Employing Learner Autonomy in the Use of English as a Lingua Franca in International Communication Pedagogy

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Language reflects our realities and in times of greatest globalisation effects ever it is no surprise that one particular language started to take the role of the language of communication among various nationalities and cultures. How that came to be the English language is not discussed in this paper. It is a fact that it took the role of lingua franca on multiple levels, in various fields, and areas – science, academic circles, tourism, business, etc. This paper intends to put a perspective on English as a lingua franca (ELF) in the pedagogical process of English language learning inside an International Business Communications Classroom. It aims to stress the significance of giving students their autonomy in the learning process, as they are active contributors of ELF communication community. The result of this research is a model of employing learner autonomy intended for educators dealing with ELF.

Key words: English, lingua franca, learner autonomy, international communication, intercultural communication, pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

It has more than ever become important to redefine the communicative behaviour in relation to English becoming a world language. One of the aspects in need of this is education due to the increasing trend to use English in tertiary education as the language of communication among non-native English speakers. Some authors even claim that already nowadays 'the language of higher education is English' (Doiz et al. 2013, 13) and that English is already 'replacing other languages as medium of instruction' (Marsh 2006). Nevertheless, in times of intensive

internationalisation of education English is often used as a language of communication mediating among many languages, nations, cultures in various situations and with many possible purposes. It has been predicted that English will become the second language for many, if not most, of the world's citizens by 2050 (Graddol 1997). Hence English is no longer influenced and created solely by native speakers but it has spread to all people using it as the language that two parties use when they do not share a common mother tongue. English used in these situations has become known as English as a lingua franca (ELF). According to all stated a shift in educational process is needed. The article aims to establish firstly, whether allowing more autonomy to students participating in multi-national classrooms, cultural and language backgrounds, will result in improved outcomes, and secondly, how to do that.

In order to achieve this aim, the article starts by elaborating on terminology and provides definitions of ELF. It explains why it should be distinguished from English as a foreign language (EFL), especially for educational purposes, and introduces the term English as a medium of instruction (EMI). Further on, the paper presents insights into teaching ELF and places it in the international discourse. Afterwards it focuses on the term of learner autonomy and discusses it from the perspective of international communication classroom pedagogy. It elaborates on whether to foster this type of classroom communication, focusing especially on international surroundings, and how to do that. The latter results in the main contribution of this paper – a proposal of a model of employing learner autonomy in an international communication ELF classroom. It provides 6 steps for educators to employ learner autonomy and include students as equally important and active participants in classroom communication by providing more grounds for their inner motivation in studying.

The debate in this paper is not solely of pedagogical nature as it touches upon highly discussed issues of internationalisation and multiculturalism. World's migrant flows have affected educational systems on every level, forcing the pedagogical process to be reconsidered and redesigned to suit the current

needs. For example, according to OECD report on education (OECD 2014), the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship has risen dramatically, from 0.8 million worldwide in 1975 to 4.5 in 2012. They also report (ibid) that Europe has become the top destination for students at the tertiary level of education enrolled outside their country of origin, hosting 48% of those students where 'English has become the main foreign language that is used as a means of instruction at universities in Europe and worldwide' (Doiz et al. 2013, xvii). According to a research done by *Wächter* and Maiworm (2008) over 400 European Higher Education Institutions provided a total of more than 2400 programmes taught entirely in English in 2007. These data show that the issue of the language of communication in tertiary education has to become a relevant issue around the world, across European countries and has to enter the discussions also inside the Euro-Mediterranean area. Hence the proposed model of this article aims to provide educators of the Euro-Mediterranean area using English as a lingua franca in the communication with foreign students with a supportive tool to deal with the arising issues in a foreign language communication.

ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA (ELF)

The term *lingua franca* originates from Arabic and it was first used as a pidgin trade language of communication among Arabic and European travellers that clearly did not speak any other common language (Brosch 2015). This description is irrelevant nowadays, but with regard to its original meaning, it generally referrers to a language that is used to communicate among the speaker that share no other common language and speak other diverse languages. In times of rapid globalisation, the need for this type of communication increased and hence the number of English non-native speakers exceeded the one of native English speakers (Graddol 1997). Later Graddol (2006) observes that there is an increasing number of people starting to learn English, and that they are younger as ever. According to Brumfit (2001, 116) English is no longer 'owned' by English native speakers,

making them less potent in the power to adapt and change their language. Hence, by being used by non-native speakers for a range of public and personal needs and in isolation from native speakers it began to change from its original form, especially in its role of use. It is now not only 'an international language but rather *the* international language' (Seidlhofer, 2011). It serves as a 'contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common national culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication' (Firth 1996, 240). Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE 2013), slightly differently describes EFL as 'an additionally acquired language system which serves as a common means of communication for speakers of different first languages', where they claim the key issue to be the fact that this definition does not exclude native speakers.

The use of English as a lingua franca in many environments might present an obvious threat to national languages and multilingualism. House (2003, 556) argues the opposite by claiming that there is a distinction between 'languages for communication' and 'languages for identification'. ELF is a language of communication, used to enable communication with others and it is highly unlikely for a speaker to conceive it as the language of identification as this is the language that determines one's identity.

Teaching English as a Lingua Franca

There is now an increasing trend to use ELF in European tertiary education in order to become more internationalised and adapt to today's globalised market. Despite this change in the means of communication in educational systems there is a lack of discussion how globalisation affects our languages and the methods of their teaching. Nevertheless, Seidelhofer (2011) claims that the teaching models are very resistant to change and instead of elaborating on what they teach, teachers dwell on how, the latter being more manageable. According to Jenkins (2011) there is a lack of detailed discussion about how different varieties of English, or how the 'dynamic variability' of EFL can affect language teaching models or methodology. However, in need of

a twist, English as a native language still remains the 'default referent', despite the need to consider many possible concepts of English. When English is used as a lingua franca, it is 'no longer founded on the linguistic and sociocultural norms of native English speakers and their respective countries and cultures' Gnutzmann (2000, 358).

Similarly teachers need to keep apart the notions of 'English as a lingua franca' (adapted to different needs of intercultural communication, the main objective is to use usually the only language both parties involved in communication are able to speak, they are not trying to achieve the native-speaker norm but rather to achieve the goal of their communication, linguistic norms are here ad hoc and negotiated during communicational process) and ' English as foreign language' (the focus is where the language comes from, the culture, the linguistic norms are pre-existing and re-affirmed), according to Seidlhofer (2011). Teaching ELF tends to be based on the assumptions different from teaching English as a foreign or second language.

The third notion that needs to be mentioned in this context is the notion of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) increasingly used at tertiary education level, especially for academic subjects such as science, mathematics, geography and medicine (Dearden 2014). Dearden (ibid) in her report for the British Council also claims that there was little empirical research done into why and when EMI is being introduced and how it is delivered, despite this they still label it is a phenomenon with very important implications for the education in non-anglophone countries.

Canagarajah (1999) presents two pedagogical approaches to teaching a foreign language. The first, called Mainstream Pedagogy, continues with today's attitude toward Standard English, but the second, called Critical Pedagogy, carefully questions the present teaching practice. The latter suggests that by accepting a foreign language one also inherits the politics, ideologies, racial tenets and economic values of the dominant group, by stating that language is an inseparable part of that group. By contrasting the two pedagogical approaches, Mainstream Pedagogy puts language as a separate entity, implying that all

people learn it in the same way, and viewing knowledge as simple undisputed acts. However, the Critical Pedagogy tries to involve individual's personal background, realizing that knowledge might be relative, contested and highly political.

This paper argues that it is necessary for educators to make a move toward the Critical Pedagogy, and that can be done by including students in the learning process as active participants on all levels, and by giving them autonomy. This is seen as one of the key changes that need to be made in order to achieve effective ELF teaching. In order to capture the nature of English we need to acknowledge the vital role and the authority of ELF users as active contributors to the development of the language by appropriating the language in a process Brutt-Griffler (2002) called macroaquisition[1].

