English as a Lingua Franca: A New Approach for English Language Teaching in China?

Jinghui SI

Griffith University, Australia

Abstract

Research on English as a lingua franca (ELF) has triggered a debate on whether English teaching should consistently conform to native-speaker Standard English or it should value the pedagogical implications of ELF. This article provides an overview of current research on teaching English as a lingua franca. It starts with research on the rationale to introduce ELF-informed teaching and comparisons between ELF-informed teaching and native-English-based teaching. Concrete proposals of how to incorporate ELF-informed teaching into English language teaching (ELT) classrooms are presented. Then controversies in the debate are summarized. They are: A lack of ELF-informed textbooks; a lack of ELF-informed assessment; and a lack of qualified teachers. It then reviews recent publications dealing with these controversies. This is followed by a discussion about the research on ELF-informed teaching in the Chinese context. This article argues that research on the practicality of ELF-informed teaching should start with prospective English users, such as students in China's Business English Program. It concludes with some suggestions for future research and practice on ELF-informed teaching in China.

Keywords: ELF-informed teaching, rationale, controversies, the practicality of ELF-informed teaching in China

1. Introduction

English is now believed to be used across what Kachru (1990) describes as three circles,

namely, the Inner Circle where English serves as a native language (e.g., in the USA, the UK), the Outer Circle where English is an institutional and official language (e.g., in Singapore, India), and the Expanding Circle where English is taught and learned as a foreign language (e.g., in China, Japan). It now serves as a global lingua franca used "among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communication medium of choice, and often the only option" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). With the emergence of English as a lingua franca (ELF) as an independent field of research, thought-provoking and multifaceted studies on ELF can now be found in various journals and book-length discussions. ELF research has successfully summarized linguistic features of the use of ELF in multilingual settings and confirmed that ELF users achieve communicative success through different ways that native English speakers use English (e.g., Björkman, 2017; Breiteneder, 2009a, 2009b; Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Kaur, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Low, 2016; Mauranen, 2012). Moreover, ELF users are found to be able to use accommodation strategies to address communication breakdowns (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011; Rogerson-Revell, 2010) and adapt their Englishes to meet their own communication needs (Deterding, 2013; Seidlhofer, 2011; Walkinshaw & Kirkpatrick, 2014; Watterson, 2008), and this supports the argument that English is owned and developed by all English users rather than exclusively by native English speakers (Davies, 2003; Park, 2012; Sung, 2015; Widdowson, 1994). The above findings problematize the focus on the native-English-based teaching paradigm in English language teaching (ELT) and serve to underpin ELF-informed pedagogy (Seidlhofer, 2015). This leads to a debate on whether English teaching should consistently conform to *Standard English* norms, represented by British English and American English, or value ELF-informed teaching (Canagarajah, 2011; Leung & Street, 2012; Leung, 2013; Prodromou, 2007; Sewell, 2012; Swan, 2012, 2013; Widdowson, 2012, 2013), especially in the Expanding Circle countries where English teaching is traditionally norm-dependent (Bolton, 2004).

In the Chinese context specifically, as one of the countries that have gained benefits from globalization, the crucial role of English in international communication has been widely recognized (Simpson, 2017). English teaching in China is generally identified as exam-centered (Kirkpatrick, 2011) and native-English-based (Wen, 2012a). There has been a wide range of contrastive studies between Chinese English learners and native English speakers published in Chinese linguistic journals such as *Foreign Language Teaching and Research, Foreign Language World*, and *Journal of Foreign Languages*. However, little attention has been paid to the pedagogical values of ELF research in the Chinese context (Wang, 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Wang & Jenkins, 2016; Wen, 2012a, 2012b).

My intention here is to provide an overview of research on ELF-informed teaching internationally and locally. This review aims to provide Chinese practitioners and researchers with a thorough understanding of current perspectives on teaching English as a lingua franca

and facilitate them to rethink the practicality of ELF-informed teaching in the Chinese context. I will first review up-to-date research on how ELF-informed teaching is defined, present concrete proposals of how to incorporate ELF-informed teaching into classrooms and discuss controversial issues which have emerged in its implementation. I will then specifically look at research on ELF-informed teaching in the Chinese context and discuss the practicality of it in this context. In the final part, I will provide some suggestions for future studies on ELF-informed teaching in the Chinese context.

2. What ELF-informed teaching is and why it matters

ELF-informed teaching was generally defined through its comparison to native-English-based teaching (Charles, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Swan, 2012). Table 1, adapted from Charles (2007), shows differences between native-English-based teaching and ELF-informed teaching. Native-English-based teaching is generally practiced in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) where the ultimate goal of language learning is to attain native-like English (Jenkins, 2006). In native-English-based teaching, native speakers (NSs) are regarded as providers of norms and owners of English (Seidlhofer, 2011). The differences of language production between NSs and NNSs (non-native speakers) are treated as errors that have resulted from "incomplete L2 acquisition and that require remediation" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 139). Teaching materials are thus from British and American publications that embody native-speaker *Standard English* and represent cultures of NSs. Meanwhile, with the belief of native-speakerism that "'native-speaker' teachers represent a 'Western culture' from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology" (Holliday, 2005, p. 6), the ideal English teachers are native English speakers.

