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## **“Emancipating myself, the students and the language”: Brazilian teachers’ attitudes towards ELF and the diversity of English**

**Alessia Cogo<sup>1</sup> and Sávio Siqueira<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. Email: [a.cogo@gold.ac.uk](mailto:a.cogo@gold.ac.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Bahia Federal University (UFBA), Salvador, Brazil. Email: [savio\\_siqueira@hotmail.com](mailto:savio_siqueira@hotmail.com)

### **Abstract**

A great amount of the findings in ELF research has not yet reached the regular practitioner in different parts of the world. Despite the fact that ELF research has been solidly advancing, very little has been found out about teachers’ questioning their role in the context of ELF, the global position of English, their role in possibly reproducing or resisting discourses of dominance, inequalities, hegemony, among others. This paper investigates teachers’ attitudes towards ELF, and what influences them, with pre- and in-service teachers in Brazil, the former from a public university and the latter from a prestigious language institute located in Salvador, the capital city of Bahia, Brazil. The findings have shown that regardless of the differences in experience and background knowledge, both groups have demonstrated a very positive attitude towards ELF, although many questions and doubts were brought up when it came to conceiving the teaching of ELF-oriented classes on a regular basis. At a broader level, both groups highlighted the link between an ELF-oriented pedagogy and emancipation and open-mindedness, a way of liberating the teachers from the straightjacket of traditional ELT.

**Keywords:** ELF; Brazil; pre-service/in-service teachers; attitudes and beliefs towards ELF; pedagogical implication

### **Resumo**

Grande parte dos resultados das pesquisas em ILF ainda não alcançou o professor comum em diferentes partes do mundo. Apesar de a pesquisa em ILF estar avançando solidamente, muito pouco se estudou sobre os questionamentos de professores sobre o seu papel no contexto de ILF, a condição do inglês como língua global, o papel do docente em estar possivelmente reproduzindo ou combatendo discursos de dominação, iniquidades, hegemonia, entre outros. Este artigo investiga as atitudes de professores brasileiros de inglês em formação inicial e formação continuada quanto ao ILF e o que os influencia nesse pormenor. Os professores em

formação inicial são oriundos de uma universidade pública e os em formação continuada de uma prestigiada escola de inglês local. Os achados demonstraram que, apesar das diferenças quanto à experiência e conhecimento prévio, ambos os grupos apresentaram uma atitude bastante positiva para com o ILF, embora muitas questões e dúvidas tenham surgido quando se discutiu o ensino regular da língua a partir de uma perspectiva de ILF. Em uma visão mais ampla, os grupos relacionaram uma pedagogia voltada para o ILF com emancipação e abertura, isto é, uma forma de libertar os professores da camisa-de-força imposta pelo ELI tradicional.

**Palavras-chave:** ILF; Brasil; professores em formação/formação continuada; crenças e atitudes em relação ao ILF; implicações pedagógicas.

## **1 Introduction**

Since the beginning of ELF research, scholars have been keen to point out that ELF is not about imposing what should or should not be taught in the ELT classroom. Instead, a very important aspect of the investigation around this phenomenon has been about how teachers and teacher educators can make use of and adapt the theoretical findings in their own contexts, and how current consolidated ELT beliefs and practices can facilitate or prevent practitioners from applying a more ELF-oriented approach (Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey 2011).

In fact, ELF research has advanced so much that one of its main challenges now is to have its empirical findings reach the regular practitioner. As Dewey (2012: 142) argues, "ELF has major implications for language learning and teaching," and its "growing significance is such that it is becoming increasingly untenable for language teachers not to consider its particular relevance for their own teaching contexts" (p. 143). The pedagogical implications of ELF include several key areas like the nature of the syllabus, materials, approaches and methods, assessment, and ultimately the knowledge base of teachers, being all this equally crucial for teacher education. Researchers have also pointed out that "teacher education would privilege process over form and awareness over certainty, and it would treat knowledge of language and knowledge about language as equally important" (Seidlhofer 2011: 204-5). Such a panorama also reveals that a lot of the potential ELF holds is still to be explored and implemented in most ELT contexts.

Brazil, the place where this work on teacher attitudes towards the diversity of English was conducted, is a multilingual/multicultural country whose major language, Portuguese, is spoken along with about 180 languages in its continental territory. English is basically learned, taught, and spoken as a foreign language

(EFL). Needless to say that the interest in ELF and its implications to ELT is still incipient. Although there has already been a reasonable number of researchers affiliated to the field (Gimenez, Calvo & El-Kadri 2011; Siqueira & Barros 2013; Gimenez 2015; Siqueira 2015; Porfirio & Silva 2016, among others), this work has just only started to be addressed in teacher education and by local practitioners.

In this study, we are interested in developing an understanding of Brazilian teachers' attitudes towards ELF, of what facilitates or challenges English teachers to embark in the journey to question themselves and their beliefs on language teaching and the role of English in the world. Our informants are pre-service and in-service Brazilian teachers of English working in two specific contexts, a private language institute and the language extension program of a local public university.

The article starts with a brief overview of the Foreign Language Education and ELT picture in Brazil, continues with a discussion of previous studies on teachers' attitudes and what influences their positions, before moving on to the analysis of data collected among Brazilian teachers.

## **2 Foreign language education and ELT in Brazil**

Historically, the peculiar status of English as the most demanded foreign language in Brazil is a relatively recent phenomenon. English language teaching in Brazil dates only from 1809 when, by decree, Portuguese King João VI officially determined the teaching of English along with that of French in public schools (Siqueira 2008). With a curriculum centered on a French model of education, FL teaching in Brazil from mid 1900s to the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has gone through several reforms which imposed innumerable changes, including the decrease in the number of teaching hours and the adoption of imported methodologies.