It is not argued here that everything students say or do should be considered correct, as it still seems important for students to know the Standard English. Rather than that it is suggested that teachers have to change the attitude towards students who speak different varieties of languages. Because a 'learning environment that values the students' cultures and languages, that allows students to engage in activities where they can show their expertise and that capitalizes on the students' linguistic and cultural experiences will foster academic success' (Mermann-Jozwiak and Sullivan 2005, 273).

ELF in International Discourse

Alptekin (2002, 58) sees learning a foreign language as enculturation, meaning that by learning a language one also acquires 'new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers'. That is a fact when one learns a language with a set frame of speakers, but, as already mentioned before, according to Brumfit (2001, 116), English is no longer a language owned solely by English native speakers. It is sometimes thought that native speakers have 'no right to intervene or pass judgment. They are irrelevant'

1 Macroaquisition is seen as second language acquisition by speech communities, that links language change to its spread Brutt-Griffler (2002).

(Widdowson 1994, 385). The English language changed its shape due to various aims of communication and ELF became widely used in business communication among non-native speakers, allowing the language to adapt to given communicative situations. Nevertheless, English of native speakers tends to be more difficult to understand and learn to non-native speakers from other varieties of English. Consequently, this might represent a problem in international business communication where communicational skills tend to be considerably more valuable than grammatical or pronunciation accuracy. Due to its frequency and scope of use ELF is 'undoubtedly the currently most prevalent language for intercultural communication' (*Hülmbauer* et al. *2008, 25)*.

LEARNER AUTONOMY

The topic of learner autonomy has been discussed for many decades now and it has been widely promoted in literature. Many teachers, especially foreign language ones, have desired to make a move and change their approach to teaching. The new approach frequently involved encouraging students to participate in their learning more fully (Miller, 2009). Student-cantered approach has been put into focus in new syllabuses designed to promote learner autonomy (Gardner and Miller 1999). That does not necessarily imply that the teacher is absent, but it rather suggests that their role changes by giving the autonomy to their students. Davies and Williamson (1998:10) state that the shift of responsibility helps in motivating learners in the processes of learning (Schweinhorst 2003). Teachers do not have to completely lose their role. They design and create opportunities and environments in which learners employ their new role of being autonomous, actively assist students in their learning processes (Hafner and Miller 2001: 69).

Many authors are prone to this shift in pedagogical processes for various reasons. Changes in the role of English in the world have significantly influenced the perspectives on teaching and led to an increased socio-political and intercultural awareness (Seidlhofer 2011). When it comes to ELF the autonomy over the

English language is no longer solely in native speakers' hands and it has been shared among all its users and participants in communication. Hence the educational process of learning ELF should give the autonomy to learners more than ever before.

Even though it seems logical to conclude that learner autonomy means giving the autonomy to learners it is not nearly that simple to define this term precisely. It is broadly defined as "the ability to take control over one's learning" Holec (1988), or "a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (Little 1991, 4), characterized "by readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This "entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person" Dam (1995, 1).

In literature there are many opposing views and issues surrounding the term learner autonomy. Taking into consideration the views of other authors Little (2003) noticed that they debate about it being "a capacity" (Little 1991, 4) or a skill and they also question whether it is a type of behaviour or an attitude. Duruk and Kecik (2014) debate whether it is a right or a responsibility. (Benson 2001) claims that it is characterized by learner's responsibility as well as their control, the questions whether students should take control or take charge, and finally the author decides it is better to talk about *control* than about *taking charge*. He sees the construct of control as more amenable to being observable as those kinds of behaviours provide better guidelines for teachers' actions in order to promote autonomy (ibid).

Apart from that, the term has been subdivided into types. For example, Benson (1997) presents three types of autonomy. Firstly, he talks about the technical (associated with positivism emphasizing learning-to-learn and promoting life-long learning). Secondly, the psychological (associated with constructivism, stressing the inner transformation of one's attitudes, behaviours and personality, and aiming to take charge of one's learning, by emphasising authentic and real learning environments, negotiation and social mediation, self-awareness and self-regulation, and the role of the teacher as a facilitator or a guide). And thirdly, the political autonomy (stressing the control

of learners' learning processes and the content of learning where students need to become aware of the context of learning, its purpose and implications of learning a foreign language, as well as the potential for personal and social change).

