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Revisiting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) vs English Lingua Franca (ELF): The Case for Pronunciation

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Abstract: The spread of English as the world lingua franca has evoked the rethinking of the significance of native-speaker (NS) norms and models in teaching English, and as a result, the target of pronunciation teaching and learning has shifted from imitating native accents to achieving speech intelligibility. The Lingua Franca Core (LFC) proposal introduced a list of phonological features in English that are, arguably, the minimum required to achieve intelligibility and argued that mispronouncing these features is expected to cause a breakdown in communication among non-native speakers. As a consequence of this, it has been suggested that LFC be prioritized in teaching and learning English pronunciation. In response to the LFC proposal, researchers have become polarized; while some have found LFC a promising approach, others have argued against its appropriateness as a target of pronunciation teaching and learning. This paper evaluates the controversial position of the LFC proposal in the literature, focusing on three main dimensions: the LFC's potential to result in intelligible communication, its teachability and its scope of function as an alternative target to the NS models (Received Pronunciation and General American), and the influence of different attitudes on the success of implementing the LFC.

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Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca, The Lingua Franca Core, Pronunciation, Intelligibility, Attitude.

Abstrak: Perkembangan bahasa Inggeris sebagai lingua franca di dunia telah membangkitkan pemikiran semula kepentingan menggunakan norma dan model penutur asli dalam mengajar bahasa Inggeris. Kesannya, sasaran untuk pembelajaran dan pengajaran bahasa Inggeris telah berubah daripada imitasi loghat penutur asli kepada mencapai kecerdasan bertutur. Lingua Franca Core (LFC) atau teras lingua franca mencadangkan untuk memperkenalkan senarai ciri-ciri fonologi dalam bahasa Inggeris yang menekankan keperluan minimum dalam mencapai kecerdasan dan penghujahan tentang kesalahan sebutan ciri-ciri ini dijangkakan menyebabkan keruntuhan dalam komunikasi antara orang-orang bukan penutur asli. Sebagai kesan kepada isu ini, satu cadangan telah diusulkan terhadap mengutamakan LFC dalam pembelajaran dan pengajaran sebutan bahasa Inggeris. Ikutan daripada cadangan yang diusulkan, dua analisis telah dikeluarkan oleh para penyelidik. Sebahagian daripada penyelidik berpendapat bahawa LFC merupakan pendekatan yang memberikan kesan baik, manakala sebahagian yang lain menolak LFC sebagai sasaran pembelajaran dan pengajaran sebutan bahasa Inggeris. Kertas kajian ini menilai posisi kontroversi cadangan LFC dalam kajian sebelum ini dengan fokus kepada tiga dimensi: potensi cadangan LFC dalam kecerdasan komunikasi, kebolehan LFC dalam pengajaran dan skop fungsi sebagai sasaran alternatif model-model NS (Received Pronunciation and General American), dan pengaruh pelbagai sikap ke atas keberjayaan melaksanakan LFC.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Inggeris sebagai lingua franca, Teras lingua franca, Sebutan, Kecerdasan, Sikap

Introduction

The English language has a position that no other lingua franca has ever had as the language of communication across all social classes and the official language of business, education, economics, and technology. The powerful position of English is attributed to the imperial expansion of Britain toward the end of the nineteenth century and the emerging status of the United States as the leading military, scientific, technological, and economic power. These factors—along with globalization, by which the entire world started to behave as a single society—benefited English and made it become the international auxiliary language (Smith, 2015) and the single world lingua franca (Crystal, 2003; Svartvik & Leech, 2006). Kachru (1985) visualized the spread of English in three circles:

the *inner circle* (or the native-speaking countries), the *outer circle* (or former British colonies where English is used as a second language), and the *expanding circle* (the rest of the world, which comprises the biggest number of speakers of English, who learn it as a foreign language). In addition to Kachru's (1985), there have been several other attempts to describe the global spread of English, such as those by Strevens (1980), Modiano (1999), Rajadurai (2005), and Svartvik and Leech (2006). While all of these proposals were successful in reflecting the spread of English across the globe, they all reveal the dichotomy of native and non-native speakerism.

As a consequence of its unprecedented worldwide spread, knowing English became like possessing the 'fabled Aladdin's lamp' that opens opportunities and doors to a person that would not exist if he did not know English (Kachru, 1986). Since English has grown beyond the inner-circle countries, the 'ownership' of English has shifted: It has become denationalized (Smith, 1976) and should no longer be considered the property of its native speakers but the world's speakers' property (Kachru, 1986, 1992; McKay, 2002, 2003; Smith, 1976, 1983, 2015; Widdowson, 1994). This generates several implications: Speaking English differently from native speakers (NSs) does not mean the speaker is speaking incorrectly, and it is not necessary to appreciate NSs' culture to use English effectively (Smith, 1976, 1983, 2015). This movement in ELF-based research has been subject to criticism by what ELF scholars perceive as constructivist criticism that could inform ELF thinking, or unconstructive criticism resulting from misunderstanding ELF's principles, rationale, scope, and function that could never contribute insight to ELF researchers (e.g., the reply of Baker & Jenkins [2015] and Baker *et al.* [2015] to O'Regan's [2014] 'English as a Lingua Franca: An Immanent Critique').

