

English as a lingua franca in higher education: Implications for EAP

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Abstract

The last decade has brought a number of changes for higher education in continental Europe and elsewhere, a major one being the increasing use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) as the medium of instruction. With this change, EAP is faced with a new group of learners who will need to use it predominantly in ELF settings to communicate with speakers from other first language backgrounds. This overview paper first discusses the changes that have taken place in the field of EAP in terms of student body, followed by an outline of the main findings of research carried out on ELF. These changes and the results of recent ELF research have important implications for EAP instruction and testing. It is argued here that EAP needs to be modified accordingly to cater for the needs of this group. These revolve around the two major issues: norms and standards for spoken English and target use. If the aim of EAP instruction and testing is to prepare speakers for academic settings where English is the lingua franca, the findings of ELF research need to be taken into consideration and then integrated into EAP curriculum design and testing, rethinking norms and target use. The norms and standards used by EAP instruction must be based on this realistic English, and educational resources should be deployed more realistically, including the usage of ELF, thereby validating the pluralism of English. This paper argues that any practice that excludes this perspective would be reducing EAP qualitatively and quantitatively.

Keywords: English as a lingua franca (ELF), English-medium education, EAP instruction, EAP testing.

Resumen

El inglés como lengua franca en la educación superior: implicaciones para el inglés con fines académicos

La última década ha sido testigo de múltiples cambios en la educación superior en el continente europeo y en más lugares, y el cambio más importante es el uso

creciente del inglés como lengua franca (ILF) y como medio de instrucción. Con este cambio, el inglés con fines académicos (IFA) se enfrenta a un nuevo grupo de alumnos que en su mayoría habrán de utilizar la lengua inglesa en entornos de ILF para comunicarse con hablantes de distintas lenguas maternas. El presente trabajo tiene un carácter general y estudia, en primer lugar, los cambios producidos en el ámbito del ILF por lo que respecta al grupo de estudiantes, esbozando seguidamente los resultados principales obtenidos tras una investigación realizada sobre el ILF. Estos cambios, así como los resultados procedentes de otras investigaciones recientes sobre ILF repercuten con fuerza en la instrucción y evaluación del IFA. Se argumenta que el IFA debe modificarse a fin de ajustarse a las necesidades de este grupo, y dichas necesidades atienden a dos cuestiones principales: normas y estándares para el inglés hablado, por un lado, y, por otro, objetivos de uso. Si la instrucción y la evaluación del IFA tienen por finalidad preparar hablantes para los entornos académicos en los que el inglés es la lengua franca, habrán de tenerse en cuenta los resultados de las investigaciones en torno al ILF para integrarlos en el diseño y la evaluación de los currícula de IFA, reconsiderando las normas y los objetivos de uso. Las normas y los estándares utilizados en la instrucción del IFA deberán basarse en esta realidad y los recursos educativos deberían distribuirse de un modo más realista, incluyendo el empleo del IFA como lengua franca y validando así el pluralismo del inglés. El presente trabajo expone que toda práctica que no tenga en cuenta esta perspectiva estará reduciendo el potencial del IFA tanto cualitativa como cuantitativamente.

Palabras clave: inglés como lengua franca (ILF), inglés como medio de instrucción, enseñanza del inglés con fines académicos, evaluación del inglés con fines académicos.

1. Introduction

Today English is the main means of academic communication in northern European universities. It has long been the language of publication in this area, but it is also increasingly becoming the language of instruction in a large number of institutions throughout continental Europe and elsewhere. This bottom-up practice is not in agreement with the top-down decision by the EU to favor a multilingual structure (Seidlhofer, 2010). The reality is that English is the language of communication of scientific information in many domains. As Ferguson says, the establishment of English as the dominant language of scientific communication is now so well-documented that its strong presence is undisputed even by those who are critical of this development (2007). This dominant position of English in scientific

communication has contributed to the growth of the field of English for Academic/Specific Purposes (Ferguson, 2007).

This paper will have as its starting point the changes that have taken place in the student body in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), especially in the last decade, with reference to English as a lingua franca (ELF). The very large groups of speakers who use ELF in academia make it necessary to adjust EAP instruction and testing accordingly. The first prerequisite for such an endeavor is to describe authentic language usage from EAP settings today, and to be able to do so, we need appropriate corpora. After a discussion of the available corpora with reference to the groups they cater for, the paper will move onto a review of findings from leading ELF research and will discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings for EAP instruction and testing. It is claimed here that excluding the ELF perspective from EAP instruction and testing would be excluding the very large groups of speakers in higher education settings throughout the world.

