



Undergraduate Dissertation

Trabajo Fin de Grado

The controversy over the LFC: An analysis of the implications and viability of ELF ideology and the LFC.

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Abstract

This dissertation questions the ideology of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and the possible implementation of the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) in our context. The purpose of this analysis is to assess the validity and usefulness of these ideas in order to elucidate whether their proposals are appropriate to the needs of students of English as a Second Language. The methodology of this research is divided into two main parts. First, theoretical work examining the implications of LFC for researchers, teachers of English and, in particular, for students. Second, an attitude study and a perception study carried out among a group of Spanish university students. The results obtained showed a certain prevalence of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) ideology among students. However, their attitudes, frequency of exposure, and aspirations were determining factors which showed that actually, they have a greater preference for standard models of pronunciation. Therefore, the LFC seems to be still neither a viable option nor an adequate substitute within the English language teaching paradigm.

Resumen

Esta disertación cuestiona la ideología del inglés como lengua franca (*English as a Lingua Franca*, ELF) y la posible implementación del *Lingua Franca Core* (LFC) en nuestro contexto. El propósito de este análisis es evaluar la validez y la utilidad de estas ideas con el objetivo de dilucidar si sus propuestas se ajustan a las necesidades de los estudiantes del inglés como segunda lengua. La metodología de esta investigación se divide en dos partes principales. Primero, un trabajo teórico en el que se examinan las implicaciones del LFC para los investigadores, los profesores de inglés, y especialmente, los estudiantes. Y segundo, un estudio de actitudes y un estudio de percepción llevado a cabo en un grupo de estudiantes universitarios españoles. Los resultados obtenidos mostraron cierta prevalencia de la ideología del inglés

como lengua franca (ELF) entre los estudiantes. Sin embargo, sus actitudes, la frecuencia de exposición, y sus aspiraciones, fueron factores que determinantes que mostraron que tienen una mayor preferencia por los modelos estándares de pronunciación. Por lo tanto, el LFC no es todavía ni una opción viable ni un sustituto adecuado dentro del paradigma de la enseñanza del inglés.

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Introduction

This dissertation focuses on the current status of English and the ideology of English as Lingua Franca (ELF) in order to evaluate the actual viability of its proposals regarding pronunciation teaching and learning by means of an analysis of the implications of the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) in the literature and through a study of attitudes, and a study of perception about different varieties of English.

As Akkadian or Aramaic were in Mesopotamia, and koine Greek and Latin among the peoples of the Mediterranean; as it was French in Europe, as it is Arab among Arabs, or Mandarin Chinese in Far East Asia; such is English for the world today. Currently, there is a global mutual agreement about English as the dominant language of the world. It has been little more than three centuries since John Dryden wrote “we have yet no English *prosodia*, not so much as a tolerable dictionary, or grammar, so that our language is in a manner barbarous”. The outcomes of the tremendous development of English are a tangible reality in the society of the 21st century, and there has been no such “declination of the language” yet. English has reached its current status due to several reasons. According to Braj B. Kachru, “British colonialism was the main reason for English to upgrade and spread socially and culturally all over the world.” (Cited in Fernandez, 2016: 6-7). The linguist David Crystal (2003) adds that the determinant factor for English to become the global language is the economic and cultural influence of the USA in the 20th century. Therefore, the British colonial enterprise, as well as North-American neo-colonialism, are both responsible for the current status of English. It is not only that English is somehow present in every corner of the planet, but the fact that it is perceived by people all around the globe, as one of the most essential tools in our globalized society.

In this context, learning English is an essential requirement to communicate with the rest of the world, and successful communication entails being able to understand and be understood by other speakers, an idea related to the concept of intelligibility. The Cambridge Dictionary defines intelligibility

as the “quality of being possible to understand”, either of speech or writing. For the purposes of this paper, there will be a focus on the phonetic perspective of this concept. Munro & Derwing (1995) explain this concept in relation to comprehensibility and accentedness. These terms are concerned with listeners’ perceptions, while intelligibility is rather concerned with “listeners’ actual understanding” and “the degree of difficulty encountered when trying to understand an utterance”, speech can be more intelligible or less intelligible. Thus, intelligibility is a quality of speech that, according to some experts, can be measured. There is a connection between the concept of Intelligibility and the phenomenon of ELF. Based on the fact that English is the global language, Jennifer Jenkins (2012) says that “English has served as a means of communication among speakers of different first languages (i.e., a lingua Franca)”. Another issue is the fact that Non-native speakers of English outnumber the Native speakers of English. According to ELF researchers, this fact implies that English Language Teaching should be aimed at achieving effective communication, that is intelligibility. Thus, we can distinguish ELF from EFL (English as a Foreign language), which establishes that Native competence is more of an appropriate target for English Language Teaching than intelligibility. According to ELF researchers, the replacement of English Language Teaching paradigm is an urgent demand in situations of intercultural communication. These ideas led to the creation of the LFC (Lingua Franca Core).