The country has also gone through the promulgation of laws which guided the national basic education. Most recently, within the scope of a not well-received and thus controversial national reform, the Ministry of Education has made English the only obligatory FL discipline throughout basic education, demoting, for instance, Spanish, which, after great efforts, had earlier conquered the right to be taught at both primary and secondary stages along with English<sup>1</sup>. In other words, all other

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<sup>1</sup> The Law 11.161/2005 determined that Spanish was to be taught optionally to the Lower Secondary Level (*Ensino Fundamental II*), and mandatorily for the Upper Secondary level (*Ensino Médio*). With the promulgation of the Law 13.415/2017, which introduced the Common National Curricular Basis (*Base Nacional Curricular Comum* – BNCC), encompassing, among other things, a Reform of the Upper Secondary Level (*Ensino Médio*), the former law was revoked and English became the sole language to be learned throughout Brazil's basic education system. Spanish can still be offered at the

foreign languages had their status demoted to 'optional' regardless of the region where schools are located, and whether the presence and circulation of English is more or less important (cf. Rajagopalan 2003; 2013).

Despite all measures to stimulate and create possibilities for students to learn foreign languages in schools in Brazil, it is plausible to say that as a whole this intent has not been successful. As revealed by a report specially produced for the British Council in São Paulo (2014), only "5.1% of the [Brazilian] population aged over 16 state that they have some knowledge of the English language". Results showed that there are important differences between generations, and just to have an idea of the general landscape, among younger people aged 18-24, the percentage of those stating they speak English just doubles, reaching meager 10%. Such a picture clearly shows that concerning English and FL education, Brazil is still distanced from a democratization of the access to an additional language, especially when we consider the socioeconomic underprivileged, overtly the greatest majority of the Brazilian population.

Prompted by this scenario, the general belief is that learning a FL in the regular school is a next to impossible endeavor. And once the official system fails, compensatory education emerges with the objective of quickly responding to a huge market that would see languages like English, for instance, as a crucial asset to guarantee the access to better job opportunities in today's globalized world. This is the case of private language institutes in Brazil, as in many parts of the world, where they have proliferated at an enormous pace, selling foreign languages as a powerful cultural and attractive merchandise, even when commercializing it at the most utilitarian level. In other words, the failure of one segment (the state schools) can basically mean the success of another (the private schools). And this is especially true in Brazil and in several other South American countries. As Bohn (2003: 160) would remind us, "since neither the private nor the public school systems in Brazil offer adequate English education in the regular elementary and secondary curriculum, wealthier families send their children to special private language courses where they can develop the necessary linguistic skills for immediate academic as well future professional needs."

Brazil, and possibly many emergent countries, still faces the dilemma of challenging such a status quo in this particular area (cf. Finardi 2014), whereby only some privileged groups can "buy English" as a merchandise of high social value. Moreover,

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Upper Secondary Level, but only as an option, which was seen by the academic community as a significant backlash for FL education in the country, that is, the reinforcement of the hegemony of English, and the consolidation of public policies still rooted within the tenets of monolingualism.

ELT (and FL teaching in general) in the Brazilian regular educational system (public and private) has been seen as a failing enterprise where classes are generally EFL-oriented and present decontextualized grammatical content. Besides that, in those spaces where English is thought to be taught and learned successfully, the ELT industry still exercises a very strong influence in local institutional policies which basically respond to the demands of an elite who is not willing to exchange, or even contrast, EFL for ELF yet. However, this does not mean that stakeholders do not have access to ELF research findings and that ELF developments are not pushing for change in such spaces. In fact, as language teacher education in several parts of the country is incorporating ELF-related topics in their pre-service and in-service programs, there is a possibility that teachers may reconsider their attitudes towards ELF, and they could contribute to demystifying and finally challenging enduring EFL tenets that still hold sway both outside and inside the classroom.

### **3 Research on teachers' attitudes to ELF and language variation**

A consideration of teaching beliefs, attitudes and practices is crucial in light of a possible development of an ELF-aware approach. Studies about teachers' beliefs and orientations towards English are vast, and towards ELF are a very rich and fast developing area of investigation. Research so far has shown that attitudes towards ELF are more negative among language teachers and linguists (rather than non-linguists) and that they tend to be associated with various language ideologies (Cogo 2012; Llorca 2009).

Jenkins' (2007) study of English language teachers' beliefs and attitudes shows more complex oscillations between positive orientations to English and English variation, and more resistant discourses. The latter are possibly influenced by the linguistic profile and trajectory as language teachers, some of whom may have invested greatly in their language learning from a NS perspective, seeing themselves in the role of the language teacher as a custodian of "English norms" and standards. Jenkins' research certainly depicted the importance of students' and teachers' attitudes towards ELF for a possible implementation of an ELF perspective to be successful.

However, in initial teacher education the tendency is to reserve very little or no space at all to discussion of the nature of the English language and its more-than-ever great diversity. Dewey (2015) shows how international pre-service teacher training awards, such as DELTA, CELTA and CertTESOL, include a recent mention of English as a global or international language in their syllabus guidelines, but that does not correspond to incorporating an ELF-perspective in the programmes. In his

work with international teachers training in the UK but teaching in other parts of the world, novice teachers were found to have little familiarity with English diversity and little awareness of the extent and nature of it.

Outside the remit of constraining international training programmes, teacher educators more directly involved in ELF have focused on reflective methods that invite practitioners to consider their own teaching contexts and students' needs in light of ELF research. And, not surprisingly, central to this kind of reflection are the teachers' and learners' beliefs, attitudes, and practices. For instance, Sifakis' work (2007) focuses on a transformative perspective in teacher education in Greece and Turkey, whereby teachers familiarize themselves with ELF research before engaging in a journey that will critically review their beliefs about the English language and language teaching prior to attempting to teach in an ELF perspective and transform their educational practices. For him, "the value of an ELF-aware transformative perspective to ESOL teacher education lies in its power to help teachers define ELF for themselves and for their teaching contexts" (Sifakis 2014: 330).