Since the main role of English in lingua franca settings is to facilitate cross-cultural communication in a globalised world, speakers' potential to be understood and communication success have become the primary concerns amongst ELF users and researchers in the expanding circle (Berns, 2008) and are prioritized over native-speaker norms (Greenwood, 2002). The term 'intelligibility' is widely used by ELF scholars in discussing interlocutors' potential to be understood, although it does not have a definition that is widely subscribed to, nor an agreed way to measure it. One definition of intelligibility that

is widely adopted by some ELF scholars (e.g., Jenkins, 2000; Walker, 2010) was offered by Munro and Derwing (1995), Derwing and Munro (1997), Derwing *et al.* (2006), and Derwing (2006), who defined it as the extent to which a speaker's utterance is actually understood. They distinguished this from the notion of 'comprehensibility', which refers to the listener's estimation of the difficulty or ease of understanding an utterance. Another definition for intelligibility that has been adopted by some writers in classroom-based research and ELF implications (e.g., Bayyurt, 2018; Zoghbor, 2016a; Zoghbor, 2018) is that of Smith and Nelson (1986), who referred to it as recognition of utterances, while 'comprehensibility' is understanding the meaning of the utterance.

Pronunciation has been given attention in the discussion of the global spread of English due to its strong link with accent and its potential to reflect the identities of NNSs in lingua franca settings (Zoghbor, 2016b). Pronunciation is a more noticeable indication of the speaker's identity than grammar or vocabulary, as it is salient in spoken language at the start of communication, while some time is needed for the speaker to use words that could be unfamiliar to the listener's vocabulary repertoire (Nelson, 2008). Despite the strong connection between a person's first language and identity, this premise (of the potential of language to indicate a speaker's identity) is not universally accepted, nor it is clear what the nature of this connection is (Suleiman, 2003). A foreign accent that is noticeable in verbal communication might reveal the speaker's first language and, consequently, the country where the person might have come from (what is referred to as *jinsiyya* in Arabic). However, 'identity' can be a more generic term than *jinsiyya* to refer to the person's belonging to a bigger group of people with more than one *jinsiyya*, as in the case of Arabs coming from several Arabic-speaking countries sharing their first language. Arabic is also the language of the Quran, the Holy book of Islam, and the Hadith, the saying and deeds of the prophet Mohamed, peace be upon him (Alsohaibani, 2016), allowing the Arabic speaker to reflect the Arabic and Islamic identity and nationalism (or *qawmiyya*), although Suleiman (2003) used both *jinsiyya* and *qawmiyya* to refer to nationalism. It is important to mention that Arabs might too reflect an identity that shares *qawmiyya* despite belonging to different religions. For example, an Egyptian (whether a Muslim or a *Qibti* [Copt], which refers to the minority Christians in Egypt) will still reveal from his accented English his or her belonging to Egypt, reflecting the Arab identity with no indication of religion, with the recognition that the

Arabic speaker might be associated with Islam due to the inseparable relationship between Islam and Arabic (Alsohaibani, 2016). In this paper, identity is referred to in the discussion about pronunciation and accent in its narrow definition as an indication of ethnicity and the group of people, social class, and nation that the person belongs to and with which he or she shares common values and traditions (Suleiman, 2003).

The leading empirical study on the phonological features that could influence speech intelligibility was conducted by Jenkins (2000), who observed communication between advanced NNSs of English from different first languages and developed a record of the pronunciation features where breakdown in communication occurred. This pronunciation feature inventory was later referred to as the Lingua Franca Core (LFC), and it initially included a certain set of phonological features: In terms of segmental features, the LFC includes all the consonants except for /θ/ and /ð/, the RP intervocalic /t/ ([t]), clear /l/, GA's rhoticity, vowel length, and the quality of the vowel /ɜ:/. All the other segmental features are non-core features. In terms of suprasegmental features, only nuclear stress is considered to enhance intelligibility. The LFC was also proposed to be the inventory upon which the pronunciation syllabus of English as a lingua franca can be based instead of the traditional pronunciation syllabus that was based on the native-speaker norms of Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA). Table 1.1 introduces the differences between the targets of syllabi that are based on LFC and NS norms.

Table 1.1: Targets of the EFL and ELF pronunciation syllabus (Zoghbor, 2011: 285, Modified from Jenkins, 2005, p. 149)

	A	B	C	D
		EFL targets	**Impacts ELF intelligibility?**	**ELF (contents of the LFC)**
1	The consonant inventory	All consonants	Yes, but not all	All consonants except /θ/ and /ð/
		RP non-rhotic /r/ GA rhotic /r/	Not clear	Rhotic /r/ preferred
		RP intervocalic [t] GA intervocalic [ɾ]	Not clear	Intervocalic [t] preferred

2	Phonetic requirements	Rarely specified	Yes, but not all	Aspiration after /p/, /t/, and /k/. Appropriate vowel length before fortis/ lenis consonant phonemes.
3	Consonant cluster	All word positions	Yes, but not all	Word initially, word medially
4	Vowel quantity	Long–short contrast	Yes	Long-short contrast
5	Vowel quality	Close to RP or GA	No	L2 (consistent) regional qualities
6	Weak forms	Essential	No	Unhelpful to intelligibility
7	Features of connected speech	All	No	Inconsequential or unhelpful
8	Stress-timed rhythm	Important	No	Unnecessary
9	Word stress	Critical	Yes, but not all	Recommended in words of more than two syllables.
10	Nuclear (tonic) stress	Important	Yes	Critical
11	Pitch movement	Important	No	Inconsequential

In addition to the above list of ELF inventory, four main principles accompany that establish the LFC:

- The LFC is argued to be more able than NS pronunciation features to enhance speech intelligibility.
- The LFC is a more achievable target than the traditional syllabus based on RP and/or GA.
- The LFC is not to be imposed on learners, nor should all English learners be intelligible to all English speakers. A speaker should be intelligible to the target community he or she is (or will be)

in contact with, and according to this, the decision whether to follow an EFL or an ELF syllabus can be made.