However, with the argument that native English is neither ideal nor relevant to ELF communication (Jenkins, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2011), ELF-informed teaching aims to facilitate learners to communicate in English in multilingual contexts rather than to imitate native speakers. Therefore, contrary to the monolithic focus on native-speaker *Standard English* norms and its cultures, teaching materials in ELF-informed teaching are suggested to emphasize linguistic and cultural diversity (Chan, 2014; Galloway, 2017; Galloway & Rose, 2014, 2017; Matsuda, 2003; Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011; Sung, 2014). These materials could enable learners to understand how non-standard forms function in real communication (Seidlhofer, 2011) and establish "a sphere of interculturality", that is, learners' ability to reflect on their own culture by comparing it with other cultures (McKay, 2002, p. 82). Given that the native-speakerism has now been questioned (Jenkins, 2012), ideal teachers in ELF-informed teaching are not necessarily native English speakers but local multilinguals (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Llurda, 2017).

Table 1. Comparison between native-English-based teaching and ELF-informed teaching

Categories	Native-English-based	ELF-informed
successful communication	native-like English use	appropriate language use fulfilling requirements of communication needs
main cause of communication breakdowns	inadequate language skills	inadequate communication skills
ownership	native English speakers	everybody
research aims	to reduce the non-standard use of English by comparing the linguistic performance between NSs and NNSs	to understand the use of English in the multilingual contexts and identify effective communication strategies
objectives	native-like English use	capable ELF users
teaching materials	British or American publications	materials representing cultural and linguistic diversities
ideal teachers	native English speakers	local multilinguals

The justifications for ELF-informed teaching are mainly four-fold. First, native-speaker *Standard English* is irrelevant to today's use of English as a lingua franca (Wang & Jenkins, 2016). The global spread of English has presented a profile that the number of non-native English speakers far outnumbers native English speakers and thus English communication happens more often between non-native English speakers than between native English speakers and non-native English speakers (Crystal, 2006). A large body of research has proved that in real-life multilingual settings, people from different linguacultural backgrounds use English as a lingua franca for their own purposes and in their own ways (Baker, 2015; Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Mauranen, 2012), and this is different from communication that happens in idealized monolingual native-English speech communities (Seidlhofer, 2011). If language teaching is supposed to be based on the current use of English, the exclusive focus on native speakers' English would by no means reflect the use of English in multilingual settings and is therefore inappropriate (Galloway & Rose, 2014).

Second, the concept of *Standard English* is by its nature problematic (Seidlhofer, 2011). There is no general consensus on what *Standard English* is (Trudgill, 1999), and this can be seen from the fact that the definitions of *Standard English* vary from one dictionary to another. The two definitions of *Standard English* exemplified below are from *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDCE) and *The Macquarie Concise Dictionary* (MCD) respectively. In LDCE, *Standard English* is equivalent to British English while in MCD, *Standard English* only exists in the written form.

The definition of *Standard English* in LDCE: BrE, the form of English, spelling and pronunciation that most people in Britain use and that is not limited to one area or group of people.

The definition of *Standard English* in MCD: That form of written English characterized by the spelling, syntax and morphology which educated writers of all English dialects adopt with only minor variation.

(as cited in Li, 2004, p. 186)

Hall (2014, p. 377) argued that "*Standard English* is not the language itself" and considering the prevalence of the unstandardized use of English among both NSs and NNSs, *Standard English* does not "adequately reflect the linguistic competence and performance of most NS and NNS users and uses".

Third, even if native-speaker *Standard English* were adopted, few NNSs can achieve native-like English (Kirkpatrick, 2007). It has been argued by not only ELF researchers, but also cognitive linguists, social linguists, and even second language acquisition scholars, that it is impossible for adult English learners to acquire native-like English in a non-native English-speaking country, no matter what type of teaching method is adopted (Pennycook, 2014). Therefore, for example, among China's 163.71 million English learners (Wen, 2012a), to speak English like an American or a Briton is rare.

Fourth, ELF-informed teaching is beneficial to non-native English teachers. ELF researchers claim that ELF-informed teaching could liberate non-native teachers from the feeling that they are teaching a model which they do not speak themselves (Blair, 2015; Canagarajah, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 2012). In other words, in ELF-informed teaching, non-native English teachers will not be constantly gauged against native-speaker *Standard English* that they have not acquired. More importantly, non-native English speakers might be more competent than native English speakers in understanding the difficulties that English learners encounter in English learning and communication (Kirkpatrick, 2006). For instance, McNeill (2005) found that Chinese NNS English teachers were very skilled at predicting the difficulties that Cantonese-speaking English learners might encounter in understanding the meaning of words.

3. Proposals of ELF-informed teaching in various contexts

Under the general framework of ELF-informed teaching, researchers have presented concrete proposals to be implemented in various contexts (Dewey, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Kohn, 2015; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011; Wen, 2012b, 2016). Geographically, studies on the implementation of ELF-informed teaching have been largely carried out in European and Asian contexts. In a UK-based investigation, Dewey (2012) proposed a framework against which teachers could decide "whether/to what extent/which (if any) language norms are relevant to their immediate teaching contexts" (p. 166). It is a post-norm approach, which goes

beyond any norm-based teaching. It foregrounds the construction of "classroom-oriented theories of language and communication" and "generate[s] location-specific, classroom-oriented innovative language models" (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 29, as cited in Dewey, 2012, p. 166). This approach highlights the importance of teachers' self-reflection with respect to current teaching model(s) that they are referring to. The self-reflection needs teachers' active involvement in ELF research, which is necessary for evaluating which model is the most relevant to a local context. By doing the reflection, teachers are able to make informed choices on language forms applicable to their classrooms and possibly realize the relevance of ELF-informed teaching to their own teaching contexts.