Bayyurt and Sifakis (2015), still under a transformative perspective, and working mainly with in-service teachers, argue that a concern for teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards ELF and ELF-related issues is fundamental to any examination of the implications of ELF research. For them, up to the moment,

[...] a contrastive picture has emerged: on the one hand, there is willingness to find out more about ELF and non-native speakers' successful interaction strategies; on the other hand, there is confusion about what needs to be done to integrate the teaching of such strategies into established, EFL-bound practices. (Bayyurt and Sifakis 2015: 119)

ELF-research developments have shown that various aspects have been reported to influence teachers in their orientations to ELF, especially in their resistance or even insecurity to applying an ELF perspective in their classrooms. Some of these aspects are 1) conceptualisations of English as EFL, i.e. a foreign language; 2) attachment to ENL-based ELT materials; 3) conceptualisation of the role of the language teacher as custodian of "English norms" and standards; 4) influence of testing and international examination bodies requiring ENL standards; and 5) influence of their own institutional policies, among others.

When it comes to "conceptualisation of English as a *foreign* language rather than a *lingua franca*," in their study with pre-service MA teachers in Portugal, Azuaga and Cavalheiro (2015: 116) point out that, although it is fairly well-known that the "F" in

ELF is much more inclusive than in EFL, “teachers remain attached to old ideals and hierarchies, by establishing the native speaker (NS) as a model and symbol of perfection in language use.”

As for “attachment to ENL-based ELT materials,” this has become one of the most prominent aspects influencing teachers’ orientations and classroom practices concerns. Various studies (see Gray 2013; Matsuda 2012; Vettorel 2010; Lopriore & Vettorel 2015, Siqueira 2015, among others) have shown how ELT resources can be quite removed from real-life experiences and the local sociocultural practices where teachers and students operate. The reason resides in that materials generally oriented to a NS perspective are less concerned with the sociocultural and pragmatic practices in context, especially in the local contexts that are relevant for both teachers and learners. Recent work on ELT materials has been rather critical of this essentialist and ethnocentric approach, and the predominant highly normative approach to language knowledge that have long prevailed in ELT.

Concerning “the role of the language teacher as custodian of ‘English norms’ and standards,” and therefore the role of language ideologies in shaping orientations and attitudes, it is clear that ELF provokes serious destabilization in classroom practices that for years have been oriented towards the maintenance of a status quo of an instructor that, regardless of his/her origin and background, is to act as the gatekeeper of what is supposed to be “good and correct” English. However, this position has been seriously confronted lately “with the promotion of plurilithic (vs. monolithic) ELT practices, which are oriented by an Englishes- and an EIL/ELF-informed approach” (Lopriore & Vettorel 2015: 16). Among the practices suggested by the authors are: “encourage language use in authentic contexts, similar to the ones [they] are already engaged in, [...] whether face-to-face, or digitally-mediated; foster awareness, and provide a realistic representation, of the pluralities of English today, both in terms of varieties (WE) and of ELF users; provide attainable and realistic language models for learners as L2 users, etc.” (p. 17).

In terms of “testing and assessment”, research relating ELF to this area is still something of a novelty (Chopin 2015; Hall 2014; Harding and McNamara 2018). Once ELF use dramatically increases in practically all corners of the world, a strong need to assess performance and proficiency, thus reflecting the flexibility and fluidity of ELF communications, arises. In fact, “ELF research continues to question the viability of external, normally NS-oriented, norms as a reference for most international and local testing practices” (Cogo 2015: 9). Under a Critical Language Testing orientation, Shohamy (2018) argues that language tests in general do not reflect the most updated and current views of what it means to know a language in



plurilingual societies, which certainly includes ELF, translanguaging, bi/multilingualism, among other aspects. So, as disputed by Chopin (2015: 200), “language testing could and should change focus [...] towards other aspects of performance which may be more meaningful in terms of how people successfully communicate with each other.”

As for “institutional approach/policies”, Gimenez (2013) and Finardi (2014) go a step forward to suggest that the lack of responsibility of public education to form fluent speakers of English increases the social gap of those who can afford to study English in private institutes and those who cannot. In other words, because of such a reality, where EFL appears as the sole key to success, ELF seems to be side-lined among teachers, but instead, could be perceived as bridging the gap among the social classes, reinforcing, for example, the idea that English belongs to everyone, it is not only for the wealthy and educated, and that it should be seen as a democratic arena where equal opportunities are offered to anyone who decides to learn it (as the pre-service teachers seem to believe, see below).

Studies have shown a willingness on the part of teachers to incorporate ELF into their daily practices, but that there is still considerable work to be done if an ELF-aware perspective is to be embraced by significant groups of ELT practitioners. So, the aforementioned aspects are key topics that potentially affect attitudes towards ELF and are explored in the discussion with the Brazilian teachers in this study.

#### **4 Context and participants**

Foreign language teaching in Brazil presents certain peculiarities that, in many ways, can be extended to the whole country (cf. Finardi 2014). In private elite schools and language institutes, students expect correctness and good teaching. The discourses around English language education orient to the belief that if you want good English you have “to buy” it. Here there is more pressure from parents (paying the fees for their children), and the institutional affiliations (several private institutions are affiliated with British or American cultural/government/educational organisations). The language institute where we worked though is considered more relaxed in relation to English norms, compared to other English private schools and institutes.

In regular public schools, on the other hand, teaching is not considered good or prestigious, and there are different expectations from the students and teachers. This is also true for a significant part of private schools where ELT also plays an irrelevant role, forcing parents who can afford to register their children in English language schools or, more recently, opt for the equally costly complementary

“bilingual programs” in the opposite shift. In such contexts, for the low expectations concerning the acquisition of English and foreign languages in general, there is less institutional pressure to conform to the traditional language models (American/British English), although more and more elite private schools are offering EFL-based programs with similar orientations and expected goals of regular language institutes.

Despite this picture, especially in the public sector, most teacher courses have been going through curricular changes in order to prepare future teachers of English to challenge the negative results of English education in Brazil. This begins early, before they graduate from university programs, once their training and preparation for the future career is mandatorily to be conducted in local public schools, and it is the public sector in the basic education that will absorb most of these professionals. Only a minority goes to the private sector or to language institutes. In fact, English language centers in the country are notoriously known for not hiring locally certified English teachers although this practice has been slowly changing over the years.