The aim of this study is to promote improved and achievable practices for the teaching and the communication in English as a Second Language. For this reason, there is a focus on the global character of English and the outcomes of its development as a lingua franca. From this starting point, there will be an emphasis of the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) ideology and the development of the Lingua Franca Core as an alternative model for the teaching of English pronunciation. In order to assess the ideas behind this new paradigm, there will be an analysis on from the point of the expert community, the implications for teachers of English, and an analysis of LFC’s goals and its repercussions on students who decide to learn such variety. In addition, this, there are two complementary field studies; a study of attitudes, that

provides an overview on the opinion of students about their use of English and its different varieties, and a study of perception, that evaluates students' actual comprehension of native and non-native accents of English. The results will lead us to particular conclusions that will clarify the controversy over the LFC, and will support plausible and more feasible projects that enhance communication in English in lingua franca contexts.

Literature review

The *Lingua Franca Core* has been extensively studied in recent years. The growing interest in the subject has generated many reactions, either in favour or against. Sobkowiak (2003) takes a well-defined position against "LFC-like syllabuses" and elaborates a series of arguments from different perspectives such as philosophical, logical, ideological, sociolinguistic, pedagogical, and psychological. For instance, in the *philosophical arguments* section it is stated that "axiology does not follow from ontology". In this sense, it seems that factual evidence is not enough to make statements of absolute value. Thus, according to Sobkowiak, ELF researchers must prove that "it is preferable to maximize understanding", referring to ELF preference for intelligibility (or understanding). The rest of the considerations provided in Sobkowiak's work follow a logic of their own and deserve a deeper examination, but are not the scope of this composition. From a Marxist perspective, O'Reagan (2014) attacks ELF ideology on the basis that it promotes "the class stratification of English" in our globalized society. This idea encouraged the interest of other authors in the subject. Schmitz (2017), for instance, focuses on the analysis made by O'Reagan and criticises his monolithic view of Marxism, neoliberalism, and Globalization as well as his biased insight of capitalism. However, Schmitz confirms O'Reagan's thesis that ELF researchers fail in understanding the actual consequences of ELF for English language pedagogy.

Other researches have led to divergent conclusions, and differ from this view of the LFC as disruptive for the teaching of English as a Second Language. Many authors adjust to this ideology of intelligibility as the correct aim for the teaching of English pronunciation. For example, Zoghbor (2010) states that ELF “was criticized on a theoretical more than an empirical basis”. Her study, “The Effectiveness of the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) in Improving the Perceived Intelligibility and Perceived Comprehensibility of Arab Learners at Post-Secondary Level” concluded that NNS are more intelligible to other NNS than the NS. This is an important argument within ELF investigations. Together with other studies, it is promoting intelligibility among English speakers as an improvement in comparison to the NS models of pronunciation. The most relevant argument, however, is based on the idea that NNS accents are as valid as NS accents. This is due to the fact that English is a global language, which implies that there should be modifications for the benefit of *all* speakers of English. This was one of the main reasons for the development of the LFC by Jennifer Jenkins back in 2000. In short, the LFC establishes the supremacy of certain features (either segmental or suprasegmental) depending on whether they maintain or damage intelligibility. In addition, Jenkins (2005) addressed the fact that the replacement of native models is legitimate since currently the majority of English speakers are NNS, and the majority of communication does not involve NS.

The diversity of English is especially relevant in the concept of ELF, where English is a medium of communication among non-native speakers, who become agents of language innovation. Nowadays, the majority of English speakers are Non-native speakers of English (NNS). They have learned a new language’s skills at different levels, and most of them will use it only with other NNS. This is the focus of ELF, English communication among NNS, as distinguished from EFL (English as a Foreign Language), that is, communication among Native and non-native speakers. Within this context, where no one is a Native speaker of English, it seems that it is preferred to be intelligible rather than sound like a NS. In view of this fact, Jennifer Jenkins conducted research where the Lingua Franca Core (LFC from now on) can be found.