Moving a step forward, Kohn (2015) proposed a three-dimensional ELF teaching scheme and suggested a possible way to incorporate ELF into classrooms. This scheme consists of awareness raising, comprehension, and production activities. The awareness-raising activities are to expose learners to authentic ELF manifestations, thus preparing them to address characteristics, possibilities and challenges of ELF communication and enhance their linguistic and cultural tolerance. The comprehension activities offer learners skills to deal with for example "unfamiliar pronunciation, unclear meanings or weak coherence" (Kohn, 2015, p. 61). The production activities emphasize the pragmatic skills that students might employ in future ELF communication.

Another noteworthy model, Global Communicative Competence (GCC), is situated in a specific context, the global business community, and could serve as a benchmark for curriculum design in teaching English as a business lingua franca (BELF) (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011). This model is extracted from, and well reflects, the research on BELF (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005; Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen, & Karhunen, 2015). Figure 1 shows that "Global Communicative Competence" is at the center of three circles, representing "Multicultural Competence", "Competence in BELF" and "Business Knowhow" respectively. "Multicultural Competence" refers to "the knowledge and skills in managing communicative situations with representatives of different national, organizational and professional cultures" (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011, p. 28). The second circle, called "Competence in BELF", is necessary to fulfill the two main tasks of BELF communication, getting meaning across and maintain rapport. It is interpreted as competence "in the English core, business-specific genres, and communication strategies focusing on clarity, brevity, directness and politeness" (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011, p. 28). It recognizes the dynamic, hybrid use of English in multilingual settings where the ability to employ effective communication strategies identified in EFL and BELF research is highlighted. The outmost circle is named as "Business Knowhow" and depicts the holistic context to interpret the model of GCC. "Business Knowhow" is an embodiment of business-specific knowledge, in which "the particular domain of use and the wider, overall goals, norms and strategies of business shared by business community" (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011, p. 28) are equally crucial.
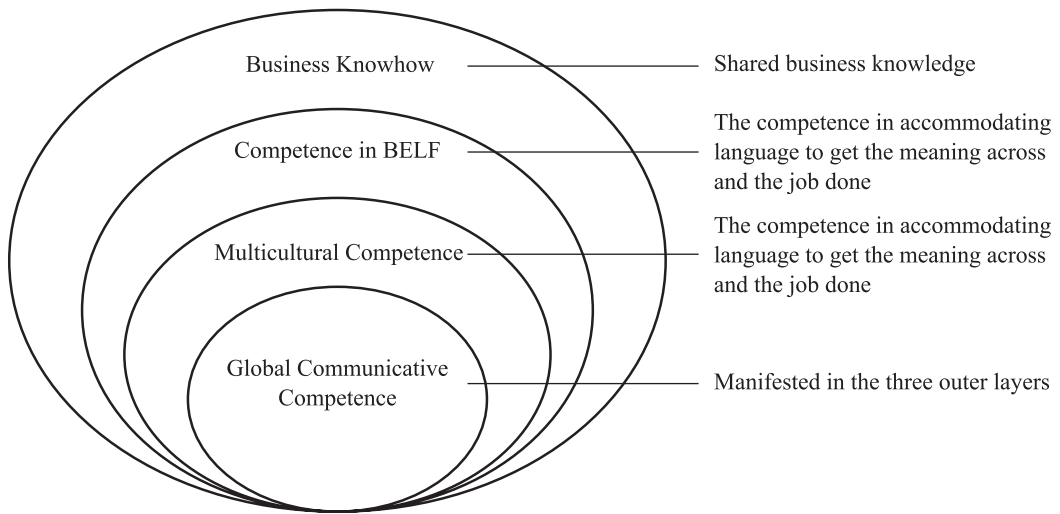
Figure 1. The model of Global Communicative Competence

Moving to the Asian context, Kirkpatrick (2012) proposed a *Lingua Franca Approach* for developing English teaching curricula in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) contexts. The key points of this approach are summarized as follows:

(1) The goal: Use English successfully in multilingual ELF contexts rather than sound like native speakers
(2) The curriculum: Include regional/local literature and regional/local cultures
(3) The activities: Enable learners to critically approach their own cultures and express their cultural values in English
(4) The materials: Include linguistic diversities, especially "the speech styles and pronunciation of their fellow Asian multilingual users of English as a lingua franca" (p. 40).

This model clarifies what should be included in an ELF-informed curriculum and underscores the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity. Much content in this approach, such as the fourth criteria for selecting materials, is in line with the statement in Kohn's (2015) three-dimensional scheme.

Wen (2016) presented a hypothesized solution to a dilemma in culture content in English teaching in the Asian context. The dilemma is whether practitioners should teach English "native speakers' cultures (NECs) or the ELF learners' home culture (HC) or the other ELF learners' culture (OCs) or all of them" (p. 156). Inspired by Risager's (2007) model of languaculture, Wen (2016) came up with a model of "languature", a word from the combination between *langua* from "language" and *ture* from "culture". She explained four dimensions of languature, namely, topical, discoursal, situational and linguistic, which could be placed from

more separable to less separable on a continuum. The solution for the dilemma is summarized as "the more separable, the more multilingual; the less separable, the less multilingual" (p. 174).