Omaggio (cited in Wenden 1998, 41) lists seven attributes that seem to characterise an autonomous learner. He sees him/her as learners who (1) have insights into their language styles and strategies; (2) take an active approach to their learning tasks; (3) are willing to take risks, to communicate in the target language at all costs; (4) are good at guessing; (5) attend to form as well as content; (6) develop the target language into a separate reference system and are willing to test and change rules if they do not apply; (7) are tolerant and outgoing in terms of approach to the target language. If we simplify and take the stance that learner autonomy is the autonomy of learners to accept that they are responsible for their own learning, an autonomous learner is one who 'understands the purpose of their learning programme, explicitly accepts responsibility for their learning, shares in the setting of learning goals, takes initiatives in planning and executing learning activities, and regularly reviews their learning and evaluates its effectiveness' (Holec 1981; Little 1991; Little 2003). An autonomous learner therefore, contributes the aims, materials, techniques, and methods to the learning process inside and outside a classroom.

By giving the autonomy in the learning process to learners one might consider teachers redundant. There is still an intense debate on the subject whether the support of a mentor or a teacher is still needed inside as well as outside classrooms. Learners also have to learn how to be autonomous and mentors are there to provide guidance and knowledge, and are still a vital part of a classroom. They are to include learner autonomy as a part of a structured learning environment by which it can become a part of the pedagogical objectives of a language course (Hafner and Miller 2001, 67). Making a shift in classroom learning procedures is of course something to be taught and there is a great need for teaching the teachers how to give up their safe environment of having the whole autonomy inside a classroom and partly giving it to students. The dimensions of the learning

process completely change by doing that. It might seem that this demands less of a teacher, but it clearly does not. By employing autonomy to learners the teacher has to consider more factors as well as to coordinate them in a way that the learning process is efficient. This is of course much more demanding than building a subject on the assumption that whatever and however a teacher decides is the only reality.

The shift towards giving learners their autonomy works in favour of efficiency as well as motivation of learners. As we know, no two learners are alike and only they know what works for them. By giving them the option of contributing and becoming a part of decision making process, we motivate them more than in the case where a teacher sets the objectives and provides the materials inside the learning process. Inner motivation tends to be more long-term and efficient in terms of language learning. Little (2003) states that by making learners autonomous they are more likely to be efficient. If they are actively involved in the process of learning, they are more likely to be motivated and they are proactively committed to their learning. In terms of foreign language learning the third dimension is added by stating that effective communication is developed only through use and by gaining the autonomy in social interactions students are generally likely to master the full range of discourse roles.

Giving learners the autonomy to actively participate in their own learning process is a vital part when considering the use ELF inside an international communication classroom. It gives a voice to each and every student as an equal part of ELF language community and by that it equalizes the intake of every present nation or culture. The following chapter makes the connection among learner autonomy, ELF and international communication in the pedagogical perspective clearer and presents a model of employing learner autonomy in ELF international communication classroom.

DESIGNING THE MODEL OF EMPLOYING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN ELF INTERNATIONAL CLASSROOM

ELF, as we have seen, is a specific style or type of English, which by no means can any longer be seen as having only one real set of native speakers creating the language. Globalisation forced the world to 'find' a common language and English is beginning to take the spot. Nowadays English language learning starts at ever younger age, but the English used is still based on native speaker English, regardless of the fact that non-native speakers are nowadays larger in number and can be seen as co-creators of the language as well. Due to this reason this paper discusses a model of ELF learning inside an international communication classroom. The model stresses the need for learner autonomy as being a part of ELF communication group. Students are no longer learners of a pre-described and fixed language system, but active contributors. The shift also to be expected here is the one of the teacher that has to allow students to become participators in the teaching and learning process.