2. English for Academic Purposes: emerging groups, corpora and materials

Until recently, the teaching of English for Academic Purposes focused mainly on two groups of learners. EAP referred, first of all, to the teaching of English for foreign students studying in English-speaking countries, e.g. Chinese students studying in the UK. The aim in this kind of teaching is, primarily, to prepare these students for studies in an English-speaking environment. This group of students needs to make good use of both the receptive and productive skills in English since they need to use it in written and spoken contexts on a daily basis. In other words, they need to use English effectively in both spoken and written encounters. EAP also means the teaching of English to students studying outside English-speaking countries, e.g. Swedish students in Sweden. In this second type of EAP, the instruction focuses predominantly on helping these students use their course literature in English effectively. This is not unexpected, as these students will use English mostly in writing and reading. So unlike the first group of students described above, this second type of EAP learner needs practice of the receptive skills, reading and listening, to be able to cope with their course literature and assignments in English.

The nature of the typical EAP learner has changed dramatically with the emergence of ELF (Björkman, 2008). Globalization has made English-medium higher education a common feature of many academic institutions in northern Europe and elsewhere. Although northern European universities seem to be more anglicized compared to the universities in southern Europe, English is gaining significance with increasing academic mobility, which involves both students and staff. The medium of communication for this growing group is ELF. Many institutions in continental Europe have acted to accommodate such groups and introduced English-medium programs consequently. In Sweden, for example, this proportion has increased to about 65 per cent in Master's programs (Salö, 2010). In Swedish engineering education, it is not uncommon to have a German scholar lecturing a group of students from different language backgrounds, or for a group of Chinese, Spanish, Indian and Italian students to work on a group project, all through the medium of English. This linguistic development has given rise to a third target group of EAP including such speakers: Those who speak English as a lingua franca (Björkman, 2009). This third group consists of speakers from different first language backgrounds and uses English primarily as a "spoken" medium.

As this development largely took place in the last decade, the materials used in EAP instruction have remained geared towards the needs of the first two groups described above with respect to mode (writing vs. speaking) and target (native-speaker as the ideal target): those studying in English-speaking countries and others who need it for their studies in non-English speaking countries.

In an effort to help these groups, EAP instructors have focused more on academic writing (and in the UK on listening), compared to academic speaking. This trend is considered a direct result of the research in academic English, which focused heavily on writing for various reasons (Mauranen, Pérez-Llantada & Swales, 2010). First of all, what is assessed in higher education is still mostly written language. Students need to produce different types of academic texts in order to pursue their studies and advance to higher levels. Second, it has been easier for EAP instructors and researchers to access written materials. Acquiring written materials is much less problematic compared to the hardships involved in capturing real academic speech. In addition, written discourse enables the use of traditional methods of linguistic analysis (Mauranen, Pérez-Llantada & Swales, 2010). Finally, most EAP courses and workshops have focused on written discourse, in an

effort to help users develop their academic skills (Mauranen, Pérez-Llantada & Swales, 2010). Taken together, these factors explain the strong focus on written discourse in early EAP instruction.

About a decade ago, the focus shifted from written discourse to spoken discourse in EAP, which will be our primary concern throughout this paper. This is a cause of the emergence of major spoken corpora of academic English. The first corpora of spoken academic English came from English-speaking countries. The availability of the MICASE (Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English) corpus has provided us with an insight as to the usage of spoken academic English from an English-speaking country (Simpson et al., 2002). The recordings in this corpus come naturally from the North American academic context and mostly from native speakers, with only about 12 per cent of the corpus capturing the speech of the first group described earlier in this section. The compilation of the MICASE corpus paved the way for other spoken corpora. An example is the BASE corpus of British spoken academic discourse.¹ Developed at the Universities of Warwick and Reading, it is also largely based on native speaker speech. Similar to the MICASE corpus, BASE also provides us with information regarding the first group of EAP students. The T2K-SWAL, based on North American academic contexts, was compiled to determine whether the listening and reading tests in exams mirror what goes on in academic contexts. Again, like MICASE and BASE, T2K-SWAL includes the speech of the first group of EAP users.