- Teaching ELF pronunciation should be accompanied by developing accommodation skills for successful communication rather than depending entirely on one aspect of the language, such as pronunciation.

In response to Jenkins' LFC, researchers have become polarized. Some (e.g., Cook, 2002; Seidlhofer, 2005; Walker, 2001a, 2001b) have found the LFC the salvation of foreign language learners and NNSs, as it is the solution to many challenges they encounter, and some have carried it further and implemented it (e.g., Sifakis, 2018; Walker, 2010; Walker & Zoghbor, 2015; Zoghbor, 2009, 2011). Parallel to this line of effort, others (e.g., Dauer, 2005; Sobkowiak, 2005; Trudgill, 1998; Wells, 2005) have argued against it, considering that the LFC is only a temporary, rather than a permanent, solution to the challenges that might currently exist in teaching/learning English and in using it as a lingua franca, and that it might even have negative side effects in the future if it is legalized and widely implemented or if it replaces the current considerations in language learning and usage.

The following two sections will address the two sides of this argument. While doing this, it is important to mention that this paper is more in favour of the LFC trend. However, LFC supporters will need to have a more inclusive approach than their current one in addressing LFC matters to consider in ELF settings in non-European contexts.

Salvation of Foreign Language Learners, Teachers, and Speakers

LFC's proponents have claimed that it is better able to increase the interlocutor's intelligibility in ELF settings, and they have based their argument on a body of empirical data in addition to Jenkins's. Smith and Rafiqzad (1979), Tauroza and Luk (1997), and Smith and Nelson (2006) revealed that NNSs might be more intelligible to their NNS counterparts than NSs. Nevertheless, other studies have found that NSs are easier to understand than NNSs. Munro and Derwing (1995 and 1999) demonstrated that speaking English with a foreign accent does not impede intelligibility, and communication can be remarkably successful when foreign accents are noticeable or even strong. However, Rubin and Smith (1990) found that foreign-accented speakers were perceived

as less intelligible, less competent, and even less attractive than native speakers. Zoghbor (2014) also found that native speakers (except for an American from South Carolina) were easier to understand than an Indian speaker to Arab listeners. But there are also writers such as Matsuura *et al.* (1999) and Rajadurai (2007) who have shown that lower intelligibility ratings assigned to NNSs might be attributed to factors other than NNS phonology, such as tolerance and attitudes towards the speaker. Overall, these contradictory research findings suggest that what is required from NNSs is not to sound exactly like native speakers but rather to be more intelligible, and being a NS is not equivalent to being able to communicate successfully.

Secondly, it is also important to note that intelligibility is not only a concern in NS/NNS or NNS/NNS communication but in communication among NSs themselves. Larry Smith started reporting this in 1976 when he started talking about the ownership of English as an International Language (EIL). Smith referred to Marckwardt (1958), who suggested that NSs (not only NNSs) who speak different varieties of English may not understand one another and should modify their speech to communicate successfully. Wells (2005), Kubota (2001), and Yamaguchi (2002) demonstrated that even NSs need to modify their English and use simplified, sometimes ungrammatical, speech with each other, resulting in a register known as 'Foreigner Talk' (Yamaguchi, 2002). Although the concept of 'Foreigner Talk' and ELF might be polar opposites of one another, since the first involves NSs, while the latter looks at legitimating NNSs' Englishes, 'Foreigner Talk' is referred to here to show that making efforts to be understood and communicate successfully is not just NNSs' responsibility, and what is required in ELF communication is to accommodate interlocutors, where modifications of pronunciation and other language aspects are possibly required, but it is far from necessary to sound like a NS.

The third issue is linked with speaker identity, which is carried through accent, and the influence of this on the success of communication. Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles & Smith, 1979), or Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles *et al*., 1991), holds that people change their speech according to the topic of the discourse and the people involved in communication. The goals of speech adjustments can be to evoke the addressee's social approval, to promote communicative efficiency between interlocutors,

and to maintain a positive social identity (Beebe & Giles, 1984). To achieve these goals, three strategies are used: *convergence,* whereby individuals adopt each other's communicative behaviours in linguistic-prosodic-nonverbal features; *divergence,* whereby speakers accentuate verbal and non-verbal differences between themselves and others while communicating; and *maintenance*, a type of divergence whereby interactants preserve their speech patterns and other communicative behaviours across situations in order to maintain their group identity (Giles *et al*., 1991). According to Giles and Smith (1979), large convergence might have a negative rather than positive influence on communication, as the listeners might interpret this as the speaker's projection of their identity in copying them. For that reason, it is appreciated if the speaker moves a little in the linguistic direction of the listener but resented if the speaker copies the listener too precisely (Preston, 2005). Giles and Smith (1979) also discussed the phenomenon of 'overaccommodation', which occurs when a speaker is considered by the recipient to be over-adjusting. This often leads to miscommunication despite the speaker's precise intention to produce the opposite effect. The LFC is significant in its link to this matter, as it is conservative about overaccommodation or large convergence to the interlocutor's L1 linguistic system, encourages the speakers to maintain their L1 linguistic features where intelligibility is not affected, and allows speakers to reveal their identities through their foreign accents.