The LFC is a “set of pronunciation features deemed crucial for speech intelligibility within ELF contexts” (Harding & McNamara, 2018). For a better understanding, there can be observed ten main targets within the pronunciation syllabus of the LFC (Jenkins, 2005). First, the consonant inventory includes all sounds except the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, a preference for the GA rhotic /r/, and RP’s intervocalic and [t]. Secondly, there are phonetics requirements such as the aspiration of /p, t, k/ in the initial position in stressed syllables, and an appropriate vowel length before fortis and lenis consonants. Word initial and word medial consonant clusters are also essential to maintain intelligibility, but not in the final position. Regarding vowel quantity, there should be a clear long-short contrast, and regarding quality, it is highlighted the quality of /ɜ:/, and the acceptance of L2 regional qualities. The use of weak forms, word stress, stress-timed rhythm, and the features of connected speech seem to hinder or be rather unnecessary to intelligibility. Lastly, Nuclear (tonic) stress is found to be critical in order to be intelligible. This set of features is known as the core features and makes up the LFC (Patsko & Simpson, 2019).

ELF entails modifications in other aspects of language distinct from the phonetic perspective described above. In these terms, a discussion on the implications of ELF has to be introduced to elucidate whether or not ELF is such a valid requirement so as to reformulate the paradigm of English teaching. An appropriate analysis of the ELF, and in concrete the LFC, should be inclusive in a practical way, considering the implications of those who are ultimately affected by these changes: the expert community and researchers, the teachers, and especially, the students of English.

Analysis

Implications for the expert community

Regarding the expert community, ELF has been defended and refuted extensively. There are several points of discussion within the ELF, but the main question stems from the actual efficacy of the

LFC, does it work? Language descriptions of ELF have concentrated on the levels of phonology and pragmatics, in fact, researchers recognize that it is the pronunciation that causes more problems with intelligibility (Seidlhofer, 2004). Thus, Jenkins's LFC collected the essential features for intelligible communication. As a consequence, experts on the subject have responded in various ways to a completely new paradigm for English as Second Language (ESL) teaching. Jenkins's Conclusions have been refuted on the basis that the LFC is rather insufficient. For instance, Trudgill (2005) claims that the LFC is "overwhelmed with vagueness and lacks detail concerning the number of segments and phonetic information of the vowel system". However, pronunciation is not the only field of research. Regarding pragmatics, it seems that native norms do not hinder intelligibility, and ELF speakers are often involved in situations of cooperative communication. This view is supported by authors such as Firth (1996), who described these kinds of situations in more detail. In this sense, he used the term "let-it-pass principle" to describe a scenario wherein the hearer permits 'to pass' unclear utterances with the expectation that they would become clear as the conversation progresses. Similarly, other aspects have been investigated, such as lexicogrammar and written language. However, experts recognize that there should be more studies on these subjects since they are aligned to standard norms in many aspects, and present few innovations. Nevertheless, important initiatives on ELF research are being carried out. The ELFA project (English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings), and the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) focus on spoken interactions among non-native speakers and the use of ELF by speakers of diverse backgrounds. The introduction of ELF and the LFC has generated plenty of discussion among experts, but it seems that there is no consensus within the specialized audience. This lack of agreement and uncertainty is affecting the classrooms as well, where the implementation of the LFC would generate a series of consequences and implications that deserve to be analysed as well.

Implications for teachers

Teachers would be the first affected by the introduction of the LFC syllabus in classrooms. First of all, a new paradigm of teaching means new teaching purposes. The traditional teaching of English aimed at acquiring the conventions of native speech. The two main models provided were Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA). In the case of ELF, teachers should aim at creating intelligible speakers of English. This new target, however, poses some significant problems. First, the efforts of teachers at honing their pronunciation skills over years may become worthless. Also, the new model provided by the LFC is dynamic, has varieties, and seems unstable in contrast to native models (Hancock, 2019). Moreover, teachers would have to take into account the preference of a student for a specific variety of English. This idea is aligned with the democratic views of ELF of respecting the choice of every student (Jenkins, 1998). Another issue mentioned by Wells (Wells, 2005), is that instructors are supposed to anticipate with whom their students will use English. Furthermore, other experts have pointed out the teachability of certain features of the LFC. For example, Dauer (2005), sees a contradiction in the fact that the LFC, on the one hand, deems the aspiration of the voiceless plosives /p, t, k/ in the initial position in stressed syllables crucial for intelligibility, but in the other, does not consider word stress an essential feature for intelligibility. In a general view, it seems that the introduction of the LFC overloads the task of the teachers considerably, and puts forward certain unrealistic goals and challenging situations that may harm pedagogy and affect students negatively.

