approach for the study of English worldwide, and it serves as an umbrella for all varieties of English in the world (ibid).

However, the distinction between EFL and ELF is often essential for scholars, who perceive ELF as having its own existence, independent of the native-speaker norms. These native-speaker norms are pivotal for EFL pedagogy, though (Swan, 2012). In the Expanding Circle, EFL is taught as a school subject and the prevailing paradigm is that students need to acquire a native-like language competence, and the target culture should be integrated substantially in the curricula (Dombi, 2011). While ELF seeks mutual *understanding* and *intelligibility* between participants who

do not share a native language, EFL aims at helping students acquire a common framework of norms in order to have a native-like-language competence (ibid). Additionally, Cogo (2010) argues that the orientation towards native speaker fluency as “the yardstick against which ELF performance should be measured is still pervasive” (p. 309). Similarly, Risagar (2007) asserts that there is still a tendency for native speakers to be regarded as custodian over what is acceptable or standard language use.

However, Baker (2016) disagrees with the above findings and believes that English is most probably used as a lingua franca by non-native speakers more than native speakers; therefore, learners have to be ready to deal with language variation rather than concentrating on mastering ‘a single fixed code’ (p.11). From my vantage point, to develop tolerance for cultural differences and respect for cultural diversity, learners should be exposed to various effective examples of non-native speakers of English, and equally important, they need clear and consistent learning models of Standard English of native speakers. I would also like to say that the linguistic status of ELF (as regarding ELF as a language of its own right and not being evaluated by native speakers’ norms of correctness) seems rather ambiguous and impractical, particularly in EFL settings.

English as a Lingua Franca and National Identity

Some learners of English choose to keep traces of first language accent when speaking English in order to retain their lingua-cultural identity and emotional attachment to their national affiliation (Jenkins, 2000). Interestingly, besides projecting their national identity, participants feel themselves belong to a community of ELF speakers, who share a common identity (Jenkins, 2007). Researchers in ELF studies believe that it might be culturally neutral means of communication, but sometimes it is used to construct identity and cultures (House, 2012; Kirpatrick, 2007). Since communication always involves participants, contexts, histories, purpose and linguistic choices, languages in intercultural communication “are never just neutral” (Phipps and Guilherme, 2004, p.1) Moreover, Cheung and Sung (2013) propose that teachers can introduce language variation in order to foster respect for diversity and develop true intercultural reflections and conscious awareness among learners of English.

Finally, Jenkins, et al. (2011) aptly articulate some distinctive ELF communicative strategies associated with multiculturalism and multilingualism communication. For example, they encompass pragmatic strategies such as accommodation, code-switching, pre-empathy, misunderstanding, letting unimportant misunderstanding pass, linguistic awareness, cultural awareness, and the ability to adopt linguistic forms needed for any communicative practice.

Accordingly, this study endeavors to explore the concepts of English as a lingua franca and intercultural awareness to capture potential insights and implications in the English language teaching and learning. For example, ELF prioritizes remarkably *comprehensibility* in language teaching by exposing learners to a wide range of English, by reducing the nativespeakerist element in some teaching materials, by including variety of accents and authentic materials, by offering situations of negotiating meaning, by employing communicative pragmatic strategies, and by having communication models (Bjorkman, 2013). The following section highlights intercultural awareness as a crucial strategy in ELF communication.

Intercultural Awareness

Baker (2016) argues that learners lack adequate intercultural awareness (ICA) in order to be well equipped and fully prepared for future intercultural communication. Consequently,

misinterpretations may occur when interlocutors lack awareness of their behavioral rules and project them on others (Cardona et al., 2015). Raising adequate ICA can also equip language learners for the upcoming responsibility as language learners and global citizens (Wang & Le, 2014). The following sections highlight the development of ICA from communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence over to symbolic competence.

Communicative Competence (CC)

In response to Chomsky's linguistic competence and linguistic performance dichotomy, Hymes (1972) coined the term communicative competence. It designates the ability not only to manipulate the grammatical rules of a language but also to know when, where, and to whom to use them appropriately (Sercu, 2005). CC encompasses sub-competencies, e.g., grammatical competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. It entails grammar knowledge, an understanding of the 'social context' in which language functions, and understanding of how utterances are grouped together to form 'meaningful whole', and an employment of strategies to "make best use of what language user knows about how a language works in order to interpret, express, and negotiate meaning in certain context" (Walcott, 2007, p.1).

However, taking the dependency solely on native speaker as a model has been one of the reasons to challenge the concept of communicative competence (Corbet, 2010). The problem with taking 'native speaker' as a model is that it becomes hard, if not impossible, target for the learner, who will 'inevitably end up frustrated (Aguilar, 2008, p.61; Byram, 1997). According to Byram and Guilherme (2000), intercultural communicative competence has been extended from Hyme's notion of

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Foreign language learners need to develop cultural sensitivity and ability to mediate between various cultural perspectives in real-time communicative situations (Byram, 2008). Many scholars have defined intercultural communication in terms of knowledge, ability, and behaviors. For example, Chen & Starosta (2008) define intercultural communication as "the ability to negotiate cultural meanings and appropriately execute effective communication behaviors that recognize each other's multiple identities in a specific environment" (p.7).