A fourth rationale adapted by LFC proponents is LFC's potential to allow NNSs the same sociolinguistic rights as are enjoyed by L1 speakers by validating (or legitimating) NNS accents in ELF settings (Jenkins, 2005). English learners are allowed the same, and this is partially due to the implications of the LFC that do not reside at the phoneme inventory but are echoed in overall classroom practice (Jenkins, 2000; Lee & Ridley, 1999; Tomlinson, 2006; Walker, 2001b). For example, the teaching of pronunciation is no longer the replacement of NS sounds in the phonology of the learners' L1, but it rather builds on their existing repertoire. While in the traditional EFL syllabus, divergence form NS norms is considered an 'error', it is a 'variation' from ELF perspectives. 'Code-mixing', or making use of words or grammatical features in L2 that belong to another language (Crystal, 1997), is considered primarily the result of gaps in the learner's knowledge of NS forms, yet it is an acceptable (even a positive rather than a negative) phenomenon from the

ELF perspective (Jenkins, 2006). Accent loss has long been an aspect of EFL pronunciation instruction, but it is discarded in ELF perspectives, in which learners are encouraged to maintain their regional accents. These practices allow learners to appreciate their L1 and retain the right to the English language ownership that has been associated with native speakers of the inner-circle.

The teaching of ELF pronunciation has also helped in reconsidering the role of some theories in language teaching and learning. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) (Lado, 1957, cited in Celce-Murcia *et al.,* 1996), which holds that while L1–L2 similarity equates with simplicity in L2 acquisition, L1–L2 difference equates with difficulty, was primarily used to predict students' errors. From the ELF perspective, CAH is valuable for investing learners' L1 in the acquisition of L2 and maintaining sounds that are similar in in L2 and L1, and the inclusion criteria of these sounds depends on their influence on intelligibility rather than native-speakerism. It is realized that the CAH has been challenged for the idea that similar sounds are not necessarily more acquirable than dissimilar sounds (Eckman *et al.,* 2003; Flege & Hillenband, 1987) and for its inability to predict the degree of difficulty learners would experience with a given item (Celce-Murcia *et al.*, 1996). These claims could be valid if English sounds replace similar phonemes in the learner's repertoire, while in ELF principle, these sounds should be maintained rather than replaced.

To further enhance students' potential to understand NNS varieties, the LFC entails exposing learners to several NNS varieties (Bayyurt, 2018; Deterding, 2016a; Sifakis, 2018; Walker, 2010; Zoghbor, 2009). Arguably, exposure to several NNS varieties, despite being helpful in increasing learners' familiarity with other NNS varieties and their admiration of these (as well as their own) varieties, might have a negative influence if the NNS used in class includes non-core features. Hewings (2004) distinguished between two levels of learning and teaching pronunciation: *receptive* (listening) and *productive* (speaking) skills. Introducing NNS varieties in class without encouraging the students to produce the same might function at the receptive level. While receptive skill is intended to help learners to improve their listening ability and develop discrimination skills, it provides a foundation for pronunciation improvement in their own speech (Hewings, 2004). Considering this, teachers implementing the LFC are expected to show control over the

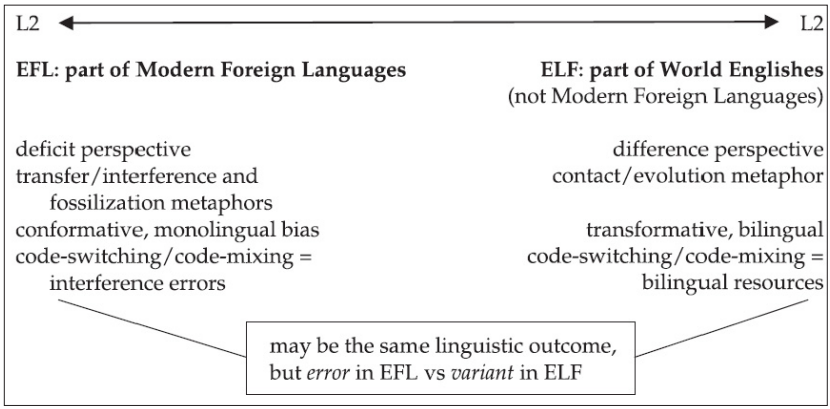
classroom's input by bringing to learners' attention the differences between the non-core phonemes used by the NNS sample and the core features being aimed at.

The fifth claim of the ELF approach's proponents concerns the issues of second language acquisition in reference to the work of Lenneberg (1967). Lenneberg posited a *critical period*, which occurs around puberty and refers to biological constraints after the period of life during which the optimal conditions of language acquisition happen. Scovel's (1969) and Krashen's (1973) research also demonstrated that native-like pronunciation appears to be biologically conditioned to occur before adulthood. Consequently, researchers have continued to suggest that aiming for native-like pronunciation is an unrealistic burden for both teachers and learners (Cook, 2002; Levis, 2005). The LFC fits in this argument as a more appropriate target, as it does not require learners to acquire native-like models, and intelligibility is its main concern. However, not all second-language researchers subscribe to the critical period hypothesis, and some argue against it (e.g., Flege, 1981; Marinova-Todd *et al*., 2000). Nevertheless, several NS pronunciation features seem to remain unacquirable. Apart from age constraints, there are other factors that still affect children's and adults' chances of acquiring the L2; for example, the environment in which adults typically learn a second language (i.e., the classroom) may not be as rich as that experienced by children acquiring a second language in a more natural, input-rich environment (Jacobs, 1988). Disparity between children's and adults' performance may be a reflection of a complex interplay of social and psychological factors (Ausubel, 1964; Schumann, 1975), and other factors such as amount and type of proper pronunciation instruction, as well as learners' aptitudes, attitudes, and motivation, can all add to the complexity of pronunciation acquisition (Celce-Murcia *et al*., 1996), making intelligibility, rather than native-like pronunciation, the priority and target.