Implications for students

Traditionally, the target of English teaching as a second language has been the student's acquisition of a certain level of proficiency within a framework of reference based on native standards. This is easily perceived in the teaching methodology of English pronunciation, where RP and GA have

encountered no objection in the Academic settings. The introduction of new models such as Jenkins' LFC establishes a whole new paradigm for students that challenges the orthodox native norms of pronunciation. Thus, it is necessary to discuss the implications of the LFC for students of English, who are potentially the ultimate agents of intercultural communication. This analysis will focus firstly on the objectives of ELF and the LFC, and then, on the actual consequences of acquiring such variety.

The acquisition of LFC offers students a series of advantages. One of the reasons for the creation of the LFC was to provide an intelligible alternative to the standard pronunciations. In international contexts, LFC assumes that GA and RP are not more intelligible than the non-native varieties of English. On the contrary, the core features of the LFC are such because they seem to safeguard intelligibility and ensure successful communication. Apart from intelligibility, another concern of the LFC is the maintenance of individuals' national identity. This is possible, in part, thanks to the dynamic and variable perception that ELF has about interlanguage talk (Dewey, 2009). This inclusive conception allows non-native speakers to maintain certain features of their L1, as long they do not harm intelligibility. Thus, it is promoted the students' acquisition of a good non-native accent that contains the features of the LFC. In summary, the objectives of the LFC are the students' achievement of a good non-native accent, the preservation of national identity through language usage, and speakers' intelligibility to every other speaker of English (Seidlhofer, 2011).

Ensuring the capability of being understood means a clear advantage for LFC speakers. This suggests that LFC speakers are able to attain effective communication in English disregarding the context. Nevertheless, it should be remarked that effective communication involves both being understood and understanding the other speaker. Thus, LFC speakers can be involved in situations where they may be understood by others while struggling to understand others. This scenario is quite plausible as long as LFC is not established as a widely spoken variety of English.

Additionally, LFC speakers may find difficulties in terms of social perception even though they are being perfectly understood. Native varieties such as RP and GA are still a desirable goal for most English learners. Moreover, previous investigations have shown that standard-accented speakers are more favourably rated in comparison to foreign, non-standard, and regional accents (De Meerleer, 2012). The educational systems of many countries as well as English language teaching programs and academies also, use standard norms to gain recognition. For example, native teachers and travel abroad programs are very often presented as part of a prestigious way of learning English. Conversely, intelligible speakers can be evaluated as more competent (Bresnahan et al. 2002), but also as having a lower social status in comparison to speakers of native varieties. In fact, many studies confirm that accent preference correlates to the perception of social status (cited in De Meerleer, 2012). Although intelligible speakers receive positive evaluations and affective responses (Rubin & Smith, 1990), apparently, it is not a desirable variety of English according to most non-native speakers. A study conducted by Jenkins (2007) ratifies the idea that non-natives are more inclined to learn native varieties rather than being intelligible. Participants recognised native accents as more correct, more pleasant, and "acceptable for international communication". A number of factors can affect accent attitudes, perceptions, and stereotypes about accents. Just to mention a few, Media increased the visibility and accentuated the preference for learning GA (Mobärg, 1999). Furthermore, the United States' economic dominance and leading role in world affairs, and the position of the United Kingdom throughout history have undoubtedly contributed to the preference of GA and RP. Hence, even though intelligibility has positive connotations among students of English, LFC speakers may be regarded less favourably than someone who speaks RP or GA. Thus, LFC speakers might be at a disadvantage in certain situations in terms of social perception when compared to speakers of a native variety of English.