Having said that, this work aims at exploring Brazilian teachers perceptions and attitudes towards ELF and the aspects that affect their attitudes. Concerning language attitudes, we have considered relevant to this paper the elaborations by Ishikawa and Panero (2016) who argue that these are observable in two different ways: as stable (but not enduring) and as variable. According to the authors, as for the first perspective, attitudes “can be identified with a reservoir of stable (but not enduring) evaluative dispositional concepts, directed to a linguistic phenomenon, and underlying observable responses which are constructed situationally” (p. 79). On the other hand, in its variable sense, attitudes can be defined as “variable and emergent forms of evaluative social practice around a language-related issue” (p. 76). In other words, they are “constantly under construction and negotiation through people’s interactions and therefore as variable and volatile, rather than static” (p. 76/87).

As for the development of the study, we devised three research questions to drive our investigation. They are:

1. What are teachers’ attitudes towards ELF?
2. What kind of aspects affect their attitudes?
3. What are the differences between pre- and in-service teachers’ attitudes?

In order to stimulate discussion on a topic that may not have been well known by the teachers, we decided to run focus groups, rather than individual interviews. We

ran two focus groups with pre-service and in-service teachers from Salvador, Brazil.<sup>2</sup> The pre-service teachers were all from a regular Foreign Language (English) course at a federal university, and at the moment of the research were teaching at the university's Language Extension Program, which offers low-cost courses to the general public. Seven student-teachers joined the focus group. They presented an average of two years teaching experience, very little formal training, and no experience abroad. Their average age, around 24-25, was also lower than the other group.

The in-service teachers, on the other hand, were all working at a prestigious private English language institute with students from the local upper middle and high classes. Their backgrounds were diverse, with an average of five years teaching experience, regular formal training, one was a foreigner, and most of them had experiences abroad, especially in English-speaking countries. Ten teachers joined this second focus group.

To stimulate discussion, we (the co-authors) were present as moderators of the debate, by introducing the project, handing out a few quotes and occasionally intervening with follow up or clarification questions. In general, our role was not very prominent in the discussion of the focus groups, which flowed rather well without our intervention. We used a selection of quotes from ELF writing that challenge some ELT myths/traditional views etc., and we asked the teachers to reflect over the quotes and then discuss their views in relation to the issues depicted (see Appendix).

One drawback of using quotes as stimulus for our focus groups is that the participants may be influenced by the quotes themselves in various ways, in terms of the concepts, which may be seen more or less relevant to discuss, and in terms of understanding of those concepts. This was confirmed by a few participants, who referred to specific terminology that was most probably taken from the quotes presented. However, the drawback of influencing participants with concepts and specific vocabulary was considered when planning the project, and we found that the problem was levelled out by the advantages of being able to use the quotes to remind participants about the concept (some of them were familiar with ELF, but

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<sup>2</sup> The rationale for choosing these two groups of teachers concerns their experience and exposure to conceptualisations related to global Englishes. We assumed that the pre-service teachers would not have heard much about EIL/ELF or global Englishes by the time of the focus groups, and that they may not have reflected on them for their future teaching practice. For the in-service teachers, we assumed they would have done some teaching and may have thought about these issues and encountered some answers in their teaching experience.

others were not), and introduce some of the key points that we wanted them to discuss.

In terms of analysis, the focus group data was analysed using an inductive process in two stages. In the first stage, the transcriptions were read through by the two researchers/co-authors and coded using descriptive coding. In the second stage, the descriptive codes were exchanged and discussed in relation to accuracy and relevance. During this process, prominent themes were identified and refined to reflect the collaborative, analytic process.

## **5 Exploring the voices of Brazilian teachers: data analysis**

In this section, we analyse the data collected from the two focus groups separately before relating the findings to each other and discussing the implications of the study.

### **5.1 Pre-service teachers (1<sup>st</sup> focus group)**

The pre-service teachers discussed (in English) the topics following more or less the order of the quotes, but in this section, we provide a thematic analysis of their comments in relation to the main themes that seemed to emerge from their discussion. The analysis below, therefore, concentrates on the 'products' of focus group co-construction rather than the 'process' of negotiation of ideas, and although there were moments of disagreement among the participants, which might have been interesting to explore, we felt these were not relevant to the research questions of this paper to be reported here.

One of the main aspects the teachers addressed concerned their views on *the nature of ELF*. For these young teachers,

(T1): ELF is free, you cannot put it in a leash;

(T2): It's dynamic, it's open;

(T3): [...] people want to put the language in a box.

Teachers in this group show to be interested in the open aspect of ELF and its dynamic and changing nature. They oppose this to the traditional understanding of language as contained and bounded, as if in a "box". By contrast, therefore, ELF seems to be associated with something that is free from the box, that is without

boundaries and fluid. Curiously enough, they do not comment on the implications of this dynamic nature of language for their teaching.

A second topic that emerged was *ELF linked with real life, not the classroom*, as we can see from a few of the lines which follow:

(T4): I had the opportunity to work in FIFA World Cup,<sup>3</sup> and I saw this reality. Every day, we had Japanese people, Brazilian people, Chinese people, German people, Dutch people, and everybody was speaking not our language, but one world English. This is the foreign reality. We have another language, another way to understand [it]... we have different cultural backgrounds... [English] approximates people from different cultures;

(T5): I have been thinking about creating something for Brazilians to learn English and produce the language.

The participants link ELF with events in their life, like the 2014 World Cup, and their experience of ELF in those contexts. The "reality" of ELF is repeatedly emphasized and the cultural aspect is linked with it. ELF is therefore understood as language used and constructed from "different cultural backgrounds", from "Japanese, Brazilian, Chinese, German, Dutch," and as everybody's language.

The remarks above are extremely relevant for the local context itself, especially because, prompted by the concept of ELF, participants highlight the importance of using the language in real life:

(T4): English is now, is here, is outside, is on the bus, is in the theater if you have the opportunity to go there, you know.

(T5): People with different linguacultural backgrounds sharing English.