The sixth reason to support the ELF approach, which is also linked with the acquisition of L2 pronunciation, is the possible outcomes of implementing the EFL and LFC syllabus. ELF has been mistakenly positioned along the 'interlanguage continuum', the system that L2 learners develop (Selinker, 1972), with L1 at one extreme and L2 at the other. From ELF perspectives, positioning ELF learners at any point on this continuum is biased against them, as NS pronunciation is not the

aim of L2 learners. In addition to demonstrating inequity against EFL learners, Figure 2.1 indicates that the actual outcome of ELF and EFL may possibly be the same but reached by different routes, despite the differences in EFL and ELF perspectives (Jenkins, 2006). Therefore, marginalizing the LFC in favour of the traditional EFL does not leave learners with native-like pronunciation but leads them to be considered under-achievers for a target that was recognized by Cook (2002) and Derwing and Munro (2005) not to be achievable in the first place.

Figure 0.1: EFL contrasted with ELF (From Jenkins, 2006, p. 140)



Despite all the above reasons to shift from a syllabus based on EFL to one based on ELF, some scholars find the LFC an inadequate solution for several reasons, which will be addressed in the following section.

A Temporary Solution for English Language Learners

The first argument against the LFC is the concern that it encourages and legitimates a wide range of Englishes, which might lead to diversification in language use and, consequently, to unintelligible varieties (Dziubalska-Kołaczyk, 2005; Lee & Ridley, 1999; Tarone, 1987; Trudgill, 1998; Yamaguchi, 2002). However, Smith (1992), Widdowson (1994), and Jenkins (2000) argued that this is unlikely to happen, as, according to the language universals theory (Anderson, 1987; Jakobson, 1941, cited in Macken & Ferguson, 1987), there is a universality of solutions and/or substitutions of sounds used by interlocutors in cases where L2 features do not exist in L1. For example, the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are commonly substituted in L2 by a limited set of alternatives – /t/ and /d/, /s/ and /z/, or, less commonly, /f/

and /v/ – and, thus, first language transfer will not impair intelligibility (Jenkins, 2000). In other words, change in pronunciation will remain within a frame in which limited substitutions for /θ/ and /ð/ exist. Another study has the same claim about substituting NNSs' regional vowel qualities for NSs'. Low (2016) investigated the vowel quality patterns in five Asian Englishes in an informal ELF setting and found that the varieties under study were statistically similar in terms of vowel quality (and overall rhythmic pattering), suggesting unity in the regional vowel quality that the speakers of these varieties could produce when they were speaking English.

However, Evans and Levinson (2009) challenged the idea of linguistic universality and the trend amongst cognitive scientists that languages are all built to a common pattern. For them, languages differ so fundamentally from one another at every level of description (sound, grammar, lexicon, meaning) that it is very hard to find any single structural property that they share. With this misconception of language uniformity, according to Evans and Levinson, the diversity of languages may not have a limited number of forms, and the concern that diversity might end up leading to unintelligible varieties, to some extent, is still valid. Even if one could demonstrate that a given feature of language is an absolute universal in the sense that it is found in every currently spoken language, this does not exclude the possibility of unknown counterexamples in the lost languages of the past or in the innumerable possible languages of the future. However, Longobardi and Roberts (2010) believed that Evans and Levinson's position was built on a narrow and unwarranted definition of the notion itself, explaining that the question of language universals can be approached either *inductively*, like the Greenbergian typology, which is based on finding recurrent patterns and making generalisations on that basis, or *deductively*, like the Chomskyan tradition, which is based on a hypothetico-deductive approach making inferences from an already available set of theoretical postulates, although of course both traditions combine induction and deduction to varying degrees. Longobardi and Roberts (2010) agreed with Evans and Levinson that an inductive approach is inherently limited; however, they believed that Evans and Levinson took an extreme position and neglected, virtually by definition, implicational universals of the classical Greenbergian format. A statement such as 'If a language has nasal vowels, then it has oral vowels' reflects empirically correct

implicational universals. For these reasons, the idea that encouraging variety among NNSs might lead to unintelligibility is, temporarily, declined.

The second argument against ELF concerns the claim of Widdowson (1994) and Smith (1983, 2015) about the shifting ownership of English. Sobkowiak (2005) argued that this position is 'highly emotional, even hysterical' (p. 136), being more likely to be the result of mixing linguistics and political/ideological matters. The outcome of mixing these matters, according to Sobkowiak (2005), does not provide ground on which new pronunciation standards can be established. Along the same line of argument, Sobkowiak (2005) argued that statistical matters and the unpopularity of a certain variety of English (e.g., the case of the Received Pronunciation, which is spoken only by between 3% and 5% of the English population, according to Trudgill & Hannah, 2008) cannot be the criteria upon which a variety is excluded from being a target to work toward and achieve. For Jenkins (2007), this is a 'curious' claim to make, as it neglects the fact that the vast majority of English speakers are NNSs, and this seems to evoke NNS 'self-castigation' for not having a NS accent. Sobkowiak's position also seems to sidestep the LFC boundaries and involves the whole argument about the existence of English as a lingua franca and the influence of this in different aspects of its users' lives (Jenkins, 2007, 2008). It is insensible to underestimate the influence of the statistics and the vast number of English users; English derives its position as the worldwide lingua franca from these statistics, which also make English subject to conclusions that other languages are not subject to. Additionally, this statistical matter ignores the issue of 'intelligibility', a core factor in interaction and the criterion upon which the LFC has been developed. And it is this particular criterion, not statistics, that matters in communication worldwide.