National identity is identified as another issue within ELF and has other implications. the individuals' necessity of expressing their national identity through language is a fair defence within this

context. It is true that the dynamic nature of the LFC allows certain L1 features, an important factor that allows speakers to maintain their national identity while speaking English. In a different order of things, it should be mentioned that national identity can be expressed in many other ways, not only through language usage. As it has been said, non-native speakers' speech can be the object of stereotypes and other prejudices. Authors such as Hancock (2019) point out that "not all learners are preparing for an ELF context". He mentions the example of immigrants whose objective is to be intelligible and to be assimilated within a community. For such a purpose, the LFC could not be enough. Lastly, intelligibility is not an ELF's isolated contribution. Traditional models of pronunciation intend students to learn a native pronunciation, and difficult as it may be, native pronunciation aim for intelligibility too. At this point, students should consider all these implications if they decide to learn and use the LFC.

Methods

Below, there can be found the elements of the study that has been carried out, which consists of two main parts. Firstly, the design is made up of a description of the population of the study, and a description of both the study of attitudes and the study of perception. Secondly, there is a discussion about the results of each study, the main ideas that can be extracted, and the conclusions after the results, previous to the final section of this paper "Conclusions of the Study".

The participants were 36 senior students of both sexes of the University of Zaragoza that belong to the degrees in Finance and accounting, Marketing and Market research, and Economics. They were all studying the subject of English for the specific purposes of their degree. According to the teachers, most of the students represented a lower level of proficiency in English, and the subject aimed for students to reach a B2 level (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). In this sense, they have not had English lessons since they started University, but had experience learning English in the earlier years

of their lives. Thus, they are all sufficiently qualified to assess their views about their experience in learning English and about English pronunciation and give reasoned and critical opinions on the matter. The L1 of the majority of students is Spanish, but there are also Romanian, French, and Chinese students that speak Spanish as a second language. They live in Zaragoza or come from other parts of Spain such as La Rioja and Navarra. It is important to remark that during the course, teachers do not put the emphasis on pronunciation, and devote the lessons to the teaching of grammar and vocabulary. Moreover, the subject of English is not compulsory within any of these degrees, but the acquisition of a B2 level of proficiency in English is a minimum requirement as part of the curricula of their degree. Regarding the procedure, the study was carried out in the classroom. Google Forms was the platform used to share the questionnaires with the students, who answered using their own electronic devices. The questions as well as the answers were all in Spanish. First, students were asked to answer the questions of the study of attitudes, which consisted of 8 questions, some of them included subsections A, B, C, etc. The task was completed after twelve minutes, and the students were introduced to the study of perception. This survey consisted of three questions per video, and there were five videos in total, that were reproduced only once. Each video had a duration of approximately one minute, and the students had another two minutes almost to answer the three questions, which were all the same for each video.

Hereafter, there is a detailed discussion about each question of both surveys. There is a description of the questions, their purpose, and the expected answers previous to the materialization of the results. Furthermore, there is also an explanation about the videos of the study of perception, a description of the interlocutor and his/her accent, and similarly, the expected reactions previous to the answers.

Study of attitudes

Number 1 is made up of three questions with the same typology. These questions are all evaluative, whose objective was to show a comparison of students' perceptions about the importance of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. This allows us to consider in the first place, how involved are students in their learning of English since ELF requires students' active involvement in their learning choices. Thus, these questions are expected to show that pronunciation is a minor issue for students in comparison to other skills, such as grammar or vocabulary.

Number 2 is a multiple-choice question. Students are prompted to select the skill they consider the most difficult to learn (Grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation), and justify their choice. In this case, pronunciation should get a higher score, since students might be influenced by the popular conceptions of Spanish speakers about the difficulty of English pronunciation. In this sense, learning the LFC may become an attractive option to consider for those who have difficulties in learning a native accent.

Question number 3 has two sections. Section A enquires directly into students' priorities about being intelligible or sounding like a native. ELF introduces this controversy as one of the main points to take into account in the teaching of English pronunciation because, apparently, native speech might be unnecessary in intercultural encounters. As a result, if students think it is enough for them to be understood, it can be guessed that they are not interested in acquiring a native level of pronunciation, which is more aligned with ELF models. Similarly, section B probes into students' beliefs about the future. If an L2 speaker dismisses the idea of talking with L1 speakers, LFC can be again, a better alternative than RP or GA.