In the same vein, Hino and Oda (2015) developed an approach called Integrated Practice in Teaching English as an International Language (IPTEIL), which they had successfully practiced in a Japanese university. This approach employs authentic real-time news as teaching materials and clarifies necessary steps that teachers could follow in classroom operations (See p. 38). Although there are still some problems with respect to ELF ideas, including that some intra-national news resources in use are more appropriate in teaching World Englishes and not ELF, this approach did provide some handy knowledge about how to incorporate ELF into classrooms.

The above research is mainly on a conceptual level and provides general guidance for teachers to consider the relevance of ELF-informed teaching to their own classrooms. There is a lack of classroom-level research showing how ELF-informed teaching could be implemented (Galloway & Rose, 2017). This could be attributed to many ELF researchers' belief that it was practitioners' responsibility to decide whether ELF-informed teaching was relevant to their classrooms and how to apply it in a specific context (e.g., Seidlhofer, 2011). However, with continuing research on ELF, Jenkins (2017) argued that it is the time for ELF researchers to pass ELF findings to practitioners. It is hoped that ELF researchers could propose more operational approaches or concrete teaching plans in the near future.

4. Where controversies are

Since ELF-informed teaching has been justified and native-English-based teaching has been problematized, ELF-informed teaching should have been readily accepted by practitioners. However, the reality is rather the opposite. There are quite a few studies about teachers' beliefs towards ELF and ELF-informed teaching showing that even though teachers have well realized the changing role of English as a lingua franca, a native-English-based teaching paradigm is still their preference at the moment (Ranta, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2015). As Wright and Zheng (2017, p. 515) commented:
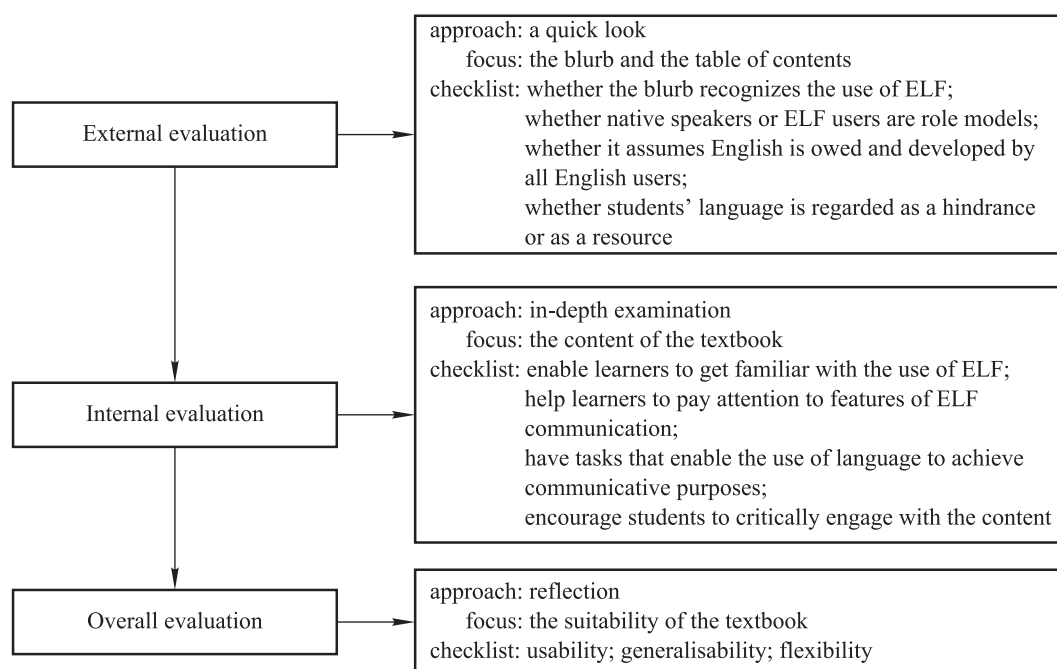
> Linguistics in the late twentieth century changed focus. The preoccupation with form and structure gave way to approaches that foregrounded the role of language as a vehicle for the creation and maintenance of social relations. And this influenced second-language pedagogy. Many education systems abandoned grammar-translation and audio-lingual parroting. However, the move to situational and communicative language teaching only changed the "how" of what was to be learnt not the "what".

In this vein, how to implement ELF-informed teaching that intends to change the "what"

in language education has to be addressed. The availability of teaching materials, qualified teachers and an assessment approach have all caused great concerns for researchers and practitioners.