Despite the reasonable number of foreign visitors to Salvador annually<sup>4</sup>, an international event such as the 2014 World Cup, in their view, appeared as a

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<sup>3</sup> Along with several other capitals, Salvador was one of host cities of the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

<sup>4</sup> Salvador is Brazil's 4th largest city and it bears a very strong African heritage. Although many African languages came to circulate in the area due to the masses of slaved people trafficked by the Portuguese to work in the local sugarcane plantations and other subjugated activities, none of these languages 'survived' to be fully spoken by the following generations. The same happened with several indigenous languages, making the capital of Bahia, in a broad sense, paradoxically, an international city whose population largely comprises monolingual Brazilian Portuguese (BP) speakers.

remarkable opportunity to experience ELF interactions in a more constant and visible way, beyond the limited touristic sites, and, of course, outside the classroom.

Another topic we could singularize touches the idea of ELF being linked to *pronunciation as a way to contradict traditional ELT's native model orientation*. According to them,

(T2): It's better to talk... with this difficulty... this English with an accent;

(T4): I tell my students everybody has [an] accent; native speakers too;

(T4): [...] talking with someone from Japan... phonetic differences, another English.

Within this topic, it is interesting to register the little anecdotal situation narrated by one of the participants:

(T5): I played an audio with author Chimamanda Adichie<sup>5</sup>, and then students felt frustrated they couldn't answer the [follow up] questions. They said, "But, teacher, what kind of English is she speaking? Broken English?" I replied, "It is not broken English! For Heaven's sake, don't say it!" And then I had to go to the board, to explain something, to tell that she's from Nigeria, that she speaks this kind of English, and then about colonialism, many, many things to go to the point.

Pronunciation, as for several of the remarks, is the linguistic level of analysis that participants reflected upon as the most obviously associated with ELF, and in their view, the issue of accents and what accents are considered legitimate or illegitimate is a topic worth exploring in the classroom with their students.

For these respondents, ELF was also related to *simplification and lack of idiomaticity*, which, according to them, lends ELF a "more democratic" character:

(T4): While we were talking, we didn't use a lot of "slangs", or tried to teach some expressions, not "to over" them, to make it simple";

(T1): Every person from every part contributes to enriching it.

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<sup>5</sup> World acclaimed Nigerian writer of novels, short stories, and non-fiction.

The student-teachers referred to simplification in relation to language teaching, as a strategy not to “overload” students/not to use “slangs”, while at the same time mentioning co-construction of language and therefore making it more complex or less simple to conceptualize. They referred to co-construction as an aspect that speakers make use of in order to contribute to and enrich ELF, but this, to a certain extent, seemed to contradict their previous consideration of ELF as being simplified for the classroom. When it came to discussing co-construction in ELF, they also showed a vague idea of what that would comprise. It seemed to be a new element for them, so the comments were rather wide, depicting little familiarity with such a concept:

(T1): There is the language co-constructed and there is the language everyone speaks;

(T2): [...] maybe [students] are not going to agree with this idea of co-construction and dynamics;

(T3): We have the resource, and then it’s constructed together;

Co-construction is both mentioned in the quotes and by the participants in their discussion, but it is clear that the full meaning of this concept is not understood by everybody. T2, for example, raises the point of a possible struggle with this idea in the classroom but the issue is not picked up and further explored.

*Criticizing traditional ELT methodology* is another issue that came up as a strong aspect to be reviewed in relation to ELF. According to participants:

(T1): It is not only learning the language, but everything that is involved; I think the teaching has to consider this a lot... otherwise, it will be only a meaningless session classroom;

(T3): teach the idea of adaptation... to make things easier, to make a conversation more natural; I tell my students that when the matter is language, you cannot make generalizations because it’s dynamic;

(T4): I need to adapt my speech and teach according to reality.

As we can see, the participants question the relation between ELF and language teaching methodologies, and draw the attention to raising awareness of the dynamic nature of language and its “adaptation”. They also question ELT methodology in

relation to the overall focus on grammar teaching, which is typical of some of the classes they experienced:

(T2): What is grammar, what is the point of the class? Students don't see it as ELF. You know, people don't have this sense of... you... you're ELF students, this lingua franca... in the class is really difficult to do this... although we're kind of actors in the classroom; it's still kind of difficult... to tackle ELF in my classes;

(T5): They have a resistance; most of them are interested in speaking like a NS, [they're] interested in the code, knowing the language in that box.

Another interesting topic that they identified ELF with was the idea of *Breaking with prejudice*. For them,

(T1): ELF is not English in itself, it's co-construction... it's another language, we conveniently call it English because there is a source, but it's more than that; [...] taking the real world freely; this has to be a plus in our lesson plans;

(T2): [...] it's not mine, not yours, it's ours; I have the language to communicate;

(T5) [...] because I use the language my way, it's my language, it's mine; if native speakers do not adapt their discourse, they are going to be on an island like [the TV series] "Lost."

(T5): There is a sort of transformation, transforming, modeling the language; broken English? No! It's the job of the teacher to break this prejudice"; so, it's not just like bringing British, American, we have to help them communicate.

From the responses given by this less experienced group of teachers, there seems to emerge a sort of "critical" vision of teaching, being the role of the teacher that of the catalyst for questioning prejudice and breaking with them, where "prejudice", for them, would encompass the traditional ELT positions and methodologies in relation to the role of English and the role of linguistic aspects, such as grammar, pronunciation, etc., in the classroom. Teachers here tend to move towards a position that goes beyond linguistic features per se and the ideological load behind them, fostering a dialogue between ELF and critical pedagogy. According to Crookes (2013: 8), "second language professionals within the project of critical pedagogy



focus on language and culture – matters which, to a large extent, make human beings what they are.” Intuitively, we would say that, as these teachers show this critical awareness in such a context of reflection, it does serve the role of empowering them to at least question deep-rooted ELT practices that have been proven obsolete in favor of alternative practices which would seriously consider the characteristics of ELF interactions in today’s world.

This links with the last (but not least) topic that emerged from the debate, which saw *ELF as emancipation*. We noticed that these participants tried to attribute a strong and positive weight to this topic, especially in the following comments, but overall throughout the focus group:

(T3): [...] they [students] should be confident to go outside, face the problems, face the different situations, to get students to make use of what they know, to move to get them out of this comfort zone, to try new things, and take the risk;

(T5): Emancipation because if I take the language... I’m the speaker... that language belongs to me, I have my own way of speaking that language in the sense of emancipating myself; it emancipates the students, and somehow the language, and empowers [them].