In foreign language education, scholarship draws heavily from Byram's (1997) model, which defines ICC in terms of attitudes, knowledge, and skills required to prepare learners to participate in intercultural relationship equally (Cardona et al., 2015). From Byram's vantage point, a learner who has developed ICC is able to communicate successfully in a foreign language, to build relationships taking into consideration his own and others' viewpoint and needs, to mediate interactions between people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and to seek developing communicative skills (ibid).

ICA is a key component of ICC. In his model, Byram (1997) defines it as "an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products on one's own and other cultures and countries" (p.53). To foster students' ICA growth, Nugnet and Catalano (2015) argue that students should be given enough time to identify and reflect upon their preconceived ideas, judgments, and stereotypes towards interlocutors from other cultures.

Interestingly, Csizer and Kontra (2012) advocate that motivation studies have shown a rising interest in international communities compared with local culture in the motivation of English language students. ICA emphasizes the need to mediate between different communicative practices,

which may be perceived as culturally based, but also in ELF communication, there is a demand to negotiate emergent and complex cultural associations “moving between the local and the global in dynamic ways that often result in novel emergent practices and forms (Baker, 2011, p. 205). While communicative competence underscores the significance of native speaker norms and correctness, ICC expands language instruction goals to equip learners with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness to meet the challenges of becoming intercultural speakers.

Intercultural

Speaker

In the context of promoting English as a lingua franca, using a native speaker as a model for EFL learners should be replaced by intercultural speaker (Byram et al., 2001). They define an ‘intercultural speaker’ as “someone who has the ability to interact with others, to accept other perspectives and perceptions of the world, to mediate between different perspectives, to be conscious of their evaluation of difference” (p.5). According to Byram and Zaraf (1997), this mediation means being able to look at oneself from an etic or outside perspective when interacting with others, and to analyze and adapt one’s own behavior as well as underlying values and beliefs.

Additionally, Kramsch (2009) coined the term ‘symbolic competence’, which suggests that effective communication has increasingly come to mean “not only getting things found in the real world, but redefining the symbolic reality of the real world” (Kramsch, 2010, p. 5). An intercultural speaker’s competence requires to be approached from a multilingual perspective and viewed as energetic and local dependent competence. Significantly, it seeks to incorporate a more reflexive perspective that addresses the ideological, historic, and aesthetic aspects of intercultural competence and language teaching (ibid). Additionally, this competence is combined with a more critical understanding of languages and cultures in intercultural communication as existing in a ‘third place’ (Kramsch, 1993), which is neither part of users native language nor a target language. Kramsch (2010) states, “the notion of third culture must be perceived as a process of meaning-making that sees beyond the dualities of national languages (L1-L2) and national cultures (C1-C2)” (p.1). Similarly, Baker (2016) argues that ELF speakers can draw on the existing symbolic resources that construct and represent language and culture, and they are able to challenge, reinterpret, and redefine things in new communicative situations.

Baker

(2015)

ICA

Model

The development of ICA through foreign language education has been offered through the work of Byram (1997) and his colleagues, Byram & Fleming (1998), and Byram & Nicole & Stevens, (2001). Building learners’ ICA is one way to encourage them deconstruct stereotypes and prejudice in the classroom (Galante, 2015). To him, in order to prepare future global language learners ICA has become as an indispensable element in language learning.

Intercultural awareness explicitly addresses the role of ELF in intercultural communication contexts, and it advocates the notion that English is no longer associated with any particular community (Baker, 2011). ICA, a vital part of ICC components, is directly required for communication in various intercultural contexts of ELF or the Expanding Circle environments. According to Baker (2011, p. 202), ICA entails explicit understanding of the interwoven relationship of language and culture in intercultural communication settings and the involvement of behavior and skills as well:

Intercultural awareness is a conscious understanding of the role of culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication.

To illuminate a better understanding of intercultural communication through ELF, Baker (2015) proposes a model that focusses fundamentally on the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to communicate easily in diverse linguacultural contexts. To this end, the model presents types of knowledge and skills, different levels of cultural/intercultural awareness, and the way they interact. Moreover, it designates three major levels of awareness- moving from basic cultural awareness to advanced cultural awareness and finally intercultural awareness (Baker, 2011). In this model, Baker distinguishes between conceptual ICA and practice-oriented ICA. While conceptual ICA is interested in types of attitudes towards and knowledge about cultures, practice-oriented ICA is concerned with their application in real-time instances of intercultural communication (ibid).