4.1 Teaching materials

ELT materials are major sources of language input in classrooms (Richards, 2001) and are "often seen as being the core of a particular program" (McDonough, Shaw, & Masuhara, 2012, p. 51). Researchers noted that ELT materials are now still oriented towards native varieties of English, its users and cultures (Baker, 2015; Galloway & Rose, 2015; Jenkins, 2012; Siqueira, 2015; Song, 2013). For instance, Rai and Deng (2016) found that content embedding native English speakers' culture is dominant in four of the most popular English textbooks in China. The lack of teaching materials at hand has become one of the key barriers in incorporating ELF into classrooms. Wen (2012a) stated that people involved in college English teaching in China, including policymakers, curriculum editors, applied linguists and teachers, all recognize the disparity between the changing role of English as a lingua franca and the deficiency of non-native Englishes and cultures of non-native speakers in materials. However, as she mentioned, "the native variety is still used as the only source of learning materials, except for a very few textbooks which have made pioneering efforts in enriching cultural content" (Wen, 2012a, p. 85) as no one has explicitly stated what should be taught if native varieties are abandoned. To address this issue, some ELF researchers have proposed the use of well-developed ELF corpora to design ELF-informed teaching materials (Flowerdew, 2012; Kohn, 2015; Pedrazzini, 2015). Online ELF corpora are based on data collected in naturally occurring speech and reflect the authentic use of English as a lingua franca in multilingual settings (Kirkpatrick, 2016). In incorporating ELF-informed materials into classrooms, as Seidlhofer (2015) suggested, it should be noticed that ELF is not a variety of English and non-standard linguistic features attested in corpora should not be taught directly. Rather, practitioners need to focus on how these non-standard forms function in real communication (Seidlhofer, 2011). Taking McDonough et al.'s (2012) three-stage process of materials evaluation and Tomlinson's (2010) checklist for effective materials development into consideration, Galloway (2017, p. 475) designed a framework to explore "how materials can be designed and evaluated to ensure that they are effective in preparing learners to use ELF". Figure 2 was drawn according to Galloway's descriptions of the framework. At the first stage, a quick glance at the blurb and the table of contents could inform the basic principles against which the textbook is compiled, including the aim of English learning, the ownership of English and attitudes towards learners' language. The second stage requires an in-depth exploration of the content of the textbook to understand how the teaching materials prepare learners to use ELF. The last stage involves a reflection on the suitability of the textbook to students in the targeted context. This framework provides a clear reference for researchers and practitioners in their process of evaluating and designing ELF-informed teaching materials.

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│                         │      │ approach: a quick look                          │
│                         │      │     focus: the blurb and the table of contents  │
│  External evaluation    │─────▶│ checklist: whether the blurb recognizes the use │
│                         │      │         of ELF;                                 │
│                         │      │         whether native speakers or ELF users    │
│                         │      │         are role models;                        │
│                         │      │         whether it assumes English is owed and  │
│                         │      │         developed by all English users;         │
│                         │      │         whether students' language is regarded  │
│                         │      │         as a hindrance or as a resource         │
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approach: a quick look
      focus: the blurb and the table of contents
checklist: whether the blurb recognizes the use of ELF;
            whether native speakers or ELF users are role models;
            whether it assumes English is owed and developed by all English users;
            whether students' language is regarded as a hindrance or as a resource

External evaluation

approach: in-depth examination
      focus: the content of the textbook
checklist: enable learners to get familiar with the use of ELF;
            help learners to pay attention to features of ELF communication;
            have tasks that enable the use of language to achieve communicative purposes;
            encourage students to critically engage with the content

Internal evaluation

approach: reflection
      focus: the suitability of the textbook
checklist: usability; generalisability; flexibility

Overall evaluation

Figure 2. Materials development and evaluation for ELF-informed teaching

4.2 Language assessment

Apart from teaching materials, how to conduct an ELF-informed test is another issue warranting serious attention. Harding and McNamara (2017) argued that ELF challenges language assessment from two perspectives: 1) Native English norms should not serve as standards; 2) Language assessment should not be conducted against a stable variety of language. As Harding and McNamara (2017) suggested, the first challenge is to some extent similar to the advocacy of researchers in the field of *World Englishes* (e.g., Brown, 2014; Davies, Hamp-Lyons, & Kemp, 2003). Since native-speaker *Standard English* has been problematized (Hall, 2014), using native English norms as standards is claimed as a deficiency of existing testing criteria or international tests (Jenkins & Leung, 2013; Jenkins, 2015; McNamara, 2011, 2012, 2014; Pitzl, 2015; Toh, 2016). For instance, Pitzl (2015) critiqued that the portrait of intercultural communication in the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) is deficient for its dependence on certain presumptions, such as mistakes gauged against native English equates to misunderstandings in communication. Much ELF research has argued that non-native norms do not necessarily cause communication breakdowns, but learners' ability to employ accommodation strategies to address communication breakdowns should be included in the assessment (Baker, 2015; Jenkins, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2011). The second challenge has resulted from the ad hoc nature of ELF communication. The fluid and dynamic features of ELF communication determine that language performance cannot be judged against "a stable variety" of English (Jenkins & Leung, 2013, p. 4), which subsequently complicates issues

including testing materials (Abeywickrama, 2013), proficiency measurement (Canagarajah, 2006; Lowenberg, 2000, 2002) and rating (Zhang & Elder, 2011). ELF researchers have to face the fact that there are currently no ELF-informed tests at hand (Jenkins & Leung, 2014).

Seidlhofer (2015, p. 26) argued that the absence of ELF-informed tests does not absolutely deny the incorporation of ELF-informed activities into classrooms which could enable learners to relate "the English they are learning to the experience of their own language" and be aware of "how linguistic forms are in general determined by communication functions". The real issue is how much time the activities could take up in some exam-oriented contexts where the main focus of a large number of English teachers and students is on how to obtain more marks in native-English-based exams. Ranta (2010) in her research on Finland teachers' perceptions of ELF found that teachers were not willing to make changes against the views of examination boards even though they are aware of the changing role of English as a lingua franca in the real world. The backwash of tests on teaching is undeniably strong (e.g., Cheng, 2004). This is why over ten years ago Jenkins (2006) noted that it was crucial for exam designers to engage with ELF. A similar statement was also made by McNamara (2012, p. 202), who called assessment an urgent topic in ELF research (See also Jenkins, et al., 2011).