As we can see, the pre-service teachers saw ELF as providing them and their students with confidence and security, because in their view they can draw from what they know and try new things with what they have learnt. In other words, ELF would empower them towards defying crystalized ELT practices, holding on to a perspective that does not take for granted the status quo, but subjects it to critique and creates alternative forms of practice (Crookes 2013). The participants would clearly associate ELF with their “own language” in ways that it “emancipates” them as teachers and students. Although this is a “green” group concerning knowledge and understanding of ELF as a concept and the research done in this area, they use their comprehension to defy a lot of the main tenets of the ELT tradition, showing an initial awareness of ELF and its implications. As one respondent of this group states, “I think students still want a standard in English. (...) I share with them: ‘Guys, American or England people, they have [an] accent; you’re all formed to speak what you want to speak’” (T4), revealing to us that ELF-aware classes are not a common reality.

This group of teachers reflected on many important aspects of ELF, such as pronunciation, grammar, simplification and co-construction, but they also linked ELF

with something powerful that conceptualizes language outside the box as something emancipatory, against prejudice and critical at the same time.

We now move on to the second group of teachers, that is, in-service educators from a prestigious local English institute.

## **5.2 In-service teachers (2nd focus group)**

As with pre-service teachers, the focus group with in-service teachers also seemed to be concerned mainly with *ELF accents*. When they talk about ELF, the emphasis is basically on *pronunciation*, as if ELF is mainly about pronunciation and accent. In the extract below, T1 explains what she would do in the classroom in relation to diversity:

(T1): I have lesson activities for my class, and there is... speaker number one is from Saudi Arabia, for example, so then I asked them can you recognize the accent? I do it for them so that they have this idea of interculturality and different accents to make my class less American or British oriented.

Acceptance of diversity is mainly related to acceptance of diversity of accents and the need to shift the attention to different kinds of accents:

(T4): So we talk about Indian accent and other people... it's about time we stop channelling English to a specific group of people, from the grassroots to any levels we should start doing that.

This mention of the 'grassroots' is interesting because, for this group, ELF is perceived as the language of the disadvantaged/unprivileged, while the native-speaker varieties of English are associated with the higher levels of society, the ones who can afford private education. Although imprinting a positive connotation to "grassroots" English here, it seems that the participants do not feel confident enough to fully explore such features in class as to challenge the dominant NS model. However, associating ELF with "grassroots" under an emancipatory orientation signals pedagogical and ideological moves against the idea that such perspectives are inherently incompatible within ELT practices.

Discussions have also rotated around the idea of power and empowerment:

(T1): With ELF there is this awareness that you need [it] for more than commercial purposes;

(T2): It's different, powerful, and there is room for variation.

For them, ELF is not seen as limited to English for "commercial purposes," or the English used for individual or business advantages, but it is seen as something "powerful". The "commercial" aspect of English is here mentioned in relation to the widespread discourses of English being the language of business or career competitiveness, but the participants associate it instead with "power". From reflections on ELF and empowerment, the discussion continues in a different direction but returns to this and emancipation at various points of the debate.

ELF also relates to "new vocabulary" which is mentioned at the beginning of the focus group. But the issue of what kind of vocabulary, how it is constructed or other related aspects are not picked up again. The grammar theme is brought up by participants more than once and the general association of grammar is with rigidity, prescriptive attitudes and teaching methodology (especially in relation to grammar translation):

(T7): How much has been said about grammar? Do we have an ELF grammar? When you come to class and talk about different Englishes we rarely mention grammar... we talk about pronunciation, accents, etc.;

(T5): Grammar seems to be a bit more rigid... I mean, if we consider accents, pronunciation, etc., we have more things, but grammar is more rigid in my opinion, but which grammar? Let me tell you why I am asking about it... because when the focus is on communication, we don't give much attention to grammar... so, through intercultural studies, strategies training in the classroom, we see that we can become more tolerant to other mistakes, including grammar, pronunciation structure... so, is it irrelevant? The focus is on communication.

Here too, the mention of grammar is not made relevant to ELF and the role of ELF research for grammar teaching is questioned. These teachers' understanding of ELF is directly influenced by their knowledge and understanding of an aspect of teaching, i.e. grammar, that has always had prominence in their teaching and learning trajectory. Grammar is seen as 'rigid', therefore something that is not easily compatible with an ELF approach. The teachers' discourses of rigidity and lack of variability in grammar are not challenged by the group, who instead point out that

ELF is not about grammar but about 'communication', that is, about content rather than form. For them, ELF focuses on getting the message across and consists mainly of sensitivity to English accent diversity rather than covering all aspects and levels of English diversity.

However, their awareness of ideological discourses concerning the role of English in the world is particularly developed, especially in relation to their comments around "an international language" and raising issues with the association of the term "international" with American or British English, as the sole representation of an international understanding of English. The related ideology of the native speaker is also questioned, especially regarding the unstated requirements of the institution: these teachers find themselves struggling with their students' parents or adult learners in their classes who traditionally orient towards a native-speaker ideal for learning and teaching:

(T2): I have a student, an adult, he talks to me because I was his teacher at that time and he said he was really angry because he was in an American school, and he had teachers from different origins, from different Englishes, and he complained about it and he complained... and he was really angry with that situation... and I talked to him and I tried to open his mind.

(T6): I think we teachers need to have an open mind with regard to the concept of lingua franca. However, I disagree with the adult because I think... my students... when they ask me "teacher, what do you speak, American or British English?" I say, "Brazilian English," and they look at me very shocked... but when I explain to them that concept I am not American, but I have studied English for a long time and I can speak English very well and this is my goal with you that you're able to communicate and people understand you... I try to open their minds a little bit because I think there is such prejudice related to accents and related to non-native speakers speaking English that we need to deconstruct this even among the teenagers because they are expecting this.