There have been attempts to contribute to this topic in a conceptual model functioning as a proposal. Alptekin (2002, 63), by collecting other author's thoughts, proposes a set of 5 criteria for a new pedagogical model in the use of international language in cross-cultural settings: (1) successful bilinguals should become pedagogic models in English as international language instead of monolingual native speakers; (2) Hyde (cited in Alptekin 2002, 63) claims that intercultural communicative competence should be developed among learners which will enable their effective communication and awareness of differences; (3) Kramsch and Sullivan (cited in Alptekin 2002, 63) say that pedagogy should prepare learners to be local and global speakers; (4) materials should involve local and global settings; (5) Widdowson (cited in Alptekin 2002, 63) adds that materials should have native and non-native interactions involved. The Alptekin's model does not tackle the need to give students their autonomy as active participants of the language community, which is seen as a vital issue in this kind of communication in the ELF educational process. Hence this paper stresses the

need for embedding learner autonomy and proposes a model for educators of ELF as an answer on how to give students their autonomy in the learning process. Next to including the need for learner autonomy, its main contribution is that it no longer stands on the grounds of the present native-speaker language system. Instead it treats students as equally important contributors of the language community as the native speakers.

The 6 steps are designed to be followed from the beginning till the end in the given order due to the fact that they upgrade each other. The first two steps are the base for further work and are two ground guidelines in effective ELF teaching and learning.

Step 1: Realise that English as a foreign language (EFL) is not equal to ELF teaching

There is a kind of 'conceptual gap' as Seidelhofer (2011) describes it. People are still unaware that English as a lingua franca, as a new and still developing concept, really exists. Most of the teachers, even inside intercultural studies, still base their implementation plans on native English materials. Nevertheless, they tend to use new methods of learning, but instead of focusing also on what they teach they merely develop the methods on how they teach. This shift is incredibly important in employing learner autonomy as active participants in ELF learning process. Therefore, the 'what' they teach in EFL teaching is not the same as the 'what' they teach in ELF teaching. EFL is based on one of the native styles of the English language but the ELF is based on the fact that it is a language with native but, most importantly, as well as a language shared among non-native speakers bringing in many other mother tongues, language systems, culture, etc. Teachers must hence realise that the 'what' they teach belongs equally to them as experts as to the international classroom of learners that need to be given the autonomy in this process. Teachers need to, next to realising that ELF is different from native English, also clearly understand that it is meant to serve different purposes and for different functions (*Hülmbauer et al. 2008, 32)*.

Step 2: ELF is not 'owned' by native speaker

To upgrade the step 1, teachers have to be aware that English is no longer owned by native speakers solely (Brumfit 2001, 116). ELF is a language of communication among many speakers from different countries and cultures, and it has become the international language that is still based on the native English language, but as every living language it tends to develop in its own course. Teachers in this case need to go beyond viewing at other languages' cultures as bounded entities. In this perspective it is advisable that the teachers know English as a foreign or a second language which gives them the power to understand the language from an 'outside' perspective, the perspective they share with their international students. What is linguistically speaking wrong is still wrong, we are not claiming that everything 'goes' and students still need to learn the proper English. Teachers just need to be adaptable in this case and not consider the only proper English to be British, or American ones.

Step 3: Integrate language and culture

To upgrade step 2, that made us realise that ELF belongs to many countries and cultures, teachers need to be careful when integrating language and culture. In ELF teaching process, the culture of native English becomes just one of the cultures to be integrated. Integrating language and culture is the key issue in language learning but in ELF the teacher must adapt and realise that the target cultures are no longer just those of native speakers of the English language, but actually those of everyone involved in communication. There is no need to stress how native speakers use the English language and adapt to only their way of using it as 'communicative competence, with its standardized native speaker norms, fails to reflect the *lingua franca* status of English (Alptekin 2002, 60). Widdowson (1998) also claims that language that is real for native speakers is not likely to be perceived as such by non-native speakers.

English to be used to express and enact cultural values, forms and realities connected to a variety of communities, is moving from what is local to being global for a speaker in a dynamic way. The main goal is to move away from viewing English as owned by

the English speaking cultures, but rather as a mediator among many communities. In traditional English language learning classrooms cultures other that the ones of British speaking countries have been completely ignored. By taking into consideration that the culture of ELF is basically every culture on the planet and that 'no nation can have custody over it' (Widdowson 1994, 385), the horizons spread, and the autonomy is given to learners. This is done as well by realising that they are equal parts of its language community.