> The articulation of the construct of English as a lingua franca communication is a complex task but an urgent one if assessment is to play its part in ELF education and in policies in which language competence features.

It is noteworthy to see that pioneering works in thinking about assessing ELF have begun to emerge recently. Shohamy (2017) connected ELF with Critical Language Testing (CLT), a framework "to raise questions about test validity" (p. 586). CLT provides a theoretical and conceptual approach to scrutinize whether tests reflect an updated knowledge of constructs, that is, what is being tested. It thus questions current testing theories and tests that are based on stable and fixed constructs in the light of ELF research. The author pointed out some directions for designing ELF tests, such as "using academic-content texts in ELF" and "writing in ELF but focusing on messages, hybrids" (p. 590). Harding (2012) presented a set of competences for developing constructs in assessing ELF and argued for the necessity of a purpose-built assessment task to assess ELF constructs. Harding and McNamara (2017) explained a trial of a purpose-built assessment task, in which features of a purpose-built ELF assessment task are summarized, and a holistic rubric for rating is presented. It is one of the few studies that provide operationalized suggestions to assess ELF. Chopin (2015) proposed a radical solution to address difficulties in building ELF constructs in the discussion of the Test of Oral English Proficiency for Academic Staff administered in a Danish university (See also Newbold, 2015). Her solution is to ignore constructs and to move language testing from focusing on forms towards factors in determining successful ELF communication attested in ELF research. Personally, to assess factors mentioned by Chopin is as difficult as to build ELF constructs. No matter which direction is adopted, much research on operationalized ELF tests is needed.

4.3 Teachers' language awareness

The above research has revealed that the role of teachers in closing the gap between ELF implication and ELF application in classrooms cannot be overemphasized. In the context where norms-oriented teaching is widely practiced by teachers, how to inform teachers to recognize, understand, accept and implement ELF-informed teaching is a key to dismiss all controversies (Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2015; Dewey, 2012; Snow, Kamhi-Stein, & Brinton, 2006). The author drew Figure 3 to simulate the influence of the prevalence of native-English-based teaching (Wen, 2012a) and the possible solutions that ELF researchers have proposed.
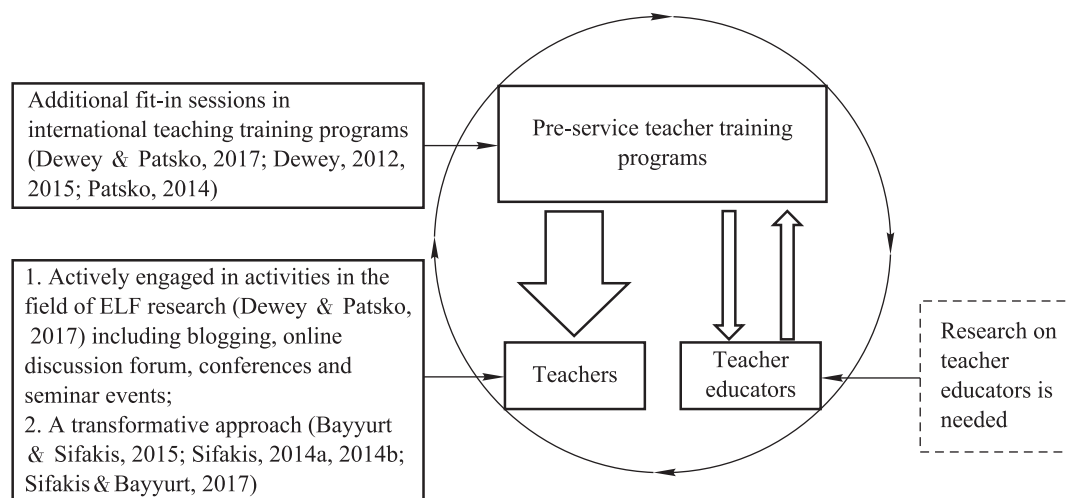
Figure 3. Issues in ELF-aware teacher education

In pre-service teacher training programs such as *The English Language and English Language Education* in China, trainees not only learn teaching theories and methodologies, but also learn English at the same time. If the pre-service teacher training programs were conducted against a native-English-based teaching paradigm at the same time, trainers would be well equipped with the knowledge needed in conducting native-English-based teaching. Since the pre-service training has long influenced teachers' teaching beliefs (Peacock, 2001), trainees who develop their professional knowledge in this context will go naturally for native-English-based teaching. After graduation, presumably, most of these trainees will be teachers and some of them will go on to work as trainers after receiving higher-level education. The outcomes will be that native-English-based teaching is grounded and circulated in the English teaching context. There are two noteworthy projects working on ways to break the circulation. Dewey and Patsko (2017) reported the inclusion of ELF and/or Global Englishes in the syllabus and guidelines in two internationally recognized teacher education programs, which leaves space for incorporating ELF introduction sessions into the programs (See also Dewey, 2015). It is a promising action that proves the practicality of introducing ELF-informed sections into

pre-service teacher training programs. The authors emphasized the importance of introducing ELF-informed sessions at the beginning of the program. By doing so, trainees will be provided with necessary time and knowledge to reflect on ELF and ELF-informed teaching. Inspiringly, it also provides some approaches, such as blogging (e.g., ELF Pronunciation available at *http://elfpron.wordpress.com/*), online discussion forums (e.g., ELFReN available at *www.english-lingua-franca.org/forum/index*) and conferences and seminar events (e.g., The Conference of English as a Lingua Franca), through which in-service teachers could actively engage with ELF.