These three corpora have been invaluable in documenting speech from English-speaking countries but fall short in describing ELF speech, which is natural considering that the research teams are based in English-speaking countries. If our purpose is to understand the use of spoken English in academia today, we should analyze data from real ELF settings. How do speakers express themselves in various academic situations? How do they communicate when they are in high-stakes spoken communication? How do they achieve communicative effectiveness in diverse language groups? How do they resolve conflicts? As Schegloff (2000: 122)² argues:

The talk that learners are going to have to do when they're not in the hothouse of the classroom is situated in the real world where they have real things to do, and that's the talk that people ideally should be recording and studying if they want to understand what the real world problems are for those who are speaking a language that is not their native language.

Compilation of such spoken data is by no means straightforward; it is time-consuming, complicated and costly. However, if we want to understand how lecturers and students interact through the medium of ELF, we must investigate lingua franca settings.

The increasing use of English as an academic lingua franca and the scarcity of spoken information from ELF settings have resulted in two major corpus projects. The ELFA (English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings) corpus work from Finland is the largest work on ELF usage in academic contexts.³ It has provided authentic data from a wide spectrum of naturally-occurring academic speech events. Another very important corpus work is the VOICE corpus (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English).⁴ Unlike the ELFA corpus, VOICE does not consist entirely of academic recordings, including a variety of settings. These ELF corpora have provided us with information on the use of ELF from authentic ELF settings and on what ELF speech is like. At the time of writing, an Asian corpus of English (ACE) is being compiled by a team of researchers led by Kirkpatrick. This team is working closely with the VOICE team and has the primary aim of analyzing and describing the distinctive linguistic features of ELF.

The second issue mentioned in the beginning of this section concerns target use outlined in EAP instruction and testing. To cater for the needs of the first two groups mentioned above, target use has been native-speaker production in EAP classes. To see why this is not appropriate for ELF settings, we will need to turn to the primary findings of research carried out in academic ELF settings.

3. Research on ELF in academic settings

Investigations on various aspects of spoken ELF in academic settings have focused on descriptions of morphosyntactic (Ranta, 2006; Björkman, 2010), pragmatic (Mauranen 2005a, 2005b, 2006a & 2007; Mortensen, 2008; Smit, 2010; Björkman, 2011; Haberland, 2011; Hynninen, 2011; Jenkins, 2011; Knapp, 2011) and partly phonological issues (Björkman, 2010). The overall results on morphosyntax can be summarized as a general tendency to reduce structures that are redundant, morphological creativity, and creating extra explicitness in general, all pointing towards a general cooperativeness. Pragmatic studies have reported on metadiscourse (Mauranen 2005a, 2005b, 2006a & 2007), proactive pragmatic strategies (Penz, 2008; Björkman, 2009

& 2011; Kaur, 2009) and low incidence of miscommunications in dialogic speech (Mauranen, 2006a; Björkman, 2009; Kaur, 2009). As regards phonological issues, studies investigating academic ELF speech are rather scarce, with the exception of some emerging studies, for instance a pilot study on question intonation of dialogic ELF speech (Björkman, 2010).

Of specific interest to our purposes are the ways in which speakers achieve communicative effectiveness in spoken academic communication. A study that investigated the effectiveness of spoken ELF comes from a higher education setting in Sweden (Björkman, 2010). This investigation focused on authentic spoken communication from content courses (21 lectures and 24 group-work sessions) and analyzed the morphosyntactic and pragmatic nature of lecturers' and students' speech, as well as intonation in questions. The findings of the study show that non-standard morphosyntactic features do not seem to cause any overt disturbance in spoken communication in this ELF setting, with the exception of non-standard question formulation (Björkman, 2008, 2009, 2010 & 2011). The speakers make use of a variety of pragmatic strategies which help them compensate for the wide range of levels of proficiency in ELF settings and help them convey the message to their listeners (see Table 1). The findings imply that the effectiveness of a speaker of English in similar ELF settings is determined primarily by the speaker's pragmatic ability and less by his/her proficiency. This finding suggests that, in similar settings, the assumption that communicative effectiveness is in direct proportion to proficiency is an incorrect one (see Shaw (1992) for a discussion of communicative competence). Being proficient in the language does not presuppose that one is also a pragmatically effective speaker. In settings where English is used as a vehicular language, communicative effectiveness takes precedence over accuracy, fluency and language complexity. Any speaker may aim for better accuracy, fluency and language complexity, but when it comes to investing in a communicative situation, it is ways of achieving communicative effectiveness that help speakers produce the desired outcome. When it comes to intonation in questions, speakers seem to register an utterance as a question with utterance-final question intonation in both Yes/No and Wh-questions unlike native speakers, who are reported to have falling intonation almost as often as they rise in both Yes/No and Wh-questions (Bolinger, 1998). This further suggests that the proficient/less proficient or the native/non-native speaker dichotomies in similar settings are not of

primary relevance or utility to international settings, and that native speaker practices may actually be less effective than such ELF practices in ELF settings (Björkman, 2008, 2009, 2010 & 2011).

