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## Variability of English as a Lingua Franca: The Pedagogical Implications for English Language Teachers in Nigeria

Uju Blessing Ozugha

### Abstract

*English has assumed the status of global lingua franca as it is now being used amongst non-native speakers as official/ national language and an international language. Unfortunately, in Nigeria little attention has been paid to how this global variety can be incorporated into language curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices. Thus, this paper explores the variability of incorporating English as a lingua franca (ELF) variety into teaching and learning of the language in a second language learning (L2) contexts by eliciting data from non-native teachers of English. It aims to find out the teachers' awareness of English as a Lingua Franca, their preferences and their choice over accuracy versus intelligibility. The study involved 20 non-native English language teachers in Gombe State University, with different linguistic backgrounds. The data were collected using a questionnaire, and the constructs measured with Likert scale statements. The findings showed that non-native English language teachers are aware of ELF and different English varieties, but rather, prefer the British standard as a model for themselves and their students. The paper also argues that establishing the variability is necessary because with the wide use of English language throughout different fields and geographical settings, variations of English in terms of phonology, lexico grammar, pragmatics, discourse and syntactic elements, have emerged. Hence the need to inculcate this variety to take into account the use of Englishes in different intercultural and multicultural encounters where people have different first languages and cultural backgrounds. Such movement will truly reflect its current diversity and wide range of its users.*

**Keywords:** *Lingua Franca, English Language Teaching (ELT), Teacher Training, Pedagogy*

### Introduction

Globalization has indeed transformed lives and societies. One of the prominent features of globalization as Ahmed (2017) articulated, is the changing role of language and how globalization has created new world order in which language, particularly the English language has taken an important role. In this sense, we cannot analyze globalization purely in its economic forms; there have to be efforts to point up to the linguistic aspect because the multiple flows and nexuses have indeed reshaped global arrangements, including linguistic ones (Ahmed 2017). For example, English has occupied a unique place throughout history and in today's interconnected world, people now interact in different ways in the world of business, politics, culture, education and technology largely through the use of English Language. In fact, as Crystal (2003) opines, there is currently no country in the world where one would not meet a good number of English language speakers. English has assumed the status of global lingua franca as it is now being used amongst non-native speakers as official/ national language and an international language. Although the

notion of Global Englishes (GE) has been widely discussed, unfortunately, little attention has been paid to how GE can be incorporated into language curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices. Thus, this paper explores the variability of incorporating the global variety of English language or English as a lingua franca variety into teaching and learning of the language in a second language learning (L2) contexts such as Nigeria.

The significance of the paper is to identify how ELF researchers and English teaching professionals can leverage on the global English variety for effective teaching and learning as it has become so pervasive that they cannot deny its existence. Previously, the English language was taken to be the language of “Great Britain” however, through slave trade and colonialism, it has been transported to America, Canada, Australia, many African and Asian countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, India and Pakistan. In the process of this exportation, English language as it is today has considerably changed to reflect its current diversity and wide range of its users in different fields and geographical settings. Thus, these changes and varieties should be reflected in teaching in ways that are digestible to learners (Jenkins et al., 2011) and takes into account the use of Englishes in intercultural and multicultural encounters where people have different first languages and cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, it is evident that most users of English are not monolingual Native Speakers (NSs), but also bilinguals and multilinguals, with English as their second or third language, bringing about diverse linguistic and cultural influences into learning of the language. Nigeria is a typical example of a geographical setting with diverse ethnic groups, languages and cultures. Hence, the focus on L1 or L2 cannot be adequate. Unfortunately, educational policies in Nigeria are still being centered on monolingual native speakers (NS) or L2 pedagogy rather than on pluricentric users of English. Teacher education and training, language policy, curriculum/syllabus design, teaching methods/materials and assessment therefore should be changed to an approach that is centered more on intercultural communication where social and cultural values can be explored. The consequences of these is that English varieties can no longer be divided just according to L1 or L2 varieties, especially as many speech communities these days are characterized by their fluidity, dynamic, innovative, diversified and mutable nature. Establishing this variability is necessary because with the wide use of English language throughout different fields and geographical settings, variations of English in terms of phonology, lexico grammar, pragmatics, discourse and syntactic elements, have emerged.

