English as a Lingua Franca: Implications for English Language Teaching
English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

by Dr. Rachaporn Rattanaphumma

What is English as a lingua franca (ELF)? The emphasis on English as a lingua franca shows unique features of English found in international contexts among speakers who have no single language in common. According to Jenkins (2009), ELF is a contact language used among non-native English speakers from the Expanding Circle, simply because these speakers exist in larger numbers than English speakers in either of the other two contexts (Outer and Inner Circle speakers). The definition of ELF as defined by Kirkpatrick (2007: 7) is also associated with language in different backgrounds. He contends that “A lingua franca” is the common language used by people of different language backgrounds to communicate with each other. Lingua francas can be used both within countries and internationally. For example, a Hungarian educationalist coming to Copenhagen to discuss qualification equivalences in European higher education with her Danish, Finnish and Portuguese colleagues or a Korean sales representative negotiating a contract with his German client in Luxembourg, a Spanish Erasmus student chatting with local colleagues in a student hall in Vienna; they all communicate in English as a lingua franca (Berns, 2009). In Thailand, Thai is the national language and English has been used as a common lingua franca to communicate in different functions such as a medium of instruction, social and business contacts, negotiations, etc.

However, the definitions of ELF and EIL (English as an international language) are somewhat different. ELF emphasizes the role of Eng-
lish in communication between speakers from different L1s and this implies that mixing languages is acceptable. There is nothing inherently wrong in retaining characteristics of the L1, such as accent. ELF is not primarily a local or contact language within national groups but between them. Moreover, ELF is not primarily a language of communication between its native speakers (NSs) and NNSs (non-native speakers), but among its NNSs (Jenkins, 2007: 2). To conclude, no matter which circle (Kachru's three-circle model of World Englishes, 1992) of use we come from, ELF is not of orientation to the norms of a particular group of English speakers, but of mutual negotiation involving efforts and adjustments from all parties (Jenkins, 2009). Unlike ELF, English as an international language (EIL), based on McKay (2003), becomes international. This is not because it is the most widely spoken native language in the world, but rather because of the growing number of speakers who are acquiring some familiarity with English as their second or third language. Crystal (2003: 6) estimates that about a quarter of the world's population is already fluent or competent in English, and this figure is steadily growing. Historically, people learnt English in order to use it with its native speakers in the US or UK but nowadays they are more likely to use it for communication with other non-native speakers (Jenkins, 2003: 15). It is quite apparent that most people do not learn English to speak to native speakers. Based on the statistical data (2003), the number of English speakers using English as a mother tongue mainly in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand is thought to be around 350 millions while English as a foreign language (in the Expanding Circle) speakers are likely to be around one billion. As a consequence, English is not a single variety but differs markedly from one territory to another (Jenkins, 2003: 14) such as Asian English: Chinese English, Singaporean English, Hong Kong English, Thai English, or even Estuary English (mid between Cockney and RP), etc.
ELF and Mutual Intelligibility

The use of ELF has brought mutual intelligibility into question. How can speakers with different backgrounds and varieties of L1s achieve the mutual intelligibility? The following data were gathered from the Expanding Circle Engishes where the use of English continues to increase. Kirkpatrick (2007: 156) concludes the findings conducted from recordings of ASEAN nationals who were attending a two-week ELT teacher training course at the Regional Language Center in Singapore (RELC) in 2004 and 2005. It has been found that in ASEAN ELF syntactic uses, the present simple was by far the most commonly used tense with ASEAN speakers and accounted for 61 percent of all the tenses used whereas some verb forms including the present perfect passive, the past continuous and the past perfect were used extremely rarely. The findings from ASEAN ELF phonological features have shown some significant implications. The dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ do not always occur since alternative pronunciations (ʃθ/, ɹð/) of these sounds seldom cause confusion. Another example from the consonant sounds /ʃ/ and /p/ has shown that they tend not to be distinguished in Malay and Tagalog (e.g. fractical for practical, group for group, or personal for personal).

Interestingly, Jenkins (2007:23) has worked on a means of promoting mutual pronunciation intelligibility in ELF communication and to encourage acceptance of those pronunciation features that are regularly and systematically pronounced "incorrectly", and found not to impede intelligibility for an NNS listener. She contends that as far as ELF is concerned, these so-called "errors" should be considered legitimate features of the speaker's regional (NNS) English accent and thus putting NNS accents on an equal footing with regional NS accents. The summary of a comparison
<table>
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<th>EFL target Traditional syllabus</th>
<th>ELF target Lingua Franca Core</th>
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</table>
| 1. The consonantal inventory | * all sounds close RP/GA  
* RP non-rhotic /r/  
GA rhotic /r/  
* RP intervocalic [t]  
GA intervocalic [ɾ] | * all sounds except /θ/, /ð/  
but approximation of all others acceptable  
* rhotic /r/ only  
* intervocalic [t] only |
| 2. Phonetic requirements | * rarely specified | * aspiration after /p/, /t/, /k/  
* appropriate vowel length  
before fortis/lenis consonants |
| 3. Consonant clusters | * all words positions | * word initially word medially |
| 4. Vowel quantity | * long-short contrast | * long-short contrast |
| 5. Tonic (nuclear) stress | * important | * critical |

between EFL (English as a foreign language) target traditional syllabus and ELF target lingua franca core is presented as follows:

Table 1: EFL and ELF pronunciation targets: core features (adapted from Jenkins 2002:99)

In addition, the following non-core items will be listed to compare and contrast with the pronunciation features to be found in EFL and ELF syllabus.
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>ELF target Traditional syllabus</th>
<th>ELF target Lingua Franca Core</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Vowel quality</td>
<td>* close to RP or GA</td>
<td>* L2 (consistent) regional qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Weak forms</td>
<td>* essential</td>
<td>* unhelpful to intelligibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Features of connected Speech</td>
<td>* all</td>
<td>* inconsequential and may be unhelpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Stress-timed rhythm</td>
<td>* important</td>
<td>* unnecessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Word stress</td>
<td>* critical</td>
<td>* can reduce flexibility/unteachable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Pitch movement</td>
<td>* essential for indicating attitudes and grammar</td>
<td>* unnecessary/unteachable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: EFL and ELF pronunciation targets: non-core features (adapted from Jenkins 2002:99)

In addition to Kirkpatrick’s and Jenkin’s data collection, Meierkord (2004, cited in Kirkpatrick: 2007) investigates the use of ELF in both outer and expanding circle countries. She obtained data comprising 22 hours of informal spoken data, primarily of students who were studying at British universities. She analyzed the data for syntactic variation and classified the syntax of the speakers as “regular” (i.e. following native speaker norms), “marked” (i.e. following nativised norms) or “doubtful” (i.e. deviating from both native and nativised norms). The findings showed that 94 percent of the utterances of the outer circle speakers were regular. It was surprising since it contradicts the assumption that speakers would carry the characteristics of their nativised varieties into ELF interactions. She also found that 95 percent of the expanding circle speakers’ utterances were regular as

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Galaxy
they had been taught either British or American English. However, the conclusions drawn from Kirkpatrick (2007) are interesting “Apparently paradoxically, the more localized the use of ELF, the more variation it is likely to display. Conversely, the more international its use, the less variation it is likely to display.”

Breiteneder (2009) as well collected ELF (the use of ELF as a tool to negotiate their interactions) data among 18 Europeans with different mother tongues (i.e. Norwegian, Slovakian, French, Italian, Czech, Swedish, German, etc.). Data were collected in the professional domains of education, business, international relations and scientific research. The findings from group discussion records have shown that these ELF speakers actually use zero marking for 3rd person singular present tense verbs instead of the 3rd person’s. Examples are shown below:

...............so this is one practical possibility which also go in the same direction...........

...............because it last three years........

...............who is the body that legalize or accept a joint program........

...............I suppose it is possible that the thing function in both possibilities........

...............but I think if the community ask to us to push this kind of initiatives.....

Moreover, it has been found that in order to achieve mutual intelligibility, repetition is a vital component of ELF talk. Repetition, based on the observational data, is used to confer prominence, show listenership, and establish cohesion. Finally, it is apparent to draw a conclusion in terms of ELF and mutual intelligibility that speakers have little difficulty
in communicating with one another, despite the inherent differences in the
Englishes that each other brings to the interaction. ELF speakers create a
new variety using the language to make meaning and create their own
versions of reality to achieve mutual intelligibility. Language used in a lo-
cal setting, ELF will display identity markers but when it is used in inter-
national communication, on the other hand, speakers will consciously
avoid the use of local and nativised norms and expressions (Kirkpatrick,

Implications for English Language Teaching

The previous sections have implied the emerging paradigm in Eng-
lish language teaching in ELF contexts. As stated by Seidlhofer (2009),
most studies related to ELF users show degree of independence of English
as a native language (ENL) norms. Those speakers assert their multilin-
gual identities and their joint ownership of the lingua franca they are us-
ing – and in using it, they are shaping and developing it. Jenkins (2007:
168) conducted questionnaires to find out how teachers perceived ELF ac-
cents relative to NS English accents. It is interesting to see that UK and
US English accents were ranked first and second. Based on descriptions of
the ten specified accents, US English accents received the most comments
on intelligibility whereas the Indian English accent was quite difficult to
understand. The German English accent was described as “harsh – low
pitch”. The Swedish English accent was perceived as close to an NS accent:
“fluent, almost mother tongue-like”, “nativelike”, “sounds like a native
speaker”. When we look at Spanish English accents, this was perceived in-
tonation and speed of delivery. The Chinese English accent was described
as “choppy”, “sort of chopped”, “having difficulty with rhythm”, and
“lacking intelligibility”. However, there are some interesting comments to
rethink in terms of the implications for English language teaching. They
are as follows:
“I don’t think there is a so-called good accent of English. English is supposed to be a language for communication, not to be compared for values because of its different accents. People are just familiar with specific accents. It is the familiarity that matters.”