Sections in question 4 will be supported by the perception study to corroborate the ideas of Jolanta (2014) about frequency as a crucial factor regarding intelligibility. Thus, English with a Spanish accent is very likely to receive higher scores due to the students' immediate context. However, exceptional cases are contemplated because of the influence of English on Media, which presents high levels of

exposure among the population. Moreover, the score range goes from 1 (meaning 'never') to 10 (meaning 'always'). Previous studies used this kind of proportion because it seems to reflect respondents' answers more accurately than a 1-5 proportion. *** (Reference to a previous study: to be completed) ***

Question 5 is concerned with intelligibility. The answers here will be compared with previous research and with the answers of the perception study, to elucidate if students' perception matches their listening performance. Those who choose a native accent as more intelligible may perceive native models as attainable goals and may reject the LFC beforehand. Perceptions about native varieties as more intelligible than non-native varieties can be connected also to the level of exposure to those varieties, therefore, these answers should be connected to question 4.

Identically, question 6 deals with pronunciation rather than perception. Again, considerations about pronunciation models may condition students' choice for a specific variety. If native models are perceived to be easier than non-native models, the LFC will be directly perceived as unnecessary.

Number 7 asks about students' preferences about the variety they consider the easier to understand. Answers are open and are expected to match answers in questions 5 and 4. This is intended to raise students' awareness about their choices. They should be coherent in their answers, even though they may notice important differences during the subsequent study.

Finally, question 8 addresses ELF's objective of individuals' need for maintaining their national identity while speaking English. There can be important differences between the answers. Subjects who do not feel this necessity will not find the LFC a useful option, instead, native accents can be preferred. In any case, it is expected that the population of the study will not consider expressing their national identity in such aspects, and therefore, be content just by learning RP or GA.

Study of perception

As stated before, the study of perception is made up of five videos plus three identical questions per video. Each one lasts one minute more or less and is devoted to one speaker, and students only have a maximum of two minutes to answer the questions. Videos are distributed by dividing native speakers on the one hand, and non-native speakers on the other, whose order is related to the linguistic proximity of the speaker with Spanish (from Spanish NS to Chinese NS). Each speaker has a different accent and a different communicative purpose. Additionally, students were not introduced to any speaker in order to prevent any potential bias about the speakers or their accents. This design prompts students to give genuine opinions, to keep the attention, and not to get used to a specific accent.

The first speech sample to be reproduced corresponds to the British speaker, Maisie Williams. The young actress introduces some aspects of her early life and personality, her dreams, and her feelings. Secondly, the North American speaker Courtney E. Martin was selected because of her soft accent, far from specific regional traits. In this sample, she deals with current views and alternative perspectives on the American Dream. The third speaker is the Chilean writer, Isabel Allende. Her accent is good and presents features of her L1. Her talk deals with feminism and patriarchy with a convincing attitude. It is expected that students recognise her as a Spanish native speaker and understand her accent easily in comparison to the others. The mother tongue of the fourth speaker is French. The soccer player Thierry Henry talks about the possibility of returning to play soccer in England, and his feelings towards his experience there. The election of a French native speaker is based on the proximity of French to Spanish. Therefore, it should be easier for students to recognise and understand than a Chinese accent, for instance. Thus, the fifth speaker is the Chinese choreographer Shen Wei. During his intervention, there can be denoted certain difficulties of articulation, but it is quite a good performance. The topic of his speech is his experience as a child and as a student at the beginning of China's cultural revolution. These

videos were carefully selected due to several reasons. Speakers' origins are denoted in their speech, which is slow and clear, and they deal with topics that require the hearer's attention with a measured amount of difficulty.

Question number 1 invites students to write down if they understood the topic of the speech and the communicative purpose, in just a few words. This allows the evaluation of students' actual understanding before we pass to evaluate their perception. The second question of the study of perception asks students to rate the intelligibility of each accent. English with a Spanish accent is expected to have the higher scores, together with British English and American English. English with a French accent may have a medium score, and English with a Chinese accent may have a lower. The third question asks students if they would like to have such an accent and justify their opinion. Here, answers may reveal that students could be somehow concerned about how others perceive their speech. Thus, they may agree to sound British or American, but not French or Chinese.

Discussion of the Results

Study of attitudes

The platform Google Forms gathered 33 respondents. Questions were not compulsory and the number of answers per section varied. Students gave their names and their L1. There were twenty-eight native Spanish speakers, two Romanians, one French, and one Chinese.

