Developing Teachers' and Learners' ELF State of Mind: The Principles and Premises of The ENRICH Project

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Abstract

The paper presents four premises and two principles guiding the ENRICH Project, an EU-funded (Erasmus+) project that ran from 2018 to 2021 and developed an innovative online continuous professional development programme aimed at educating teachers of English as a foreign language in raising their own and their learners' ELF awareness. I further discuss my own observations from the extensive training programme with regard to implications of ELF aware teacher education and pedagogy and present the essential ingredients of what I call the "ELF state of mind".

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca, ELF awareness, teacher education, transformative learning, critical reflection

Introduction

The EU-funded ENRICH Project (http://enrichproject.eu, 2018-2021) aimed at raising English language teachers' competence in engaging with multilingual and multicultural EFL (English as a foreign language) teaching and learning contexts. The ENRICH Project's Consortium (which incorporated partners from universities in Italy, Norway, Portugal and Turkey and was coordinated by the Greek partner) developed an extensive and innovative online teacher education programme that involved participant teachers from many different contexts in Europe and the rest of the world in topics and activities that raised their own and their learners' ELF awareness.

In this paper I present what I consider to be the fundamental premises upon which the ENRICH Project's training programme is developed and then present the basic principles that guide it. I then discuss what I consider to be the offspring of this training programme and the result of developing teachers' and learners' ELF awareness, namely, their "ELF state of mind" and discuss further implications for pedagogy and teacher education.

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The Four Premises and Two Principles Guiding the ENRICH Project

The ENRICH Project is based on four fundamental premises. First, that ELF research, which initially began as an innovative analysis of non-native speaker discourse, soon proved to be an interesting and progressively extremely persuasive perspective of drawing insights for communication in English globally. This rendered necessary the next "logical" step: the inevitable link with the English language teaching (ELT) and, particularly, the English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and learning context. In other words, the ever-growing ELF-related research has been perceived to raise implications for ELT and EFL (Sifakis, 2007, Seidlhofer, 2011).

The second premise is intrinsically linked to the very nature of ELF itself. Its fluidity, as research in ELF interactions for more than two decades has convincingly shown (e.g., Seidlhofer, 2011), implies that ELF is essentially non-teachable. For ELF to be teachable its linguistic, pragmatic and sociocultural characteristics would have to be "constrained" to a relatively small number of forms that would then inform pedagogy in very specific ways. This can range from the selection and adaptation of reading and listening inputs to the design of appropriate tasks for learners to the development of specific procedures and tests that would measure learners' competence levels. As this this not the case with ELF, it follows that, in order to consider integrating it with the ELT/EFL classroom, we would have to make specific decisions regarding pedagogy that would draw on insights from ELF research, and particularly ELF discourse analysis (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). These insights refer to every aspect of ELF, from observable lexico-grammatical features that deviate from standard English norms (such as the omission of the third person –s in certain contexts by certain ELF speakers) to the various socio-pragmatic accommodation strategies employed by successful ELF speakers in different interactional settings aiming to facilitate intelligibility and comprehensibility (such as rephrasing or paraphrasing).

The third premise is related to the pedagogical forms that the above implications of ELF for ELT or EFL contexts can take. More specifically, as research in ELF makes the link with the ELT/EFL context necessary (premise 1), but as ELF itself is not directly teachable (premise 2), it was necessary to develop a comprehensive framework that would convincingly support the linking between ELF-related insights and ELT/EFL. Such a framework needed to be theoretically sound (i.e., with reference to established propositions regarding conceptual understandings of communication and pedagogy) and practically informative (i.e., with specific suggestions and obtainable outcomes regarding instructional methodology and teacher education practice). More specifically, the framework that was adopted, called ELF awareness (Sifakis, 2019, Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2018), referred to two concerns: (a) ways of engaging with findings and insights in ELF, but also World Englishes (WE) and English as an international language (EIL), and (b) ways of engaging teachers in small action research projects of their own choice and development, by prompting them to design and teach lessons that impacted their immediate teaching context and drawing some reflective conclusions from this experience.

The final premise is linked to the need to draw on other, similar projects that took place in the recent past that could inform decisions made with regard to the two concerns (a and b) of the second premise just described. The ELF awareness framework used insights from research in ELF, WE and EIL to first prompt participant teachers' reflective critical thinking and progressively involve them in action research. A similar approach was explored in the teacher education projects run by Yasemin Bayyurt and Nicos Sifakis at Bogazici University between 2012 and 2015 (Bayyurt & Sifakis 2015a, 2015b, Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2015) and the project developed by Stefania Kordia for the purposes of her PhD research (Kordia, 2015).