The third argument against the LFC concerns the potential of empirical education and ELF research to make changes. Sobkowiak (2005) argued that having arrived at a corpus (referring to the LFC) through empirical work does not mean that the resulting corpus can automatically become part of teachers' curricula or meet learners' needs. However, this marginalizes the role of empirical research in education and social sciences to influence practices and make changes. What is recommended is to generate studies that could validate research findings rather than underestimating the potential of current projects to meet the

professional needs of learners and teachers. Jenkins (2000) and (2007) mentioned that the LFC is not definitive, and there is a need for more research to fine-tune its contents. These studies are, although limited, available. For example, Low (2016) revised the contents of the LFC, providing a modified ELF pronunciation syllabus for Asian learners. Zoghbor (2018), in addition to providing a revised syllabus based on the LFC for Arab learners, along with Deterding (2016b), supported the LFC's position that vowel quality can be excluded from the phoneme inventory, though Deterding (2016b) asserted that it is possible that vowel quality may cause misunderstanding if it is combined with variation in length. In contrast to the findings by Deterding (2016b) and Zoghbor (2018), O'Neal (2015) found that vowel qualities that are not in adherence with NS norms may harm mutual intelligibility. In another feature of pronunciation, Lewis and Deterding (2018) found some evidence that word stress may be a cause of misunderstanding in an ELF setting. Similarly, Zoghbor (2018) found that, in contrast to Jenkins' LFC, word stress is significant for the intelligibility of Arab learners in words of more than two syllables. It is important to point out that, although Lewis and Deterding (2018) and Zoghbor (2018) have similar findings regarding the importance of word stress for intelligibility, they drew different conclusions and came from different positions: Lewis and Deterding (2018) concluded with appreciation of the NS norm due to the lack of a clear model to guide students on how to improve their pronunciation if there is no adherence to NS norms, while Zoghbor (2018) reinforced the need to investigate the validity of the LFC in non-Jenkinsian (European) contexts to arrive at a list of the inventory that can meet the needs of English learners, concluding that what is a core feature for one group of learners (like the case of word stress for Arabic speakers) is not necessarily a core feature for another group (like word stress in Jenkins' group of speakers).

Rebalancing Positions

Although this paper supports shifting the mainstream SLA perspective to the ELF position, it is conservative about its scope of function and the role of ELF as described by its proponents. This section will provide details of why these concerns have emerged and will shed some light on what is currently considered to be a major challenge to learning ELF pronunciation, focusing on attitude and its influence, which might

surpass the factors that were subject to argument between the two groups above.

Goals of teaching pronunciation

Scholars such as Smith and Nelson (2008), Smith (1992), Taylor (1991), and Munro and Derwing (1995, 1999) all argued that it is unnecessary for every user of English to be intelligible to every other user, but rather, he or she must be intelligible to those with whom he or she is likely to communicate in English. Jenkins (1998, 2002, 2005) drew on the distinction between users of EFL, who learn English to facilitate communication with NSs, and users of ELF, who learn English for international communication, mainly with NNSs, rather than for communication with its NSs.

To this end, as Trudgill (2005), Wells (2005), and Sobkowiak (2005) counterargued, it is not realistic to ask for a choice between EFL and ELF/EIL or for English users, teachers, and learners to predict which particular students are going to be ELF and not EFL users in the future. Polish learners, for example, according to Wells and Sobkowiak, will need to be speakers of both EFL and ELF. Al-Issa (2006) showed that most students who are sent abroad by the Omani government for postgraduate studies go to inner-circle countries. It is unwise to assume that those learners were given the chance to choose between becoming learners of ELF or of EFL. It is equally difficult to assume that a learner could predict that he or she will live in the inner circle (where communication with NSs is expected) and accordingly plan to aim at NS pronunciation when he or she starts learning English. This type of prediction, in addition to being impossible to some extent, does not sound helpful in the decision to be a learner of EFL or of ELF. For Kirkpatrick (2007), it is not necessarily true that learning a native-speaker model will help learners who plan to study in the UK, the United States, or Australia, because these host countries are likely to have a mixed, multicultural population who speak 'localised' versions of their own varieties of English.

Additionally, although Kachru's (1985) description of the three concentric circles is widely used and referred to in literature, the division between these circles is not rigid, and a grey area exists between them (Brown, 1992; Kachru, 1985). A case in point is the situation of approximately twenty countries (for example Denmark,

Ethiopia, Lebanon, and Belgium) that are in transition from English as a foreign language (EFL) to English as a second language (ESL) status (Graddol, 1997). Another example of these contexts is the United Arab Emirates, a small country in Western Asia at the southeast end of the Arabian Peninsula with more than 200 nationalities living and working in the country. Amongst the 9.543 million residents, 11.48% of the total population are Emiratis, while the rest of the residents (88.52%) are expatriates (GMI, 2018). The top countries these expats come from are, in order, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Iran, Egypt, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and China. In this list, the only Arab country whose people can communicate in Arabic with the locals is Egypt (0.404 million), while all the other countries in the list are non-Arab countries, making English a necessary tool of communication across all of these nationalities who do not speak the country's first language. The UAE has a norm-oriented system, similar to the EFL context, and heavily depends on English, which has been deeply rooted in the community system since the 1800s, to the extent that it is argued to have been an ESL, rather than EFL, context until 2004, the period which is referred to as 'nativization' (Boyle, 2012). Although Arabic is the official language of the UAE, its cultural norms are associated with the multicultural residents of the country, including residents from inner-circle countries (Hopkyns *et al.*, 2018). In such context, the targeted community is the entire UAE community, with all its language diversity that is exemplified in the 200 nationalities that currently exist. The Emiratis will need to be able to communicate in English with both NSs and NNSs.