MAIN FINDINGS IN SPOKEN LINGUA FRANCA USAGE IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS				
MORPHOSYNTAX	Devices that increase comprehensibility and create extra explicitness	Double comparatives and superlatives	Björkman, 2009, 2011	
		Unraised negation	Björkman, 2009, 2011	
		Vocabulary-related explicitness	Seidlhofer, 2004	
	Reductions of redundancy	Not marking the plural on the noun	Björkman, 2008	
		Subject-verb agreement issues	Seidlhofer, 2004; Breiteneder, 2005; Cogo & Dewey, 2006; Björkman, 2009	
		NonS analytic comparative	Björkman, 2010	
Other non-standardness	Non-standard question formulation	Björkman, 2009, 2010, 2011		
	Tense and aspect	Ranta, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2008; Björkman, 2010		
	Article usage	Seidlhofer, 2004; Björkman, 2011		
PRAGMATICS	Pragmatic fluency	1. Appropriate use of routine pragmatic phenomena	House, 1999	
		2. Ability to initiate topics and topic change, making use of appropriate routines		
		3. Ability to "carry weight" in a conversation		
		4. Ability to show turn-taking, replying/responding		
		5. Appropriate rate of speech, types of filled and unfilled pauses, frequency and function of repairs		
	Meta-discourse	Metadiscourse	Mauranen 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2007	
		Rephrasing and repetition	Mauranen 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2007; Cogo and Dewey, 2006; Lichtkoppler, 2007; Kaur, 2008; Björkman, 2009, 2010, 2011	
		Explicit negotiation of the topic	Mauranen 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2007; Björkman, 2010, 2011	
	Proactive pragmatic strategies	Signaling discourse structure prospectively		Björkman, 2009, 2010, 2011; Kaur, 2009; Mauranen, 2006a; Penz, 2008
Retroactive pragmatic strategies	Signaling discourse structure retrospectively	Björkman, 2009, 2010, 2011; Kaur, 2009; Mauranen, 2006a; Penz, 2008		
	Backchanneling	Björkman, 2011		
Other	The practice of mediation (Hynninen, 2011); Managing conflicts (Knapp, 2011); Modal verbs and evidentiality (Mortensen, 2008); ownership and maintenance issues (Haberland, 2011)			
PHONOLOGY ⁵	Lingua franca core (Jenkins, 2000), Attitudes towards ELF (Jenkins, 2007), Intelligibility and comprehensibility (Pickering, 2006), Teaching ELF pronunciation (Walker, 2010), Question intonation (Björkman, 2011)			

Table 1. The main findings from ELF research carried out in academic settings.

These research results find support from previous research on the topic of ELF. Thus, there are different types of non-standardness of morphosyntax (see Table 1), and despite these non-standardnesses, there appear to be very few cases of overt miscommunication (Mauranen 2006a; Björkman, 2009; Kaur, 2009). Speakers use a number of pragmatic strategies to ensure the effectiveness of communication (Mauranen 2005a, 2005b, 2006a & 2007; Björkman, 2009, 2010 & 2011; Kaur, 2009). Table 1 is a brief summary of the findings of ELF studies from a variety of academic settings, ranging from different types of student talk (Mauranen, 2006a; Mortensen, 2008; Kaur, 2009; Björkman, 2010 & 2011; Hynninen, 2011; Knapp, 2011) to teacher talk (Cogo, 2009; Björkman 2011). It includes the main findings of investigations into the morphosyntax, pragmatics and phonology of ELF usage from academic settings.

When these research results are considered, it becomes clear that the native speaker as the ideal target for spoken production is inappropriate, if the aim of EAP instruction is to help those who will use it mostly in ELF settings. The following section argues that targets in such ELF settings need to be set by taking into account how effectiveness is achieved in such settings.

We will now turn to the theoretical implications of these findings for the field of EAP and then to some practical applications for EAP instruction and testing.

4. Adjusting EAP for ELF settings: Theoretical implications

4.1. Norms and standards for spoken English

One of the most critical issues regarding EAP today is the norms and standards for spoken English. As mentioned earlier in Section 2, the EAP focus remained on writing for both instruction and testing, at least until the emergence of major spoken corpora (Mauranen, Pérez-Llantada & Swales, 2010). It is not surprising that norms and standards for spoken English were consequently more appropriate for writing than for speaking. So, in the light of the new information from ELF research, how should the norms and standards be modified? What is correct in spoken English and therefore acceptable?