### **English as a Lingua Franca: An Overview**

ELF has existed for many decades, together with other lingua francas like Portuguese, Latin, Arabic and others. But the research into ELF is a recent activity. In the interim, English itself has served as a Lingua Franca ever since the countries of

the outer circle (Kachru, 1985 as cited in Jenkins et al., 2011), were first colonized from the late sixteenth century. Its origin is from the Mediterranean lingua franca. Lingua franca is defined on the Voice website (as cited in Jenkins et al., 2011) as an additionally acquired language system which serves as a common means of communication for speakers of different first languages. Therefore, English as a lingua franca is “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communication medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). The most important thing in ELF is the use of English as a common means of communication for speakers whose first language is not English language. Mostly, only one out of every four users of English in the world is a native speaker of the language (Seidlhofer, 2015).

ELF is a global English used by both the native and non-native speakers. This means that English is owned and developed by all users, not just by the so-called native English speakers (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Si, 2018). Therefore, instead of an exclusive focus on native-speaker's variety represented by American English and British English, ELF-informed teaching is supposed to represent a pluricentric view of English and collectively accentuate the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity (Jenkins, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2012). English as a lingua franca is a multilingual activity involving speakers from different range of geographical terrains. ELF interactions focus on 'function' rather than 'form'. Thus, Seargeant (2012) states that:

...it is probably most useful to think of English as a lingua franca as a function rather than a specific variety in its own right ..., it is also, importantly marked by communicative strategies in the way people accommodate to each other's communicative practices and adapt their usage so that it is effective and appropriate for culturally and linguistically diverse context in which it is being employed. (p. 89)

ELF research has been conducted at linguistic levels of lexis/lexicogrammar, pronunciation and pragmatics. Research in ELF has been explored in its own right, using naturally occurring data, rather than using a native English Standard (Jenkins et al., 2011). Another research on ELF was on pronunciation by Jenkins (2000), based on educational settings, including general and academic English classrooms, she made a comparison between bilingual native speakers and second language learners. The difference between her study and previous studies in ELF was that she focused mainly on non-native speaker to non-native speaker interactions, while others include native speakers in ELF communication.

There is no doubt that ELF is part of the more general concept of World English (WE), or Global English (GE). Thus, as a result of its wide usage, English has been shaped as much by its non-native speakers than the native speakers. So, in order

for the concept of ELF to be accepted, alongside English as a native language, there have been an advocacy for the “systematic study of the nature of ELF – what it looks and sounds like, and how people actually use and make it work – and a consideration of the implications for the teaching and learning of the language” (Seidlhofer, 2015, p. 340). From ELF's point of view, NNSEs are not 'failed native speakers English, but rather, they are efficient communicators who use their multilingual assets in ways that native speakers cannot. What this means is that ELF is centered on 'pragmatic' use of language in context, that is, achieving efficiency in getting the message across is more important than form (correctness). As a result of this, ELF interactions are usually 'hybrid' and pluralistic in composition, accommodating each other's diverse cultural backgrounds and may need code-switching in other languages they know.

Research in ELT has uncovered an ad hoc and creative use of English in multilingual settings. These two threads of discovery have challenged the monolithic view of English in English language teaching (ELT) and thus, problematized the English as a native language (ENL)-informed teaching paradigm, which remains commonly practiced in the fields of English as a second language particularly in Nigeria. Nigerian curriculum is still heavily influenced by ENL and have remained influential in the assessment of learner's performance. Moreover, English should be seen as fluid (changeable), flexible, contingent, hybrid and deeply intercultural (Dewey, 2007). In Nigeria, English had served as a lingua franca since its colonization by the British from the sixteenth century (Jenkins et al., 2011). Although there have been attempts to develop the Nigerian variety of English by seeking to show what is distinctive about it and its pedagogical implications. These attempts however are still basically on the distinctive features, the pedagogical aspects are yet to be institutionalized or implemented. However, Wright and Zheng (2017) argued that the movement in ELT in the last decades “only changed the 'how' of what was to be learnt not the 'what'” (p. 515). This means that there is a lot that needs to be done in order to incorporate ELF in the curriculum, especially in Nigerian context. In line with the above argument, this paper tries to examine the variability of English as a lingua franca, and its pedagogical implications for English language teaching in Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

Using a direct approach, the data of this research was collected through the extensive use of questionnaires which involved questions designed to find out the attitudes of non- native English language teachers in Nigeria towards ELF. Twenty questionnaires were given out, collected (after staying with the participants for seven days), and sent back to me. I made use of the questionnaires because of its anonymity (Garrette et al., 2003), unlike the interview. In addition, questionnaires require relatively uniform procedure when compared with an interview, though, this makes questionnaires not to be flexible. Thus, in order to make the questionnaires a bit flexible, open-ended questions were included where respondents were to provide a short narrative answer in part, which included a little bit of their personal data as it

relates to their teaching. However, my questionnaire is a mixture of open questions and closed (statements) as depicted in appendix two. Closed questions according to Nunan (1992) are “easier to collate and analyze” while one “obtains more useful information from open questions. It is also likely that responses to open question will more accurately reflect what the respondents wants to say” p.143.