Sifakis (2014a, 2014b) suggested a transformative approach which he practiced in Turkish and Greek contexts. The framework was believed to "go beyond merely exposing teachers to the principles and criteria of ELF and promote them to critically consider and ultimately transform their deeper convictions" about various aspects of English teaching (Sifakis, 2014b, p. 317). Sifakis and Bayyurt (2017) gave a more detailed description of how to carry out ELF-aware teacher education from a transformative perspective. The authors defined three phases of ELF-aware teacher education: 1) Extensively expose teachers to ELF interactions to facilitate them to become aware of "the complexity of English-medium communication in today's globalized world" (p. 460); 2) Critically reflect on what they have learned in phase one in their own teaching contexts; and 3) Develop instructional activities according to the work in the previous two phases and the needs analysis of their own learners.

As also shown earlier in Figure 3, in discussing ELF-aware teacher education, one generally overlooked issue is the availability of teacher educators, no matter whether in pre-service teacher training or in ongoing professional development. In Dewey and Patsko's research (2017), some trainers refused to deliver ELF-informed sessions or passed them to other more ELF-aware trainers. There is a primary need for ELF researchers to consider how to pass their advocacies to teacher educators, how to organize a training program if only a few trainers are capable of delivering ELF-informed sessions, and how to alleviate possible tensions between ELF-aware trainers and those who are less aware of it.

5. ELF-informed teaching in China's context

Research on ELF teaching, although controversial in some areas, still inspires scholars to begin to rethink the appropriateness of native-English based teaching in the Chinese context. In the context of China, which is often cited as a representative country in the countries in the Expanding Circle (Zheng, 2013), a limited body of research on ELF-informed teaching has been done (e.g., Gao, 2015; Wang, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Wang & Jenkins, 2016; Wen, 2012a, 2012b). The interesting thing is that in the English language education policies issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE), "*Standard English*" is a neutral term, which does not affiliate to any specific country and culture. As commented by Pan (2015, p. 86), "it is worth pointing out that at all levels of the policy regulation, primary, secondary and tertiary, Chinese institutional policies do not grant clear privilege to any type or variety of English". Instead, English is generalized as the language in English-speaking countries. English is the language in English-

speaking countries indeed. The issue is that English should not be regarded as "the language" in English-speaking countries when it is learned and used by people from other countries. However, the dominance of ENL (English as a native language), in classrooms, represented by American English and British English, is obvious (Liu, 2016). Gao (2015) commented that ELF-informed teaching, although controversial in some aspects, could inspire stakeholders to rethink the practicality of native-English-based teaching.

Wang (2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016) conducted a series of studies on Chinese students' perceptions towards native English speakers (Wang, 2016) and nativeness and intelligibility (Wang & Jenkins, 2016) and their awareness of ELF (Wang, 2015a, 2015b), which unpack Chinese students' language perceptions. Wang (2013) claimed that Chinese university students' perceptions of ENL norms were complicated. They, on the one hand, continually refer to ENL norms and regard English as a fixed language. They, on the other hand, acknowledge the functions of non-conformity norms in communicative efficiency and identity protection. Wang (2015a, 2015b) highlighted the importance of raising Chinese students' awareness of ELF by introducing ELF-informed literature, incorporating authentic ELF data and guiding learners to analyze and reflect on ELF communications in real-life situations.

Deterding (2010) investigated the possibilities of teaching pronunciation based on the *Lingua Franca Core* in China. The *Lingua Franca Core* (LFC) proposed by Jenkins (2000) consists of a series of phonological features "intended to guarantee the mutual intelligibility of accents" (Jenkins, 2003, p. 126). Inspired by LFC, Deterding (2010) summarized some phonological features that "typically occur with speakers from China" (p. 3). Similarly to Jenkins, he argued that the attested phonological features which do not inhibit communication should be excluded in teaching English pronunciation to Chinese students.

Apart from the teaching of pronunciation in an ELF paradigm, attention was also paid to communicative competence. Wen (2012a) outlined a model comprising linguistic, cultural and pragmatic components for teaching college English. She stated that the linguistic component should include native varieties, non-native varieties, and localized features and should be presented consecutively in relation to learners' proficiency. In other words, young beginners should not receive non-native varieties or localized features until they become intermediate-advanced learners. But students could simultaneously be exposed to target language cultures, non-native language cultures, and the local culture, in order to raise their awareness of cultural differences. The author emphasized "sensitivity, tolerance and flexibility" to cultural differences in teaching, given that the cultures the English learners are facing are numerous and unpredictable (Wen, 2012a, p. 88-90). The pragmatic section in this model consists of universal, native language and non-native language communicative rules. It should include and reflect communicative strategies in the three mentioned groups to facilitate expression. Qian (2015) discussed the value of ELF in teaching interpersonally oriented relation rituals, which refers to "relational action constructed in interaction through pre-existing patterns" (Kádár, 2013, p. 1) and could be adopted to construct, reinforce and maintain an interpersonal relationship among interlocutors from various cultures. According to Qian (2015), teachers

first need to define interpersonally oriented relation rituals and explain their usage with examples. Then, some video and audio materials should be presented to examine whether students are able to find examples of relation rituals. Teachers in the third step are asked to create simulated contexts to lead students to use relation rituals. In the last phase, students are required to collect examples of the use of relation rituals in cross-cultural communication. Wu (2016) acknowledged the values of research on BELF, introduced the GCC model and stated its relevance to the Chinese Business English Program.