If theoretically being intelligible to the target community (whether NS or NNS) requires different demands, learners will prefer to be EFL users (according to Jenkins, this means to learn for the purpose of communicating with NSs). The fact that NNSs dramatically outnumber NSs and that most communication settings are among NNSs, although significant, might not be sufficient to motivate NNSs to learn ELF instead of EFL or assume that it is enough to be intelligible to NNSs. The current situation of the inner circle as the leading economic, military, and technological powers makes communication with NSs unavoidable, and the idea of being unable to communicate with them becomes a concern, even if this communication is uncertain to occur in the future of the NNS.

Another deficit in ELF proponents' discussion, and linked with the above, is the ongoing assertion that the LFC is a choice, and it is up to the learners to decide whether to learn NS-based or ELF-based pronunciation (Jenkins, 2000, 2005, 2007; Walker, 2018). This negotiation began in 1998 when Jenkins suggested the LFC briefly; then, she addressed the matter in detail in 2000, and as recently as July 2018, Robin Walker reinforced, in his speech during the 11th International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca in London, that the learner can decide which pronunciation to learn. Despite the long run of this position, no clear recipe has been provided on how possible it is to offer two choices, EFL and ELF pronunciation syllabi, leaving several questions in this regard unanswered: At what age can learners be given the choice? Whose decision is it, the child's or parents'? What about the mechanism of setting up the facilities to offer syllabi with two different targets? Will the school have different classes teaching different syllabi?

It is worth recalling that the LFC was the outcome of the English Language Teaching shift to ELF, and Lopriore (2018, p. 162) demonstrated that 'ELF is not a fixed predetermined entity, it is a way of seeing language, and as such it cannot be added as a course component in traditional ELT lessons or in a teacher education course'. Although Lopriore was referring in the above extract to ELF awareness in teacher education courses, the indication that ELF is not a fixed entity reveals that ELF pronunciation is not something that can be offered as a choice for the person to select if he or she wants to adhere to an 'ELF' entity (which does not exist). ELF pronunciation rather entails looking at NNSs' accented English through different lenses, reflecting awareness of why different accents and varieties of English exist, what their role in communication could be, and how they are linked with a person's aspects of life, which are discussed in the different sections of this paper.

ELF pronunciation and attitude

Numerous studies have provided evidence that a negative attitude towards a language variation, way of speaking, or ethnic group can influence the degree to which a person is understood (Jenkins, 2007; Pickering, 2006; Rajadurai, 2007; Scales *et al.,* 2006; Smith and Nelson, 2008, 2006). Eisenstein and Verdi (1985) investigated the influence of attitude towards ethnic groups on intelligibility and found that Black

English was the least intelligible of the three English varieties in their study (Standard English, New Yorkese, and Black English), despite the considerable contact of the population of their study with Black English speakers, showing that attitude towards ethnicity can override familiarity in influencing speech intelligibility. Wolff (1959, cited in Jenkins, 2007) found that although the languages spoken by two communities in the Niger Delta, the Nembe and the Kalabari, were linguistically similar, the Nembe group, who were economically poor and politically powerless, said they could understand the speech of the Kalabari, yet the politically powerful Kalabari claimed to find the Nembe's speech unintelligible. Similarly, Giles and Powesland (1975) and Ryan and Carranza (1975) found that some accents or language groups are rated more favourably than others based on ethnicity and position in the social scale.

Attitude towards the interlocutor's speech can also influence the intelligibility threshold if 'irritation' is experienced. For Fayer and Krasinski (1987), irritation is seen as consisting of two components: *distraction* (which diverts attention from the message) and *annoyance* (negative, subjective reaction to the form). For Ludwig (1982), errors in the message may affect comprehensibility by making the listener irritated or by drawing attention away from the contents of the message. According to Kenworthy (1987), self-corrections, hesitations and low confidence, and grammatical restructurings can all influence the interlocutor's ability to understand speech, increasing the likelihood of forming a negative attitude about it.

In addition to ethnicity, an attitude of positive expectation can also have an influence on speech's perceived intelligibility. According to Smith and Nelson (1985), a listener who expects to understand a speaker will be more likely to find that speaker comprehensible than one who does not. Rubin (1994) tested how listeners' expectations about speakers' accents can be related to success or failure in comprehending their speech. In his study, the participants listened to a recorded mini-lecture by an American NS with little regional accent. In one group, the participants listened to the lecture with a photo of an Asian supposedly delivering the lecture, while the other group was shown a photo of a Caucasian lecturing. The former group rated the speaker as having a heavier foreign accent and scored lower on a task measuring recall of the lecture than the latter group, despite the fact that the speech the two groups heard was identical.

Despite the positive influence of familiarity with certain varieties on intelligibility (e.g., the studies by AMEP, 2002; Catford, 1950; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Giles & Smith, 1979; Jenkins, 2000; Rajadurai, 2007; Smith, 1992; Smith & Nelson, 2006; Taylor, 1991; Tauroza & Luk, 1997), several studies have found that attitude towards speech overrides familiarity. A negative attitude toward the speaker of a particular variety of English will tend to decrease intelligibility in spite of the listener's frequent exposure to that variety (Fayer & Krasinski, 1987). As mentioned earlier, in the study by Eisenstein and Verdi (1985), Black English was the least intelligible of the three dialects in their study (Standard English, New Yorkese, and Black English) despite the fact that the sample population had considerable contact with Black English speakers. Thus, developing a tolerant attitude, familiarity, and accommodation skills are argued to enhance NSs' as much as NNSs' abilities to communicate intelligibly and comprehensibly (Bamgbose, 1998; Kubota, 2001; Rajadurai, 2007; Smith, 1983, 1992; Smith & Nelson, 1985; Taylor, 1991).