In question 1, students rated vocabulary as the most important skill for English learning with an average score of 8.81. The average scores for grammar and pronunciation were 8.33 and 8.12 respectively. These results suggest that students have similar perceptions about vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. The scores obtained do not vary significantly and do not support strong conclusions about the lower importance of pronunciation among students. However, the range of scores did have relevant

variations. The scores for vocabulary go from 7 to 10, and the scores for both grammar and pronunciation go from 4 to 10. Thus, even though there are no significant differences in the average scores, it can be held that not only pronunciation but grammar as well, are both perceived, to some extent, as minor skills by some students.

Question 2 reveals that grammar and pronunciation are both considered the most difficult skills to learn. Students were allowed to vote on more than one skill. Grammar obtained 19 votes, pronunciation 16, and vocabulary 6. Students mentioned that English grammar has variations that make it difficult to learn. Pronunciation was considered difficult because it requires more practice, and grammar and vocabulary require study instead. During the surveys, teachers mentioned that due to the schedules, pronunciation could be part of the syllabus. Some students acknowledged that this factor influences their views, thus, the lack of emphasis on pronunciation seems to increase the perception of difficulty. However, this lack of emphasis does not reduce the perception of importance. Many students highlighted pronunciation, and not vocabulary nor grammar, as essential to achieving effective communication. This evinces that people consider that effective communication lies, among other things, in good pronunciation, which could be related either to intelligibility, aligned to Jenkins' views, or native norms, the traditional conventions.

Considerations regarding English usage in question 3 can somehow unveil students' ideas about effective communication. In section A, almost 65% of students found intelligible pronunciation sufficient for communication, instead of native pronunciation. In this sense, it could be said that the majority of students endorse ELF initiatives. Results in section B reinforce this view since the same percentage of students as before (63.3%) believe that in the future they will communicate in English with more non-native speakers than with native speakers. In this respect, there could be a clear preference among students toward ELF models of pronunciation such as the LFC.

Subsequently, there is an analysis of students' exposure to different English varieties. As was expected in the section 'Methods', English with a Spanish accent obtained the highest rate of exposure, with an average of 7 points out of 10. It was followed by American and British English with averages of 6.25 and 5.65 respectively. Other non-native varieties of English got a 3.33 average of exposure, and lastly, other native varieties of English obtained the lowest rate, with a 2.93 average of exposure. These results are going to be a point of reference for further analysis because according to previous studies there seems to be a connection between exposure and intelligibility.

Answers in question 5 show that 60% of students said that native varieties were easier to understand than non-native varieties. Some of these students recognise they have been exposed to native varieties since they were children and associate this with the fact that they can understand natives better than not non-natives. Those who said that native varieties were *not* easier to understand than non-native varieties justified their choice with similar arguments. Some pointed out that exposure to Spanish-accented English has made this variety easier to understand for them because they can easily recognise Spanish pronunciation. Others perceived that non-natives spoke slowly and did not have a strong accent, hence, their speech was more comprehensible. There exist contradictory results in different investigations about intelligibility. Smith & Nelson (2006) found that non-natives seem to be easier to understand for other non-native speakers. Similarly, Munro & Derwing (1995) noted that foreign accents do not impede intelligibility and maintain successful communication. The results of the study of perception will either confirm or refute these ideas and support conclusions with more accuracy.

Results in question 6 suggest inconsistent ideas about pronunciation. Only 45.5% of students considered that native speech is easier to pronounce than non-native speech. Within the reasons provided, some participants established a connection between the ability of pronunciation and their exposure to native varieties during school years or through Media. On the other hand, the majority of respondents (54.5%) do *not* think that native pronunciation is the easiest to learn. Students are aware of

the fact that their native tongue has a noticeable influence on their pronunciation, therefore, their accent is the easiest to pronounce. Nevertheless, this does not mean that all non-native accents are easy to pronounce, but instead, that L1 phonetic features applied to L2 pronunciation are easier to pronounce, for natural reasons. Thus, there appears to be no consensus among participants about the perception of difficulty between native and non-native speech. As a result, these perspectives might be beneficial or not for ELF, since the perception of difficulty is not necessarily connected to speakers' desire of learning a specific variety. Notwithstanding, it can be suggested that ELF models are very likely to be despised by those who find native pronunciation easier.