Taking the above premises as a starting point, the Consortium of the ENRICH project addressed the challenges of teacher education by designing and exploring a continuous professional development programme (CPD) that was governed by two broad principles:

Principle 1: That the first priority and primary concern in teacher education programmes that adopt the ELF awareness framework is the focus on participant teachers' attitudes. Research in attitudes has been at the epicentre of ELF research since the early 2000s (for an earlier review, see Jenkins, 2007). There is a good reason for that. The concerns and issues that ELF discourse analysis research raised challenged established notions regarding the prevalence of native speaker norms as both a guide for ensuring successful interactions involving non-native users of English and as the cornerstone of ELT/EFL pedagogy. Different stakeholders had widely different, and mainly negative (at least in the earlier part of this research) perceptions of these concerns and many saw ELF at worst as an unnecessary and irrelevant area of study that held little concern for formal ELT settings (e.g., Ferguson, 2009, Sewell, 2012, Swan, 2012) and at best as a challenge to established knowledge and pedagogical experience that merited further attention (e.g., Hino, 2020). Although learners' and teachers' perspectives change and evolve as the years go by and as ELF research becomes more widespread and deeper and therefore more convincing and, inevitably, more relevant for ELT practitioners, working around learners' and teachers' perspectives regarding ELF-related concerns is considered by the ELF awareness framework to play a central role in integrating ELF within ELT/EFL. More specifically, ELF-aware activities prompt teacher trainees and learners to reflect critically about their deeper convictions regarding issues that are well established in traditional EFL (such as the roles of native speakers).

Principle 2: That the teacher education approach adopted is essentially non-interventionist. In the ENRICH CPD, participant teachers are presented with information and insights provided by the extensive research carried out within the ELF, WE and EIL. However, they are not instructed to follow specific directions in applying these insights in their teaching context. As ENRICH CPD participants came mainly from Europe but also from many other places around the world, the teaching contexts involved were very different, each with its own very specific idiosyncrasies. It would be ill-advised for the CPD developers to pretend to know these teachers' different teaching contexts better than the teachers themselves and offer them all the answers to issues and problems that may arise in each context. In the ENRICH CPD, participant teachers are

invited to engage with ELF, WE and EIL research insights by means of carrying out activities that prompt them to link such insights with (a) their current ongoing teaching practice and (b) any current or previous experience they may have as teachers, users and learners of English. The aim is to guide them in grappling with both the content of ELF/EIL/WE research, but also bring to the fore their own reactions, perceptions and understandings drawn from current and previous experiences so that they can move on to the phase of developing original ELF-aware lessons that would be relevant for and acceptable in each specific teaching context. It is important to underline that participant teachers' responses to the activities and their lesson plan descriptions, justifications and evaluations were not commented upon or evaluated in any way by the ENRICH teacher educators (i.e., members of the ENRICH Consortium who were involved in the development and implementation of the CPD). The only feedback that participant teachers received was from fellow participants, and this often led to very interesting discussions (on specific activities) in the CPD's online Forum.

Developing the ELF State of Mind: Being an ELF User versus Becoming an ELF-Aware User

The principles and premises presented above provide the basis for developing a continuous professional development programme that focuses on developing what I call teachers' "ELF state of mind". The ELF state of mind is two-tiered. The first tier focuses on the ELF user and determines the decisions and actions ELF users make when being involved in a specific ELF interaction (i.e., an interaction with other native or non-native users). The second tier focuses on the ELT or EFL educational (teaching and learning) context that is socio-culturally but also historically defined with reference to certain pedagogical principles and priorities (see above). I refer to the first tier as the state of *"being" an ELF user*, and the second tier as that of *"becoming" an ELF-aware user*. As these two tiers refer to two distinct facets of the ELF "experience", the former on the interactional, the latter on the pedagogical, it follows that they can be independently studied. However, in the ELF awareness framework *both tiers* play a significant role in shaping the ELF state of mind of teachers and students (and other stakeholders, of course). In this sense, the fact that the two facets of user and learner are interconnected has special significance for the ELT classroom, as the teacher can research the extent to which their learners are already cognizant of these two roles and ready to be exposed to inputs and tasks that would raise their ELF awareness even further.

What follows below is a number of observations that I have made from studying the ways in which the ELF awareness framework has been incorporated within the ENRICH CPD.

- *The state of being an ELF user does not necessarily imply any form of ELF awareness*. ELF users are either effective or ineffective in their ELF interactions, and this is disconnected from any form of formal awareness of ELF or of their own attitudes towards ELF-related concerns.