There is variation within native varieties of English, and it is by no means easy to draw clear boundaries between what is standard and non-standard.

Some features that are considered incorrect can be observed in native speaker speech frequently. When native speakers have non-standard usage in their speech, it is generally termed “variation” whereas when non-native speakers have the same usage (see Shaw (1992) for a discussion of “variation”), it is considered an “error” in the language classroom. ELF research has shown that non-native speakers too can have variation in their speech (earlier shown by Gass, 1989), especially that the non-standardness shows clear patterns of reducing redundancy and increasing explicitness, both aimed for communicative effectiveness. The important question for this study concerns the standards for speech.

If we approach the general concept of language as a set of rules, a clear and solid set of rules to prescribe for standard usage of the language becomes necessary. What is considered standard in traditional grammar books is traditionally based on written English. In other words, the standards for spoken English have long been set by written English and what would be considered correct and therefore acceptable in written discourse. A very significant step in recognizing this was taken by Svartvik and Quirk’s (1980) Survey of English usage.

Written norms are not appropriate for speaking, for speech and writing are two very different types of discourse. The fact that speech is generally impromptu and requires real-time production and processing creates the biggest difference between these two types of discourse with regard to one’s production. So evaluating a speaker’s communicative competence by his/her adherence to the norms of writing would be against the nature of speaking, would be unjust to the speaker, being a practice that does not comply with the way natural speech is.

The first preliminary in describing speech properly involves the compilation of spoken corpora – for instance, part of British National Corpus (BNC), London-Lund Corpus (LLC), MICASE (Simpson et al., 2002), BASE, ELFA and VOICE. These corpora all serve the purpose of providing spoken data from different settings.

The second step to take towards providing appropriate norms for speech is to have a spoken corpus on its own presuppositions and not on presuppositions of writing. Such a step was taken with CANCODE (“Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English”), a corpus compiled earlier with the primary aim of exploring authentic spontaneous speech and investigating spoken grammar. However, CANCODE does not

document spoken English by non-native speakers. The speech recorded for CANCODE comprises speech from native speakers of English only, and the findings that arise from this corpus can explain variation in the spoken language of native speakers only, not in non-native speakers' speech. In this sense, not only does the CANCODE corpus include a narrower group of speakers than the other corpora compiled in English-speaking countries, it also brings us back to the "target use" problem (see next sub-section).

4.2. Target use

Carter and McCarthy suggest the usage of CANCODE data by learners of English so that they can "see, hear and understand conversational English in a range of different contexts of use" (Carter and McCarthy, 1997: 7). It would be ideal that those who are studying English and consider themselves learners could be exposed to authentic usage of spoken English from a variety of contexts, situations and settings, and undoubtedly, CANCODE data are of great interest. They reveal variation in native speaker usage of spoken English, which is very important in studying spoken English. However, they exclude speech by speakers who speak it as a lingua franca. In this respect, they are not appropriate for speakers of English who will use it in ELF settings.

In ELF contexts, the third essential is the availability of corpora that document usage of English in settings where it is used as a lingua franca. Target use for speakers in ELF settings is not native spoken usage that is culturally-loaded and is full of idioms, but rather effective speech. The CANCODE project was criticized by Prodromou (1996) for this very reason. Presenting learners of English with the heavy idiomaticity present in native spoken English is not likely to provide them with more choices; it is only likely to create opacity in their speech. Prodromou (1996) discusses the concept of "authenticity" and claims that it is embedded in the context. When it is taken out of its context, it simply stops being authentic. *Wall Street Journal* English may be authentic to those who deal with similar matters and are familiar with it (Prodromou, 1996), but it certainly is not to speakers in all lingua franca settings. Native speaker usage is not necessarily helpful for speakers in ELF settings. Although rising question intonation is not always present in native speaker usage, it helps speakers in ELF settings register questions.

The information and research findings that have been and will be generated by all the aforementioned corpora will enable research to produce

descriptions of the use of ELF. A thorough documentation of spoken English from authentic settings should contribute to the understanding of a “spoken grammar” and whether it is possible to set rules that reflect the nature of spoken English successfully. To date, there is no clear explanation or documentation of spoken grammar.