Moreover, the development of cultural awareness is coupled with intercultural experiences and remarkable ability to voice one's own cultural perspectives and attitudes towards the *Other*. Moving through the different levels of cultural awareness may eventually lead to awareness of several social groups and contexts 'of the fluid, dynamic and relative nature of any cultural characterization or understanding (Baker, 2011, p. 204). In addition, at level 2 participants should be able to make predictions for possible misunderstanding or miscommunication and avoid common stereotyping through moving beyond generalization.

Finally, level 3 of ICA is concerned with extending intercultural competence to the contexts where English is used as a *global lingua franca*, and moving sensibly between local and global dynamic ways of intercultural communication. Approaching language teaching from different perspectives can lead teacher practitioners to make informative decisions about a whole range of communication skills, knowledge, attitudes, communication strategies, pragmatic competence, and intercultural awareness.

Reflections and Implications

Language teaching today is approached from a rather functional perspective with an apparent focus on learners' communicative needs. Effective teaching methods can include interactive activities like students interviewing each other, role-play, small group discussions, listening and watching everyday conversation, engaging learners with online communication tools. It is worth mentioning that the main goal of this study is to investigate ELF and ICA in order to trigger potential insights and implications for classroom practices and effective pragmatic communication strategies. ELF is essentially about awareness and choice (Cogo, 2010).

The first practical contribution of the current research is that it raises awareness about different ways of speaking English, language variability, and change. Learners also have the choice, for example, to speak like native speakers, when they want, or they may speak ELF in certain communicative situations. Introducing ELF may help teachers make informative decisions about teaching practices, and they design their classroom activities based on their teaching environment and communicative needs.

A second important implication of this study is that with purposeful work and due cultural considerations, teachers can help learners foster the skills and cultural awareness they need to communicate effectively and interculturally. Taking Baker's (2015) levels of cultural awareness, this can be accomplished gradually through exposing learners to different varieties of English used

by individuals from diverse cultures. For example, teachers may assign learners to watch videos or movies with intercultural themes. Such videos can familiarize learners with different pronunciation and raise intercultural awareness about cultural differences and different ways of doing or perceiving the same thing. Further, to raise learners' intercultural awareness, teachers can share their cross-cultural experiences, especially those who studied in native-speaking countries. The researcher has found this technique very intriguing, particularly when sharing anecdotes from his intercultural experiences and articulating his attitudes toward *the other*. Intercultural encounters that manifest cultural and linguistic differences are extra-ordinarily intriguing examples for EFL students.

A third implication is that teachers can help learners develop ICA strategies by creating real or simulated opportunities for interactions with individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds and worldviews. Teachers may use role-play cards and critical incident handouts and ask learners to make possible predictions and interpretations for misunderstandings and miscommunications. Galante (2015) recommends exposing learners to accents that are considered widely acceptable and easy to understand by both ELF and English native speakers. To foster respect for diversity and variation, she further proposes introducing learners to language variation and encourages intercultural reflections (*ibid*).

A fourth implication stems from stressing the significance of ICA and communication strategies (e.g., pre-empathy, letting unimportant misunderstanding pass, tolerance towards cultural differences). Teachers may ask students to analyze dialogues from ELF corpora to discover patterns of accommodations and adjustment by interlocutors from different cultures. Personal attitudes, empathy, and tolerance can help students negotiate meaning and maintain effective communication. Further, an invaluable teaching strategy to develop students' intercultural communicative competence and check their understanding is to ask students questions and let them raise questions.

Finally, developing learners' ICA can be achieved by giving them enough time to identify and reflect upon their preconceived ideas, judgments, and stereotypes towards individuals from other linguistic backgrounds (Catalano et al., 2015). Teachers and learners may adopt some ELF ideas and adapt them to their teaching environment, but they do not have to take ELF as a whole package, especially in teaching settings where native-speaker-English is preferred by teachers as well as learners.

Conclusion

Presently, English is a lingua franca that brings millions of people together in a wide range of real-life intercultural communicative situations for a spectrum of purposes. This paper attempts to synthesize scholarship about the phenomena of English as a lingua franca and intercultural awareness in order to develop teaching and learning practices, bearing in mind the importance of the educational context. Moreover, it endeavors to capture some potential insights and implications for classroom communicative practices.

As teachers become aware of the various issues and challenges that ELF and ICA raise for communication and pedagogy, they are prompted to engage in a reflective dialogue both with their specific and broader teaching context and with their own deep beliefs and convictions about language, communication, and English language teaching classrooms. It is hoped that the study inspires more genuine interest in language variation and intercultural awareness, and offers both teachers and learners a range of choices to make informative decisions about their teaching and

learning. In any teaching setting, it is expected that teachers debate about ELF and ICA can create keen linguistic and intercultural awareness.

Since ELF is primarily regarded as a communication tool, not as a language variety, it cannot replace a standard variety. The paper, being of an exploratory nature, raises a number of opportunities for future research. More research will in fact be necessary to refine and elaborate on teachers and students' attitudes towards ELF. Researchers may also want to investigate types of pronunciation preferred by learners and teachers, i.e. native or non-native.

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