As pre-service teachers also commented on the link between adopting an ELF perspective and fighting "against prejudice", similarly T6 here views the role of the language teacher as somebody who needs to "have an open mind" in relation to ELF accents and native-speaker idealisation. ELF also tends to be associated with flexibility and having "an open mind" in at least two ways: 1) in terms of teachers' backgrounds: acceptance of teachers from non-native backgrounds; 2) in terms of cultural aspects: acceptance of different cultural backgrounds, not only British or American:

(T6): It relates to culture and the idealization of a culture, and also making our culture inferior. And it relates, I think, that what we have to do in class, trying to think as lingua franca as cultural English... to bring more culture not only American culture or British culture in the class to open students' minds.

As we can see, the in-service teachers were keen to discuss possible solutions to overcome the tendency to teach towards a NS model. They also referred to "compensatory strategies", in terms of accommodation or adaptation strategies:

(T6): In this concept of lingua franca, it's very important that we work with compensatory strategies [...] exposure to different Englishes is vital, but we can't expose them to all Englishes because there's so many... so, compensatory strategies is a crucial point, right? ... to make meaning achieved.

From such a discussion, they seem to ask for help from experts in identifying strategies that they can teach in the classroom. Another possible solution they offered was to explore the diversity of their students' knowledge and perspectives:

(T7): As a teacher, I think we have an advantage in class when we have the opportunity to share with the students the variation we have IN the classroom.

Exploiting the potential in the classroom by building on students' variation and cultural backgrounds was a theme that seemed to dominate at one point of the focus group.

A final solution referred to the importance of the materials used in their teaching. In this group, teachers offered examples of how to deal with ELF in the classroom, especially when it comes to approaching materials:

(T6): I think it's a big challenge for us teachers because the material that you work with ... even though there has been some thought in English as a Lingua Franca, it's still limited;  
[...]

(T6): But if you think about EFL materials, the biggest publishers are still American or English... so I think it has a lot to do with business. The idea of English as a lingua franca is not very interesting for publishing business.

So, for the more experienced teachers, ELF pronunciation and grammar were also important areas and their conceptualisation of language was linked to grassroots,

international and open-minded aspects. Not surprisingly, they also linked ELF with strategies and material, which are possibly everyday concerns of experienced teachers.

## **6 Discussion**

In relation to our initial research questions, it is clear that (RQ1) both groups showed rather positive attitudes towards ELF, but teachers' attitudes seemed more guarded in relation to its implications for language teaching (especially for the second group). This first finding already shows a contrast to previous research in this area (cf. Jenkins 2007; Ishikawa and Panero 2016), which indicated strong reservations on the side of teachers towards ELF.

Concerning our question about what influences Brazilian teachers' perceptions (RQ2), it has now become clear that pre-service and in-service teachers share a lot of the questions, insecurity and confusion about ELF, but they also orient to it and understand it in different ways. Their personal and shared experiences of language teaching and learning through formal and informal education have imprinted strong views in relation to English, ELF and English diversity, and how it can be included in the classroom. Their positions are coloured by their understanding of theories of language learning and teaching, by their successes and failures as language learners and teachers. By analysing participants' insights, we do get some hints in the directions that their previous learning experience influences their attitudes, but more research on this particular issue is needed.

In the process of analysing the responses given by both groups, we identified interesting similarities and differences (RQ3). Regarding the former, we noticed that there has been a general tendency of associating ELF with de-centering the normative orientations that have guided ELT around the world. Both groups can (and in fact do) tell anecdotes about students wanting NS teachers. In the in-service group, however, teachers talk about feeling the pressure of the parents and some adult students who expect a NS teacher or NS orientations in language teaching. Both groups also show developing knowledge of ELF from a conceptual perspective, reflecting on the co-construction and diversity of pronunciation and grammar, while at the same time trying to envisage its potential implications and applications in terms of an ELF-oriented pedagogy. Their knowledge of ELF is mainly related to accents, grammar, and, to a certain extent, communication strategies, and their understanding of the concept and its relation to teaching is basically limited to these areas. For the in-service teachers especially, ELF does not include grammar and it is clear how their understanding of grammar, as fixed and not subject to variation,

influences the way they conceptualise ELF for the classroom. What strongly emerges from the data is a similar perception of ELF as 'emancipation', 'open-mindedness' and 'grassroots' – a way of liberating the teachers from the straightjacket of traditional ELT and approximating them to a more critical professional practice which values basic ideals such as equality, democracy, freedom, and solidarity (Crookes, 2013).

When it comes to differences, the focus group of in-service teachers draws on their experience as practitioners much more than the other group, as they provide examples of what they do in the classroom and the potential challenges they face. The pre-service teachers, instead, mention some ELF-related concepts (such as the dynamic nature and co-construction) as potential issues for the classroom but more in abstract terms. In relation to that, the in-service teachers are the ones who suffer more clearly from the institutional pressure of dealing with the students, the parents and their colleagues' views of teaching and ideologies of correctness and monolingual bias in language teaching. This pressure has, most probably, also influenced the way they formulated their comments during the focus group: teachers in private institutions are supposed to conform to more traditional models and practices and the participants' comments in this respect were typically representing some of these pressures.

## **7 Conclusions and implications**

Findings from this study reinforce the premise that ELF research and its implications for ELT should be integrated into these teachers' initial education as part of their integral preparation to become ELT professionals in the current global scenario. However, it is also clear that these two groups have slightly different needs and "gaps" in relation to this area. ELF research should therefore be introduced to pre-/in-service teachers in different ways:

- Pre-service teachers need help with understanding ELF and experiencing ELF in different communication/contexts;
- In-service teachers need help in dealing with ELF/diversity in the classroom: not only in terms of material and activities, but also in terms of addressing their students /parents reservations about ELF.

From this project, we also identify two possible directions for further research. The first concerns the need to dedicate more attention to teachers' prior experiences of teaching and learning. Applying ELF theories into practice is only one of the aspects to consider when trying to bridge the gap between research and practitioners' spaces. Another important consideration is the experiences of the teachers and how

they impinge, facilitate or obstruct understanding of ELF and its implications. In other words, the teacher and their experience should be a key aspect to consider in the attempt to explore relevance of ELF research for the classroom. This would be a more bottom-up and situated teacher-education, which is built around the individual teachers and their contexts of learning and teaching.