However, the application of the research findings based on these corpora is critical. The place to apply the research findings is the language classroom, which brings the need for a discussion of the teaching of English for academic purposes. Before moving on to such practical implications, a useful preliminary is a discussion of what good English may mean and whether it is synonymous with correct English.

4.3. Good English

The results of the present study and a discussion of the general notions of ELF situations bring to the fore another important notion, albeit a much more general one: “good English”. What is good English? This question will naturally receive a variety of answers depending on a number of factors. Greenbaum (1996: 17) discusses “good English” by contrasting it to “correct English” as follows:

Good English is sometimes equated with correct English, but the two concepts should be differentiated. Correct English is conformity to the norms of the standard language. Good English is good use of the resources available in the language. In that sense we can use a non-standard dialect well and can use the standard language badly. By good English we may mean language used effectively or aesthetically; language that conveys clearly and appropriately what is intended and language that is pleasing to the listener or the reader.

Considering good English as the effective use of the available linguistic resources, and drawing a clear distinction between correct English and good English suggests that “good English” is not a notion that is necessarily determined by one’s level of proficiency. In other words, speakers who have lower levels of proficiency are also capable of speaking good English. This seems to corroborate the findings of the present study in the dimensions of form and discourse. A large body of data in the present study showed that speakers who have lower levels of proficiency were able to use the language effectively. On the notion of effectiveness, with respect to ELF settings where speakers use English as the vehicular language, using the language

effectively takes precedence over language complexity. “Conformity to the norms” will naturally be less critical for anyone who is trying to complete a task through the medium of that language.

This approach does not imply that correctness is irrelevant. Naturally, grammatical accuracy is important; a sentence needs to be made up of the right constituents to be sensical. However, in ELF settings where speakers are from a range of levels of proficiency, both native speakers/highly proficient speakers and those who are non-native speakers are challenged.

5. Adjusting EAP for ELF settings: Practical implications

This section aims to address some pedagogical and practical applications of the ELF research findings and make some tentative suggestions to adjust EAP teaching and testing to ELF settings. There are three important issues for the EAP instruction: (1) the needs and expectations of the specific group; (2) comprehensibility as the priority in teaching English to those who will use ELF in academic settings; and (3) the use of realistic course materials and testing criteria for spoken production.

In identifying the needs and expectations of a specific learner group, we need to consider the norms and standards. The discussion in the previous section takes us to the pedagogical discussion of what norms and standards students should be presented with. In any debate on teaching English, we are reminded of the responsibility of prescribing a certain set of conventions as “correct” usage since the default assumption is that teaching is prescriptive (Bex, 2008). This requires a description of standard English and automatically brings forward the question of what standard English is.

It is impossible to provide an appropriate answer to this question considering a wide variety of learners. What can be done, however, is to distinguish between different types of learners and consider their needs and expectations. For example, there are learners who need to use English to speak to native speakers in English-speaking countries and those who need to speak it in international settings mostly to communicate with other non-native speakers. As long as the teaching of English does not include the latter, its widest use in the world, it will be insufficient in providing learners with the knowledge and skills required. With regard to those who use English as a vehicular language on international grounds, the knowledge of

how the language is used primarily among its non-native speakers for different purposes in international settings will be more relevant than how it is used in English-speaking countries by its native speakers. So EAP can take steps towards meeting current demands instead of feeding on dated descriptions of English, and differentiating between different types of learners and their needs.

More research and proper descriptions from a variety of settings will undoubtedly provide EAP with invaluable information as to what English usage is like in different settings. Until then, realizing the needs and expectations of different types of learners and producing materials including features they will need to use frequently in their target settings will be important steps in the right direction. The transition from description to prescription needs to be made with caution, and this task needs to be undertaken only after thorough descriptions from a variety of settings have been made available.

The second issue of importance here is prioritizing comprehensibility in language teaching. In ELF settings, the priority must be comprehensibility, followed by language complexity, provided that achieving complexity is one of the aims at all. Prioritizing comprehensibility in language teaching was first put forward as early as in the 1970s, with the functional hypothesis and the Functional Sentence Perspective (although not a teaching approach). So, the issue is by no means a new one. The challenge has been to suggest ways of putting such theory into practice. What should then the language teacher actually do in the classroom and how should the teaching of English be modified to prioritize comprehensibility and provide the learner with a realistic model?