The participants for this study involved 20 non- native English Language teachers from different ethnic groups of the country teaching in the same school– Gombe State University (GSU) Gombe State, Nigeria. The participants included twelve female teachers and eight (8) male teachers. Apart from English language, the participants speak different indigenous languages (both major and minor) ranging from Hausa, Arabic, Fulfulde, Fulani, Panso, Tangale, Yoruba and Igbo. All the participants (100%) indicated having experience in teaching English. Of these participants, (60%) are with 1 – 10years of experience, while (40%) are teachers with greater experience, from 11years to 35years and above. (50%) of the teachers indicated that they use exclusively English to communicate with their students outside the English classroom. English with other languages (L1) is used by (40%) of the teachers and (10%) of them use only their L1 to communicate with their students outside the English classroom.

To investigate the issues mentioned above, the researcher felt that it is pertinent to formulate some research questions, which would help to focus attention on relevant information needed for the successful accomplishment of the task. These include:

- 1) What is the level of teachers' awareness of ELF?
- 2) What kind and variety of English do non- native teachers desire for themselves and their students?
- 3) How much do they (teachers) focus on accuracy versus intelligibility?

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

The main purpose of this study was to find out variability of English as a Lingua Franca. To achieve this purpose, a data collection instrument of some statements, measured through a Likert scale was used. The responses were presented on tables, followed by the analysis, explanation and interpretation of the data collected from the questionnaire. The results of the data analysis are presented following the order of the research questions.

#### **What is the level of teachers' awareness of ELF?**

Statements 3, 9 and 28 of the questionnaires aimed to find out teachers' awareness of ELF.

**Table 1**

Statements	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neither Agree nor Disagree	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
S.3 English does not belong to native speakers anymore, but to anybody who uses it.	1 5%	1 5%	1 5%	7 35%	10 50%	4.20	1.10
S.9 Schools should teach English not as the native speakers speak it, but for efficient international communication.	8 40.0 %	5 25%	3 15.0%	3 15.0%	1 5.0%	2.20	1.28
S.28 I think that English has become a global language, native speaker standards are no longer universal	1 5.0%	3 15.0%	3 15.0%	6 30.0%	7 35%	3.60	1.27

As it is displayed in Table 1, 85% of the teachers showed agreement for statement 1, that English is no longer the property of the native speakers, but rather, belongs to everyone that uses it (non-native speakers inclusive). This showed that they are aware of ELF. Even their response in part one of the questionnaire buttressed this point. When asked their understanding of ELF, 55% of them wrote: “it is a language used by non-native speakers for communication”. Nevertheless, 10% of the teachers showed some level of disagreement with statement 1, while the remaining 5% neither agree nor disagree. For statement 9, even though the teachers are aware of the use of English for international communication (especially by non-native speakers) yet, 65% of them disagree that schools should teach English just to ease communication; 15% of them are hesitant about it by responding to neither agree nor disagree. The remaining 20% of them agree to schools teaching English just for the ease of communication. Greater percentage of the teachers are in support of schools teaching English the way native speakers use it. This is also reflected in their response in part one, when asked the kind of English model they desire for themselves and their students, (70%) of them wrote: “standard British English”.

Still on their awareness of ELF and English being a global language, 65% of the teachers are in agreement to statement 28, which states 'I think that English has become a global language, native speaker standards are no longer universal'. 15% of them neither agreed nor disagreed to this statement, while 20% of them agreed to statement 28. Thus, teachers' responses to statements 3, 9 and 28, indicated that they



are aware of ELF, but rather, would not want it taught in schools.

## Research question 2

What kind and variety of English do non-native teachers desire for themselves and their students?