“It was difficult to deal with the concept of correctness as it is already filled with prejudice, to say the least. Applying to the so-called “native speakers” of English felt very odd and uncomfortable, which in my opinion, served to show me how much I am still attached to the idea that the English spoken by its native users still is the model to be followed.”

“Non-native English accents are not problems in communication. However, we still try to teach them against a so-called standard one like the American accent. because in teaching it is important to teach students to speak language (English) that can be understood by most people in the world.”

“I think it is all right that there are a variety of accents of English. What is important is intelligibility because the language is the tool of international communication.”

As implied above, there are both advantages and disadvantages in the choices of choosing NS and NNS models. Medgyes (1994) points out that if the choice of a native speaker model advantages native speaker teachers, it can also disadvantage non-native speaker local teachers. For example, teachers are required to teach a model which they themselves do not speak, which can severely reduce their sense of self-confidence. Moreover, if the choice of a native speaker model is tied to a choice of methodology associated with native speaker teachers, the ideal teacher is therefore a monolingual native speaker (Briane 1999, cited in Kirkpatrick 2007). This means English should be the sole language of the classroom and a
teacher who is monolingual is thus an ideal teacher. Below is the observation received from Honna and Takeshita, 2000, cited in Kirkpatrick 2007.

"Japanese students have passive attitudes when using this language as a means of international and intercultural communication. They are ashamed if they do not speak English as native speakers do."

On the other hand, there are both advantages and disadvantages in choosing an endonormative nativized model. Based on this model, local teachers are obviously advantaged. Kirkpatrick (2007) confirms that this choice will empower local teachers since the multilingual competence of the teacher is recognized and can be exploited in the classroom. Interestingly, Medgyes (1994) describes six positive characteristics of NNS: 1) They provide a good learner model to their students; 2) They can teach language strategies very effectively; 3) They are able to provide more information about the language to their students; 4) They understand the difficulties and needs of the students; 5) They are able to anticipate and predict language difficulties; 6) In EFL settings, they can use the students' native language to their advantage. Medgyes also explains that if the language deficiencies of the NNS teachers are remedied, native and non-native English speaking teachers have equal chance to achieve professional success.

Hayes's (2009) results corroborate Meygye's findings. The study shows that NNS teachers in Thailand make use of their local teachers to be advantaged rather than disadvantaged. One Thai local teacher reports that she always adapts the classroom practice to situational realities and sometimes uses more Thai and even the local northeastern dialect. More Thai will be used for grammar explanations and instructional confirmation. In addition to the six advantages stated by Meygye, this study shows that local teachers have a strong belief in and commitment to the value of
their work: its value to students in their schools and to society at large. As Liu explains (2007: 108), the majority of English teachers worldwide are non-native English speakers and it is a fact that in EFL settings, learning English from instructors whose mother tongue is the same as their students’ is not only realistic but also very successful.

The possible disadvantages of using NNS models may arise if that local model has not yet been codified and there are no grammars and no textbooks or materials based on the local model (Kirkpatrick, 2007: 184). Moreover, the choice over which variety to adopt must depend on the local context, including the reasons why people are learning English and the extent to which a local endonormative model is appropriate. In the Japanese context, Butler’s findings show that Japanese elementary school teachers have positive attitudes towards the privileged status of NS English teachers. These teachers believe that “standard English” only (British and American English) should be taught to EFL students. Another study from Liang (2002), who investigates the opinions of 20 ESL students towards six ESL teachers, five of whom are non-native English speakers from different language backgrounds and one of whom is a native speaker. The results show that accent does not negatively affect students’ attitudes toward their NNS teachers. Personal and professional features such as “being interesting”, “being qualified”, “being professional”, and “being prepared” are more important.

Regarding the classroom implications, ELF is a contact language used among people who do not share a first language and ELF is the irrelevance of native speakers, their Englishes, and their ownership of English (Kuo, 2006). There are implications suggested by Kirkpatrick (2007: 193-194) that the curriculum should include at least three strands. First,
students should need to be alerted to which linguistic features cause particular problems of mutual intelligibility. Second, the curriculum would need to focus on how cultures differ and the implications of such differences for cross-cultural communication. Finally, students should need to be taught the communicative strategies that aid successful cross-cultural communication. Additionally, Jenkins (2007) suggests that it seems crucial for ESL/EFL students to have one single accent or model. Instead, it becomes imperative to present them with a large array of English varieties represented by teachers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

References


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Dr. Ratchaporn Rattanaphumma received her BA in English (Second Class Honors) from the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, and her MA in International Relations from Northeastern Illinois University. She obtained her Ph.D. in English as an International Language (EIL) from Chulalongkorn University. She is currently the Chairperson of the Department of General Education, Faculty of Arts.