These issues have recently been brought to discussion in ELF research. The importance of exposing learners to a wider range of English has been discussed in a number of studies (for instance, Jenkins, 2006), as well as general “efforts to reduce the nativespeakerist element in some teaching materials” (Jenkins, 2006: 169), “the merits of native and non-native teachers of English” (Jenkins, 2006: 172), “challenges to learner language theory” (Jenkins, 2006: 166) and the importance of providing the learner with modern and broad-based descriptions of language:

Clearly, if we want to prepare learners for the requirements of the real-world language use with any efficiency, we cannot afford to rely on inadequate and outdated descriptions of language. To meet current demands, we need

models that can be applied to a variety of communicative goals (...)
(Mauranen, 2006b:144)

All these are central to improving language teaching. However, ways of achieving what is seen as important has been discussed much less, with the exception of the lingua franca core (Jenkins, 2000), the inappropriateness of unilateral idiomaticity for ELF settings (Seidlhofer, 2004) and the importance of accommodation strategies (Jenkins, 2000 & 2006). The question, then, remains: what types of modifications are suggested for the language classroom? This brings us to the third point, namely the use of realistic course materials and testing criteria for spoken production.

The first modification needs to be made to course materials in an attempt to produce realistic course materials (Jenkins, 2006: 169). This issue need not be as radical as some have suggested. There need not be a set of acceptable features in the form dimension for learners to adhere to. It has been shown that ELF usage is in fact characterized by variability (Firth, 2009) and is by no means a monolithic variety but a polyolithic one. In this respect, the integration of ELF usage into the forms traditionally used in EAP teaching adds to the existing set of standards.

The present study and other ELF research point towards prioritizing the following items:

- The inclusion of pragmatic strategies in speaking and listening materials: It is clear in the findings of ELF research (Table 1) that pragmatic strategies and negotiating meaning play an essential role in achieving communicative effectiveness in ELF settings. After learners are presented with materials of authentic usage from ELF settings (listening), role-plays and other communicative activities can be used to enable learners to practice these skills. This has been recently covered in Walker's work on teaching the pronunciation of ELF (Walker, 2010).
- The inclusion of syntactic structures that help increase explicitness: In grammar teaching, it seems a useful practice to include Heads and tails/Pre- and post-dislocation as elements that increase explicitness (Mauranen, 2007). Exposing learners to authentic speech that includes these elements will help them see how Heads and tails/Pre- and post-dislocation can be used.

- The inclusion and prioritizing of materials practicing features whose absence leads to overt disturbance: Questions have been reported to be important for the effectiveness of spoken communication in ELF settings (Björkman, 2008, 2009 & 2011). They should be addressed thoroughly in language classrooms in communicative activities such as information-gap activities, or group-work activities, which would mirror real-life communicative situations. In connection with questions, word order issues need to be given enough space in the classroom. It appears that non-standardness in word order can impede communication, create irritation, which in turn, may cause turbulence in communication.

The inclusion of non-native speaker accents in listening comprehension materials: It is important that speakers who will operate in ELF settings are exposed to a variety of accents, since this is precisely what they will need to do when they use ELF. Of special importance are materials for listening comprehension including a variety of accents (Smith, 1982; Smith & Bisazza, 1982) and cases of disturbance where meaning is negotiated and where communicative strategies are employed (Watterson, 2008). In addition, authentic recordings can be turned into course materials in which students test their listening comprehension and note-taking skills. Another positive outcome of this practice would be increased student awareness of what authentic English is in international settings.

The production of realistic materials is an issue primarily for material production but also for EAP instructors who prepare course materials for their students. Especially in higher education settings where students will use ELF, listening materials must include English by speakers in lingua franca settings. This can be enabled by proper descriptions of lingua franca settings, as discussed above.

The view that prioritizes comprehensibility in teaching is not shared by all. Some have claimed that ELF research suggests all teaching be done only based on comprehensibility, because “what is needed for comprehension is all that is needed to be produced” (Kuo, 2006: 216). This is not the case. The present study suggests that features that are critical in terms of communicative effectiveness are prioritized, followed by features that are not equally vital for communicative purposes.

The third issue here concerns testing. Interestingly, the natural order of teaching and then testing needs to be modified when exposing learners to

authentic usage. Testing is not necessarily an issue that needs to be dealt with after addressing issues concerning teaching. ELT examination boards base their practices on the ownership of English predominantly by its native speakers. The same approach is taken by most teachers and teacher trainers (Jenkins, 2006). If World Englishes and ELF researchers together point to a need for pluralism and inclusivity (Bolton, 2005; Seidlhofer, 2005), EAP practice needs to follow. Excluding the usage of English by its non-native speakers in ELF settings and not giving it the airing space it needs in EAP would be reducing EAP qualitatively and quantitatively, and therefore, unhelpful to the learners.

