

Stefanie Morejon, “English as a Lingua Franca in Europe and Asia: Teaching Policy on the Ground”, Department of English Language and ELT Methodology, 2017

Advisor’s evaluation

Stefanie Morejon has provided a further contribution to the ongoing discussion of potential gaps between various approaches to ELT and the actual communicative situations in which learners find themselves, particularly when they move from country to country. Her study expands upon a question often posed by ELT practitioners in reaction to the promotion of the English as a lingua franca (ELF) paradigm in academic circles over of the past 15-20 years: how can the contemporary needs of users of English in the global context, with particular focus on European-Asian contact, be addressed in the classroom? The study can be described as exploratory in character, based on interviews conducted with five “global” ELF users currently living in “expanding circle” countries in both Europe and Asia according to Kachru’s model, and two international ELT professionals.

Overall, the thesis has a number of positive aspects. The overview of ELF, ESL, ELF and related paradigms and approaches to teaching, including the main differences between them, appears to be relatively thorough balanced. It is also to the author’s credit that she acknowledges the domain-dependency of varieties of English, placing particular focus on the business and academic spheres (though more could probably have been said about the areas of “politics, technology, media, and tourism” mentioned on p. 23). The overview of the Business English teaching situation in Prague, for which the author provides authentic experience and data (including prices) is a highly relevant addition to this (though this perspective appears to be limited to one spot in the thesis and is not considered too much in the analysis of the interview data). It should also be noted that as a practitioner, the author approached the research with a significant level of both personal and professional enthusiasm and a sincere aim to improve both her own teaching practices and generally accepted teaching standards.

The thesis is generally well-organized and well-written, with only a minimum of formal shortcomings (such as occasional typos or reference information errors). The research procedure, including the role of the researcher herself, is well-documented and reflected, and supplemental material is provided in the appendices which may allow for further utilization of the data. In general, it is commendable that the author conducted research with everyday language users and professionals, though, of course, there could have been more of each included. The limits of generalizability of the small sample size are, however, clearly stated in the text.

There are, though, some aspects of the thesis that could be improved, mostly in the analytical sections, which probably occupy a much smaller percentage of the resulting text than might perhaps be ideal, and, I suspect, could have utilized the data even more thoroughly:

- 1) The declared “sociolinguistic” approach could be more clearly identified, elaborated upon, and above all, utilized in the analysis. The research identifies problems outlined by both language users and teachers, but does not really engage with sociolinguistic theory. Above all, what appears to be lacking is a consideration of the socioeconomic

basis for the language and communication problems described, as well as questions of ideologies and interests of the individual actors at different levels (state governments, companies, language schools, and the like). For example, the fact that in many expanding circle countries (more and more so in Asia, where institutions such as “English villages” have cropped up in abundance), there is a market for learners aiming to speak like native speakers, seems to have been overlooked somehow. Since we are very often talking about issues of policy in individual countries and regions, more attention could have been devoted to inspiration from the literature in the area of language policy/planning/management.

- 2) The summarizing formulations of what the interviewees agreed upon in section 4.2.2.1 could have been more extensively substantiated and, in some places in particular, could have made fewer logical leaps. For example, the fact that “Our five ELF users report using English with various individuals in a number of domains” (p. 53) is not a sufficient basis for the statement “The English language is a necessary tool in a number of domains in today's international world”. Likewise, the interviewees’ declarations regarding the quality of English education in their home countries appear to be taken at face value (see the summary on p. 55) rather than analyzed in the context of the overall sociolinguistic situation of those countries. It would have also been appropriate to devote more attention to points of disagreement among the participants.
- 3) The interviews with the ELT professionals seem to yield rather general information about the individuals’ teaching philosophies, but less attention appears to have been devoted to, among others, local market conditions – how do these teachers confront their ideas about what students need with what some students may demand as consumers (e.g. native speakers)?
- 4) Despite what I view to be a comparatively healthy approach to the various paradigms discussed in the study (as I mentioned above), at certain points, the author seems to get a bit caught up in both her own ideological perspectives and those of her interview participants, above all in reference to what can be paraphrased as “outdated” teaching and policy. This then visible through somewhat expressive, evaluative formulations bordering on the extreme. These include, among others, “...the pedagogical community on the ground is *still behind* in the practical application of language-awareness information and tools demanded by the implications of the rise and reign of the English language” or “...the average language school *still* touts native-speaker standards as the benchmark...”(p. 9), “This suggests that the quality of education available to potential ELF users in their home countries' school systems is *insufficient* for the many purposes in which these individuals need to use the English language”(p. 56) and reference to “*antiquated* methods of language instruction” which “are the greatest *detriment* to successful language acquisition in the classroom” (p. 55), “*poorly* implemented classroom strategy” (p. 59) or “a *dearth* of ELF-informed teaching material in both teachers’ and students’ ELT resources” (page 65) (emphasis mine in all cases).

Questions for discussion:

- 1) Throughout the thesis, the author mentions the opposition between “an ELF-centered approach to language instruction” and “traditional instructional methods”. Would it be possible to elaborate a bit more on what each of these actually entails “on the ground”, or at the micro-level, such as in the area of error correction?
- 2) On page 65 it is stated that “current hiring practices in the expanding circle which favor sometimes-underqualified NESTs who will accept lower wages over qualified NESTs and NNESTs should be reconsidered”. What socioeconomic as well as ideological barriers to the implementation of this proposal may exist in individual countries in both Europe and Asia?
- 3) The ELF users interviewed for this study can be described as “global”, having lived and worked in multiple countries. However, there are many ELF users who may never leave their country of origin. How might the perspectives of these speakers add to the conclusions reached in the study?

Overall, I recommend the thesis for defense with a grade of 2 (in Czech “velmi dobře”) on the condition that the author reacts to the points raised above in a satisfactory manner.

Prague, August 31, 2017

Tamah Sherman