**Table 2**

Statements	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neither Agree nor Disagree	4 Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
S29. To me, a correct pronunciation is speaking in an acknowledged English variety (E.g; British or American English).	1 5%	2 10%	0 0%	9 45%	8 40%	4.20	0.83
S30. I believe it is important to make students aware of many varieties of English that are important for international communication.	1 5%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%	7 35%	4.30	0.86
S31. I believe that my students should be exposed to different English varieties (e.g. Australian English, Nigerian English and so on.)	1 5%	4 20%	2 10%	7 35%	6 30%	2.45	1.09
S32. We need to develop a global variety of English that is not linked to particular English speaking country, and that can be used everywhere.	1 5%	4 20%	1 5%	7 35%	7 35%	3.90	1.12
S33. I believe that in the future, people in different parts of the world will speak their own variety of English.	3 15%	3 15%	3 15%	6 30%	5 25%	3.15	1.31

For statement 29, 85% of participants agreed that a correct pronunciation is speaking in an acknowledged British or American variety. 15% of them disagreed with that. In statement 30, the responses showed that 85% of the teachers are in total agreement to make students aware of many varieties of English for international communication, and likewise statement 31, 65% still agreed that students be exposed to different varieties of English. Lastly, for statements 32 and 33, 70% agreed that there is need

for a global variety of English that is not linked to any particular English or country. This is in view of their initial response that English belongs to anyone who uses it. 55% are in support of statement 33 that in future, people will speak their own variety of English. In summary, to answer research question 2, what kind and variety of English do non- native teachers desire for themselves and their students. From the subjects' responses, it is obvious that now, they (teachers) desire 'standard British English', but as time goes on, students will be exposed to different varieties of English that is not linked to any particular country.

### Research question 3

How much do they (teachers) focus on accuracy versus intelligibility?

**Table 3**

Statements	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neither Agree nor Disagree	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
S43. I am bothered when I hear students speak English with grammatical errors.	2 10%	4 20%	1 5%	7 35%	6 30%	2.45	1.09
S44. When I assess students' written assignments, I give more weight to the development and organization of ideas than to grammatical accuracy.	7 35%	7 35%	1 5%	4 20%	1 5%	3.90  .40	1.12
S45 When my students give oral presentation, I am more concerned about their fluency rather than their oral accuracy.	6 30%	9 45%	2 10%	1 5%	2 10%	3	1.09

For statements 43, 65% of the teachers are bothered when they hear their students speak English with grammatical errors. The teachers attribute great importance to grammatical accuracy. It is applicable to statements 44 and 45 were 70% and 75% of the teachers give more weight to grammatical accuracy and oral accuracy respectively. Therefore, to answer the question—How much do they (teachers) focus on accuracy versus intelligibility? The major trends showed in table 3 revealed the teachers' consistent preferences for accuracy over fluency and intelligibility.

### **Pedagogical implications.**

After analyzing the results found in this group of teachers, it is evident that they (teachers) are aware of the role of English as a lingua franca and the status of English as a global language (Crystal, 2003). They also espoused their opinion that students needed to be aware of the different varieties of English as ELF is about awareness and choice. Thus, it is ideal to present with different varieties of English and use the cultural background of these communities (from inner, outer or expanding circles) as a way of understanding communicative circumstances students might face with other English speakers. Thus, in this era, communicative competence in English should take into account ELF interactions in different contexts. In other words, methods and strategies to achieve ELF communicative competence should be made central to the teaching of English globally. Thus, even if teachers are aware of ELF, it does not mean that, they are prepared to teach it without some training in an ELF-based method.

### **Conclusion**

Notwithstanding, the small-scale nature of this study, it has provided some valuable insights that empirically proved that non-native English teachers are aware of ELF and the diverse English varieties. However, the participating teachers seemed to put more emphasis on grammatical accuracy (measured against the British standard model), than intelligibility. However, the researcher is of the opinion that for effective teaching and learning of English in a non-native context such as Nigeria, it is high time teachers and policy makers began to embrace ELF-informed teaching that supports the current pluricentric status of English users. This ELF-informed teaching should emphasize linguistic and cultural diversity of its users as the pedagogical cornerstone in curriculum development. In other words, English language being a global/ world language, must be prepared to pay a price as Achebe (1965), the great Nigerian writer observes “the price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings” (62).

This comment by Achebe clearly points to the necessity of incorporating ELF informed teaching to learning materials without which Nigerian learners will be culturally alienated from their contexts of communication and limited in expressing their local experiences. It is thus important for Nigerian researchers and practitioners to actively engage in designing Nigerian context-informed materials. Finally, it is hoped that this study will inspire Nigerian researchers and practitioners to reflect on the necessity and practicality of introducing ELF-informed teaching in Nigerian curriculum context.

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**Uju Blessing Ozugha** holds an MA in English Language Teaching (ELT) from the University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom. She is a lecturer at the Federal College of Education (Technical), Gombe. She is currently a PhD Student in the Department of English, Gombe State University. Email: [ask4blossom@yahoo.com](mailto:ask4blossom@yahoo.com)