Step 4: Process and not a product

The steps so far indicate that learning should become a process not a product with a set of given and prefixed language systems and a defined language community. It has to become a process instead of being viewed as a product that needs to be learned. This may be achieved by giving students their autonomy. By that we mean that they actively participate in the process of preparing the programmes' objectives, materials, activities, etc, to become active participants. Alptekin (2002, 58) sees the role of teachers in this communication as 'gatekeepers' who equip their learners with four competencies of communication – grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence and help students get access to real-life target language communication.

Step 5: Prepare activities

After realising the basic notions of this model, it is time to get to the practical part and prepare activities. We advise to consider students in the process of preparing activities (step 5) as well as in step 6 (preparing materials). On the one hand, because as already claimed, they are active participants in EFL language community and should be treated as such by giving them the autonomy. On the other hand, because the educational systems have not changed drastically over the past 50 years although the world has, and students tend to function in the ways different from teachers. For example, the 'traditional' educational processes are based on sharing data, but students quickly realise that the data could be found in a matter of seconds on the

internet and lose motivation in learning them. Hence, they should not only be taught the data themselves, but also about where to find them, what the credible sources are, etc.

Therefore, students must once again be given the autonomy in preparing the activities in which they will later participate. In case of ELF they can be from every topic students are interested in and/or are relevant to the study programme as long as ELF is used as a mediator, a joint code in intercultural communication. Bearing this in mind, activities involving computers and especially the Internet match all of the criteria, and by using the ELF in international communication and employing activities we move closer to the younger audience.

Step 6: Prepare materials

Materials have to be chosen according to the facts that ELF is a type of English no longer owned by native English speakers and that it has a wide group of international speakers. That means that all listening and reading materials should be selected from native as well as from non-native speakers of as many different languages and cultural backgrounds as possible to highlight all the possibilities. It is especially important to include and examine reading and listening materials from the nationalities or cultures present in the classroom, because it offers a mirror to students allowing them to observe their own styles and learn from them.

One of the problematic aspects of discussing the materials or styles of English to use in ELF classrooms is that there are no comprehensive dictionaries of ELF. There are only native English dictionaries. Therefore, we advise teachers to use those, but to also use the opportunity to compare and contrast different pronunciations and uses that might occur in non-native written and spoken communication.

CONCLUSION

The article establishes that it is beneficiary to foster learner autonomy in students participating in classrooms with many nationalities, cultural and language backgrounds. As an answer to

how to do that the article provides us with the proposed model of employing learner autonomy in an international communication ELF classroom. The model is intended to be used in international and multicultural classrooms where English as a *lingua franca* is used. It is based on presumptions of what ELF and learner autonomy are, and it answers the basic question of how to deal with the necessary differences this type of a classroom brings. On the other hand, it tends to join the differences into a unique whole by accepting students as equal and active participants in ELF language community. The cornerstone of the model is a teacher who considers and accepts two facts: that EFL teaching is not equal to ELF teaching, and that native speakers of English are not the sole participants in creation of ELF. This gives room for other nationalities and cultures to step in and take the place. This can only be achieved by giving students their autonomy in creating, selecting, preparing, etc. the objectives as well as activities and materials for the study programme they joined. Despite thinking that this shift changes the role and by that also diminishes the role of a teacher, the procedure of sharing autonomy with students puts a lot of stress on teachers' work, and consequently a lot more effort is needed than to just select materials and activities to the teacher's liking. The teacher's role is transformed in a way that not only 'how' but also 'what' is taught get changed, and that is considered to be a shift more than needed in today's changing educational world.

The main strength of the proposed model is that it presents a possible answer to today's much needed shift in educational practices when dealing with ELF. It sees English as a language no longer owned by native speakers, which implies the need for autonomy of students as active participants in creation and development of the English language. It could be of great use in the tertiary educational systems inside the Euro-Mediterranean countries as an area with an increasing number of foreign students with different national languages and cultural backgrounds entering educational systems.

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