6. The future of ELF-informed teaching in China

China's linguistic research theoretically and technically has kept pace with the development of the research in linguistic academia worldwide. However, the research on English as a lingua franca (ELF) is an exception. Drawing from the limited number of studies on ELF in the Chinese context, the newly emerged school of research is not widely embraced by Chinese linguists. The more interesting thing is many researchers who study ELF teaching in China are either non-Chinese researchers (e.g., Deterding, 2010) or Chinese researchers working in other countries than China (e.g., Fang, 2015; Liu, 2016; Wang, 2012). Domestic researchers and practitioners should be more actively involved in the topics related to ELF and ELT in China. The research I have reviewed above suggests three possible directions for future research and practice in ELF-informed teaching in the Chinese context.

First, taking backwash effects of exams into consideration, the lack of ELF-informed assessment should be the first priority in the research agenda if ELF-informed teaching is to have some influence in China. In China's exam-driven context, it is obvious the way that English is tested affects how English is taught in classrooms, not vice versa. However, looking from a different perspective, in this exam-centered teaching context, the change of tests might trigger the change of teaching. In 2013, some cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, announced their plan to reduce the emphasis of English in the *Gaokao* (Pan, 2015). From 2016, the *Gaokao* in Beijing has decreased the full marks of English from 150 to 100 while increasing the full marks of Chinese accordingly. Meanwhile, the English test will be held twice a year to alleviate students' pressure from English learning. It is possible that other cities and provinces might follow the movement started in Beijing. Some scholars argued that the mania of English learning that swept China in the last decades might gradually fade (Yang, 2014). However, I personally think, if the policy of de-emphasizing English in the *Gaokao* were widely adopted, it would be time for Chinese stakeholders to de-emphasize the repetitious and tedious imitation of native English and highlight the instrumental role of English as a global lingua franca. Consequently, it leaves space for the development of ELF-informed tests. Researchers could investigate its practicality at institutional level. The purpose-built ELF assessment task (Harding & McNamara, 2017) that has been discussed earlier is worthy of investigating in the Chinese context.

Second, in a transition from native-English-oriented teaching to ELF-informed teaching, the importance of ELF-aware teacher education cannot be overemphasized (Sifakis, 2014a,

2014b). Teachers are expected to be able to decide the relevance of ELF-informed teaching, to select ELF-informed teaching materials and to organize ELF-geared tests. The prerequisite of fulfilling all these tasks is that teachers have a good knowledge of what ELF-informed teaching is. Since the vast majority of in-service Chinese English teachers are graduates from *The English Language and English Language Education*, a program that particularly emphasizes the legitimacy of native English, I deeply doubt that a conflict between teachers' native-English-learning experiences in pre-service education and the expectations of ELF-informed teaching would emerge. There is thus a need for research on the possibility of offering ELF-informed courses to students majoring in *English Language and English Language Education*. By doing so, pre-service teachers may realize what ELF-informed teaching is in the early stages of their learning as suggested by Dewey (2012).

Third, even though research on ELF in China is accumulating at a relatively slow pace, I do not recommend ELF-informed teaching proposals should be targeted at all English learners. The exploration towards the practicality of ELF-informed teaching, an enormous task, should start with programs whose learners have great opportunities to use English in ELF contexts, To my knowledge, in the Chinese education system, the Business English Program, which was established to cater to the increasing needs of capable English users in the fast globalization, is a logical start. As one of the application-driven programs, goals and intentions of business English teaching should be aligned with the roles and functions of English in the global business community. For instance, more than the recognition of the relevance of GCC model to the Business English Program (Wu, 2016), studies could explore roles and functions of English in Chinese workplaces, in particular, whether English is used as a lingua franca, and compare them with the goals and intentions in business English classrooms. The comparison could decide whether a rationale to adopt ELF-informed teaching in the Business English Program exists, inform what should be included in an ELF-informed business English teaching, if necessary, and also provide empirical evidence to add to the debate on the pedagogical values of ELF-based teaching.

ELF-informed teaching that supports a pluricentric view of English emphasizes linguistic and cultural diversity and highlights pragmatic sensitivity is indeed in line with "the complexity of the linguistic and cultural basis of English" today (McKay, 2018, p. 21). However, in a situation where the traditional native-English-based teaching has been challenged, but the practicality of the new ELF-informed teaching is still in debate, pedagogical decisions should depend on a particular linguistic and cultural context (Dewey, 2012). By reviewing up-to-date research on ELF-informed teaching, its rationale, significance, and controversies, it is hoped that this study will inspire researchers and practitioners to reflect on the necessity and practicality of introducing ELF-informed teaching in the Chinese context.

Acknowledgements

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About the author

Jinghui SI is a PhD candidate of Applied Linguistics at Griffith University, Australia. Her research efforts have focused on English as a lingua franca, language awareness, language policy, and English language education. Email: jinghui.si@griffithuni.edu.au