The second direction concerns the need for more Action-research or Teacher-research (Sifakis & Bayyurt 2018). In order to encourage pre-service and in-service teachers to address and explore ELF for the classroom, more collaborative teacher-research could be carried out in the teachers' environments, so that the ELF research can become more relevant for the specific realities they work in and the practices they are required and used to carry out. In other words, teachers are to be stimulated to engage in Action-research that is relevant to the local context, responding effectively to local needs, and that could contribute to a re-alignment between teacher education and practice. By attending to such demands and needs, the access to ELF research findings and developments by regular teachers is to be taken as a unique opportunity to indeed bring meaningful changes to ELT classrooms around the world, naturally respecting each place's particularities.

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## Appendix

### Quotes for the focus groups

#### Quote 1:

"English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) research focuses on the use of English in intercultural situations where speakers with different linguacultural backgrounds share English as their common means of communication and as a dynamic and co-constructed linguistic resource."

✓From the ELF research network website <http://english-lingua-franca.org/>

#### Quote 2:

"[...] a lingua franca is a language of convenience. When it ceases to be convenient – however spread it has been – it will be dropped, without ceremony and with little emotion." (pp. xv)

✓Ostler, Nicholas. (2010) *The last lingua franca – English until the return of Babel*. New York: Walker & Company.

#### Quote 3:

"What is new about ELF, however, is the extent of its reach. As House (2003: 557) notes, the original term 'lingua franca' (which, itself comes from the Arabic 'lisan-al-farang) simply referred to "an intermediary language used by speakers of Arabic with travellers from Western Europe" (see also Kachru 1996). This early meaning, House continues, "was later extended to describe a language of commerce, *a rather stable variety with little room for individual variation*" (ibid.; my italics). This kind of lingua franca is thus of a very different order from ELF, whose speakers in any given interaction are drawn from a vast potential first language pool that encompasses the whole of the Expanding Circle, while not excluding members of the Inner and Outer Circles (Kachru 1996), and who therefore have to be ready at any time to adapt their speech accordingly." (pp.22-23)

✓Jenkins, Jennifer (2014) *English as a lingua franca in the international university: The politics of Academic English Language Policy*. London/New York: Routledge.

#### Quote 4:

"ELF users too are seen to be languagers. They exploit the potential of the language, they are fully involved in the interactions, whether for work or for play. They are focused on the interactional and transactional purposes of the talk and on their interlocutors as people rather than on the linguistic code itself. We can observe ELF users absorbed in the ad hoc, situated negotiation of meaning – an entirely pragmatic undertaking in that the focus is on establishing the indexical link between the code and the context, and a creative process in that the code is treated as malleable and adjustable to the requirements of the moment." (pp. 98)

✓Seidlhofer, Barbara. (2011) *Understanding English as a lingua franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Quote 5:**

“What are the practical consequences to the language professions of the better understanding of ELF yielded by its descriptive and theoretical explorations? A telling example of the situations that ordinary English users find themselves in comes from a Finnish IT expert whose company had merged with an Indian IT company a couple of years earlier. The Finnish representative was interviewed in the leading Finnish daily newspaper, and on the whole he was very happy with how the merger had turned out. As regards language, he made the following comment (my translation):

We had a bit of a problem when they'd call us and we didn't always understand what they said in their Indian accent. We would rather have used email. But that was not working out, because speaking is so important to them.

(Helsingin Sanomat 20.6.2010)

This is the kind of difficulty many language users report: it is not using English in itself that is the problem, it is the discrepancy between what many foreign-language learners have learned to expect on the basis of their educational experience and the kind of English they encounter in the real world. Clearly school and university had not prepared the speaker's company for intercultural communication that goes beyond non-natives communicating with members of the 'target culture', which for English mostly means British and American cultures.” (pp. 234)

✓Mauranen, Anna. 2012. *Exploring ELF. Academic English shaped by non-native speakers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Quote 6:**

Traditionally, English as a subject is designed from a teaching rather than a learning perspective on the unquestioned assumption that the purpose of pedagogy is to direct learners towards native-speaker competence. From this perspective learner achievement is measured only as degrees of success in approximating to this goal. The question is how far this remains a generally valid way of thinking. Is it not worth considering an alternative principle of approach which, as I have argued, can be drawn from an understanding of ELF? This would be to focus attention not on the language as product, on how much English learner manage to accumulate, but on the process of 'languaging', on how learners make use of what they know of the language.” (Seidlhofer 2011: 202)

✓Seidlhofer, Barbara. (2011) *Understanding English as a lingua franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### **Author Biodata:**

Alessia COGO is a Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at Goldsmiths, University of London, UK, where she is also director of the MA in Multilingualism, Linguistics and Education. She has carried out research in various aspects of English as a Lingua Franca, and is currently involved in a number of research projects concerning ELF and critical pedagogy, ELF and English-medium instruction and ELF in asylum seeking contexts. She supervises PhD students in the area of ELF pragmatics, multilingual and intercultural aspects. She is Editor-in-Chief of the ELTJ Journal (Oxford University Press). Email: [a.cogo@gold.ac.uk](mailto:a.cogo@gold.ac.uk)

Sávio SIQUEIRA holds a PhD in Letters and Linguistics from Bahia Federal University (UFBA), Salvador, Brazil. He is an Associate Professor of English and Applied Linguistics at UFBA's Department of Germanic Languages and the Post-Graduate Program in Language and Culture. Dr. Siqueira has conducted post-doctorate studies on critical language pedagogy at the University of Hawai'i Manoa, Honolulu, HI, USA, and has been collaborating in the MA in Multilingualism, Linguistics and Education at Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. Among his research interests are English as a Lingua Franca, Intercultural Education, ELT materials, Globalization Studies, the sociolinguistics of English, and Critical Pedagogy. Email: [savio\\_siqueira@hotmail.com](mailto:savio_siqueira@hotmail.com).