The influence of attitude towards the interlocutor's ethnicity on intelligibility can be discussed through ethnolinguistic identity theory, which was introduced by Giles and Johnson (1981, 1987) but has its roots in earlier research on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel's theory holds that individuals categorize the social world and, hence, perceive themselves as members of various groups. Such knowledge of ourselves as group members is defined as our social identity, and it has meaning only in social comparison with other relevant groups, which results in either positive or negative self-concept. It is assumed that one strives to achieve a positive identity (or positive 'psychological distinctiveness') by seeking dimensions that make our own social group favourably distinct from outgroups (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, individuals in the ingroup may attempt to make themselves favourably distinct on dimensions such as language by achieving 'psycholinguistic distinctiveness' (or the accentuation of ethnic speech and non-verbal markers such as vocabulary, slang, and gesture) (Giles *et al*., 1977; Giles & Coupland, 1991). According to the ethnolinguistic identity theory, when comparison with the outgroup results in positive perception, speakers accentuate their linguistic specification. However, when the comparison with the outgroup results in negative perception, the members of the minority group tend to

identify with the powerful majority group when in contact with them and attenuate the linguistic distinctiveness of their own group (Giles & Johnson, 1981, 1987).

Within ethnolinguistic identity theory, Giles *et al*. (1977) and Giles and Johnson (1981, 1987) proposed the ethnolinguistic vitality construct, which can influence a person's sense of ethnic belongingness and, accordingly, the desire to accentuate or attenuate his or her ethnolinguistic identity. Giles *et al*. (1977) suggested that 'ethnolinguistic vitality' is influenced by three factors: group status (economics, political, and linguistic prestige), group demographics (absolute numbers, geographical concentration, and birth rate), and institutional support (recognition of the group and its language in media, education, and government). The powerful status of the inner circle is documented in Phillipson's (1992) 'Linguistic Imperialism' as an example of group status. However, in addition to the demographic power of English NNSs, which is exemplified in the large number of NNSs in Kachru's expanding and outer circles, their first languages may also have linguistic power that has not yet been invested in the fight for the recognition of ELF and the claim over its ownership. An example of this is the considerable prestige of the Arabic language among Muslims and the potential of ELF pronunciation to reveal the Arabic national identity of Arabic native speakers (Zoghbor, 2016b). Arabic, which is the official language of 24 countries with a total population of around 325 million, is carried through Islam, and it can be assumed that without Islam and its spread beyond the Arabian Peninsula's boundaries to the east and west, the Arabic language would have been spoken limitedly in the Arabian Peninsula (Alsohaibani, 2016), and it is this spiritual and religious power of the Arabic language that generates enmity or calls for hostile termination (Suleiman, 2003).

Attitude has proved to be the challenge that greatly influences intelligibility and lies with the individuals themselves more than with ELF/EFL scholars. Three controversial issues are linked with the influence of attitude on intelligibility. Firstly, attitude does not necessarily act at the subconscious level. According to Munro *et al.* (2006), participants can choose to downgrade or ignore speakers' accents in evaluating their intelligibility, despite the penetration of prejudice in the listeners' assessment of the utterance. This means that attitude can be influenced when targeted, and attitude-related aspects

should be systematically addressed in language classrooms, in addition to focusing on the phonological aspects.

Secondly, NNSs are not necessarily more tolerant than NSs towards NNS varieties. Fayer and Krasinski (1987) found that Spanish listeners were less tolerant toward non-native English speech than British listeners, who are theoretically classified as native speakers. Similarly, Ingram and Nguyen (1997) reported that Arab and Japanese listeners demonstrated significantly greater difficulty understanding the utterances of Vietnamese speakers than did NSs. This suggests that aspiration towards native speaking accent(s) may influence the perceptions of NNS listeners towards their NNS counterparts and, to a large extent, tolerance towards their own ethnic group.

Thirdly, intelligibility is not always reciprocal; if speaker A can understand speaker B, this does not entail that speaker A's speech is equally easy for speaker B to understand. Therefore, teaching and learning pronunciation should focus in parallel on two aspects: (1) exposing learners to several NNS varieties in class along with developing tolerant attitude towards NNS varieties and (2) increasing learners' potential to be intelligible, focusing on their phonology along with improving their accommodation skills.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to shed some light on the controversial position of the LFC, the list of the phonological features that are arguably the minimum requirement to secure intelligibility, and the basis upon which the pronunciation syllabi of English as a lingua franca should be developed. The article reinforces the idea that, since the LFC is generated from the position of English as the worldwide lingua franca, it is subject to conclusions that other non-global languages may not be subject to. The article addressed three main mainstream arguments: the potential of the LFC to promote intelligibility in lingua franca settings, the reachability of ELF pronunciation, and the retainment of speakers' and learners' identities. Although this article is more in favour of the LFC principle, it introduced two main aspects of a drawback in the ELF discussion that need to be addressed by its proponents: The first was the argument that English learners do not need to be intelligible to every user of English, and that they are given the choice to select between the two pronunciation syllabi (EFL or ELF) according to the target

community; the second was the necessity of addressing the influence of attitude on intelligibility, as it overrides the influence of other factors, such as familiarity with the variety of English and knowledge about its phonology system.

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