- *The state of being an ELF user can be improved upon when the user is educated on ELF concerns*. EFL learners who are also ELF users, but essentially unaware of this or negatively predisposed towards it, can become ELF-aware by being involved in activities that make them critically reflect on the nature of ELF interactions, the accommodation strategies that are at play and the problems of adhering to native speaker norms while preparing for such interactions.

- *ELF users can be ELF aware without necessarily being ELF informed*. The process of formally informing learners about ELF issues and concerns may have the same purpose as that of ELF awareness (Dewey & Pineda, 2020, Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 2020), but runs the risk of adopting a top-down perspective that focuses primarily on ELF rather than on the affordances and constraints of each local teaching and learning context. The ELF awareness approach adopts an essentially bottom-up perspective that is constrained by local teaching and learning contextual conditions (e.g., Sifakis, 2009). It prompts teachers to design appropriate activities that draw from the ELF, but also from the World Englishes and EIL (English as an international language) research literatures to critically engage learners in referring to their own experience as users of English. The aim is to come to terms with examples from ELF interactions and problematize their own textbook's approach to teaching English.

- *EFL learners can also choose to become ELF aware, depending on the target situation they wish to reach.* As pointed out earlier, not all learners have the same level of readiness to engage in the demanding and critically reflective ELF awareness procedure. At the same time, a significant number of learners seek to receive EFL lessons with the express aim of passing a particular high-stakes examination, or with a view to visiting or migrating to an Inner Circle country (e.g., the UK). This means that the psychological makeup of these learners is such that they may not facilitate the integration of ELF aware processes.

- *The extent and process of integrating ELF aware practices and processes within specific ELT/EFL contexts should be decided by the informed practitioner.* In light of the above, it is up to the teacher to decide to what extent integrating ELF aware practices in a particular teaching context is possible. As has been shown above, the issues and concerns involved in raising ELF awareness has important advantages for learning that should not be overlooked (e.g., raising awareness about the role of English in interactions globally, the importance of intercultural competence, the need for accommodation strategies in communications with other interlocutors, etc.). What is more, the role of the teacher in this is crucial. Teachers should be informed about ELF-related concerns, but they should also be well versed in using needs analysis tools that will provide them with the data necessary to understand the learning profile and attitudes of their learners as well as of other

stakeholders (parents, sponsors, etc.) with regard to such concerns. In the final analysis, informed teachers will develop the specific "mixture" of ELF awareness activities that will blend well with both the specific teaching context and their learners' idiosyncrasies. In this way, ELF aware practices should not be imposed upon learners in a one-size-fits-all manner but should be the result of research and decision-making by the informed practitioner.

- *Incorporating metacognitive and metalinguistic activities in typical EFL situations can address many of the concerns raised in linking ELF with EFL.* At the level of EFL teaching, such activities can be added to existing courseware without disrupting teacher's day-to-day practices and without challenging the target situation. This means that teachers do not see the process of raising their learners' ELF awareness as a threat to their established practices but as a way of further boosting their intercultural communicative competence. In this sense, metacognitive and metalinguistic activities have also been used in the ENRICH CPD as a means of boosting learners' confidence as ELF users and teachers' self-perceived identity as reflective practitioners.

Conclusion

In this paper I have described the fundamental premises upon which the ENRICH Project's innovative online continuous professional development programme has been based and the essential principles that have guided it. I have also presented the ways in which the ELF awareness framework has been incorporated within the ENRICH training programme and have described the essential features of what I have called the ELF state of mind, with specific implications for pedagogy and teacher education.

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Öğretmenlerin ve Öğrencilerin ODİ Zihin Halini Geliştirmek: ENRICH Projesinin İlkeleri ve Önermeleri

Öz

Bu makalede, AB tarafından finanse edilen (Erasmus+) ENRICH Projesi'ne rehberlik eden dört önerme ve iki ilke sunulmaktadır. 2018-2021 yılları arasında gerçekleştirilen ENRICH projesi kapsamında, İngilizce öğretmenlerini kendilerinin ve öğrencilerinin Ortak Dil Olarak İngilizce (ODİ) farkındalığını geliştirme konusunda eğitmeyi amaçlayan yenilikçi bir çevrimiçi sürekli mesleki gelişim programı geliştirilmiştir. Ayrıca bu yazıda, ODİ bilinçli öğretmen eğitimi ve pedagojisinin etkilerine ilişkin geliştirilen kapsamlı eğitim programına dair kendi gözlemlerimi tartışıyor ve "ODİ zihin hali" olarak bahsettiğim kavramın temel bileşenlerini sunuyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ortal Dil Olarak İngilizce (ODİ), ODİ-farkındalığı, öğretmen eğitimi, dönüştürücü öğrenme, eleştirel düşünce