So how can testing be adjusted in the light of comprehensibility-based teaching and the findings of the ELF literature so far (including the findings of the present study)? Any set of criteria to evaluate the spoken production of a learner of English will need to consider the following carefully:

- One of the types of non-standard morphosyntactic usage in the present study concerns successful reductions of redundancy. An example of this type of usage is the non-marking of the plural on the noun. It cannot be suggested that such non-standard forms should be taught to learners; however, not penalizing them on items that do not hinder communication and help communicative effectiveness could be a practice worth considering.
- Another type of morphosyntactic non-standard usage in the present study is about features that create extra explicitness, e.g. pre- and post-dislocation. Although pre- and post-dislocation are considered incorrect in traditional grammar books (unlike Heads/Fronting and Tails), considering the communicative role they play in making the message explicit to the listener, teachers do not necessarily need to correct such usage and penalize learners. Another example of such usage is repetition. Although repetition is generally considered undesirable (Lichtkoppler, 2007), it does contribute to the communicative effectiveness of spoken English by fulfilling important functions in ELF settings (Lichtkoppler, 2007) and is considered an accommodation strategy used for efficiency and cooperation purposes (Cogo & Dewey, 2006; Björkman, 2010). Instead of penalizing learners because of the repetition in their spoken production, teachers can pay more attention to the types of items that are repeated and for what

purposes the items are repeated. Repetition for emphasis both in dialogic and monologic speech, and other repetition in dialogic speech help learners achieve communicative effectiveness.

- Dialogic speech gives us more information with reference to disturbance, pragmatic strategies and how speakers negotiate meaning in interaction. If teachers aim to test a learner's ability to negotiate meaning and achieve communicative effectiveness through appropriate strategies, they should assign learners dialogic tasks. This would enable teachers to test the pragmatic strategies that they have exposed their students to (the present section, see priorities in teaching). In most language teaching classrooms in Sweden, however, learners are assigned monologic tasks, presentations being a popular one. It is not possible to test how meaning is negotiated in such prepared speech. It is recommended that both monologic and dialogic speech events are used in the testing of a learner's spoken production. This would be an attempt to mirror authentic ELF situations in a language classroom setting, and it would be useful in preparing the learner for dialogic speech events.
- It is important that native-speaker accents are not presented as the only acceptable accents to achieve the highest grades in the evaluation of a learner's spoken production. The learner should be free to approximate his/her speech to a native variety if this is the learner's aspiration, but this should not be a criterion.
- In general, assessment criteria need to be adjusted considering the above, giving "effective use of the language" as the target. The criteria for higher grades should not be "native-like production", for instance native-like pronunciation, for those who will use English as an academic lingua franca. This is a very questionable practice for two main reasons. First, as discussed in the present paper, it is problematic to define what "native speaker usage" is with the variability in native varieties. Second, previous research (Björkman, 2010) has shown that native-speaker-like production does not necessarily ensure communicativeness in ELF settings, for instance in question intonation.

For the above practice to be possible, the overall criteria used need to be adjusted accordingly, recognizing different purposes for using a language.

Most countries within the EU are now in the process of implementing the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The Council of Europe (2001) defines this framework as a document that describes in a comprehensive manner i) the competences necessary for communication, ii) the related knowledge and skills and iii) the situations and domains of communication. It is precisely the competences necessary for communicative effectiveness that the ELF paradigm emphasizes. So, on this note, criteria need to be adjusted accordingly, considering the aim of the task that is performed through English.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we focused on one of the important changes that has taken place in higher education: the wide use of ELF in a large number of higher education institutions and the emerging groups of ELF speakers. The aim here has been to provide an overview of the use of ELF in higher education today, with specific reference to northern Europe, to outline the main findings of ELF research, and to make tentative suggestions for EAP instruction and testing. The discussion in this paper contributes to an ongoing debate on the extent of the use of English in English-medium higher education settings in Europe.

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NOTES

¹ The BASE corpus is available at URL: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/research/collect/base/>

² See Wong and Olsher, 2000: 122.

³ The ELFA corpus is available at URL: <http://www.eng.helsinki.fi/elfa/elfacorus.htm>

⁴ The VOICE corpus is available at URL: www.univie.ac.at/voice

⁵ Not all of these studies are based on spoken academic usage. They have been included here, because they represent important research in ELF phonology.