There seems to be a clear perception that American English is particularly easy to understand as is reflected in question 7. Among the reasons mentioned by these 12 out of 24 subjects, American English was described as strong, friendly, and flexible, and also, there were reports of exposure in Media, either through music, films, tv series, etc. These results can somehow be connected to question 4 section B, where 53.1% of respondents rated with 7, or more than 7, their frequency of exposure to American English. Thus, some signs support previous evidence of a connection between frequency of exposure and intelligibility.

Question 8 reveals that the majority of respondents agree that an accent is a way of expressing somebody's national identity. Apparently, most of them are not embarrassed by their non-native accent and feel comfortable as long as they can be understood by others. Despite that, expressing one's national identity in the speech was rather irrelevant. In other words, according to these students, an accent reflects individuals' national identity, but it is not esteemed as an important issue, since a non-native accent is rather a natural trait of speech. Besides, correct pronunciation and intelligible speech were mentioned as valuable and sufficient characteristics to acquire.

Study of perception

The analysis of the study of perception is divided into two parts. First, there will be a description of the results of each audio, and secondly, a discussion about the conclusions that can be extracted from both studies.

In the first video, the speaker with a British accent obtained an average score of perceived intelligibility of 5.6 out of 10. Half of the students demonstrated a vague understanding of the speaker and the main topic. In general, they were able to grasp certain words of the speech and repeat them in the answers. Similarly, almost 60% of the students rated this accent's intelligibility from 6 to 10, which shows an intermediate to a high level of understanding. Moreover, 19 students clearly stated that they would like to acquire this accent. There were aesthetic reasons, an explicit preference for British accent and nativeness, which at the same was labelled as correct, important for a professional career and global communication, and understandable. Those who did not want to acquire this accent labelled it as too strong, difficult to learn for non-natives, and opulent.

There are vague notions about the topic in the video of the American speaker. Answers show that the hearer recognised certain words and guessed that the speaker was talking about America and the economy, but very few were able to get a deeper understanding of the issue that is being introduced. However, the ratings raised in comparison to the previous video. The average score was 6.20 out of ten, and 67.7% rated the intelligibility of this accent from 6 to 10. Additionally, the American accent received more positive views, and most of the respondents said that they would like to learn this accent because it was native and it sounded good. There was a general perception of clearer pronunciation and more understandable speech. It was also mentioned that words were well-articulated and that this accent was strong, clear, and elegant, even though it sounded a bit posh.

Disagreements with these views referred to this accent as irritating, confusing, too native, and difficult to understand.

The third video corresponds to the Spanish native speaker. A general improvement was perceived in students' understanding since almost every answer referred somehow to the main topic of the speech. The position of the speaker regarding feminism was clear, and many noticed the point she was making about patriarchy and how it affects men, women, children, etc. Thus, the average score reached 7.27 points out of ten. In addition, there was an overall increase in ratings, with 80.6% of responses being equal to or higher than 6. Despite these results, there were more negative answers regarding the possibility of learning this accent. The reasons were quite uniform, many remarked on the fact that it was not an original accent, that is, it is not native. Also, it was not perceived as attractive, but rather, inadequate, imperfect, and too Spanish. Regardless, both negative and positive views coincided in that this was a good pronunciation, neutral, understandable, and effective in communication.

In the fourth video, there is awareness of the contribution of visual elements to the understanding of the French speaker. Thanks to the context, it was possible to infer the topic of the speech. Another element was the recognition of certain words, many of them were helpful for understanding. Thus, students concluded that the speaker was talking about his professional career as a soccer player, and they were able to understand his perspective regarding his experience in England. Even so, the average score of intelligibility of this accent was 4.75 out of ten. Therefore, context and certain words helped students get quite a good amount of information about the message, but in general terms, they did not understand the speaker's accent. Regarding the possibility of learning this accent, the vast majority of respondents answered no. The descriptions used were, it is not clear, it is too fast, too difficult to understand, too French, inadequate, unattractive, unnatural, forced, and wrong-articulated. Among the minority who answered yes, there was a participant who recognised being a French native speaker who did not find objections in learning English with a French accent.

Surprisingly, the Chinese speaker in the last video was quite better understood than expected. The average score was higher than that of the French speaker, with 5.36 points out of ten. Interestingly, the context did not give many clues to the listeners, who were more guided by what they actually heard. Thus, they could recognise some words, quite similar to the previous video, but only a few showed a deeper understanding of what the speaker actually said. Similarly, this video shows a lower approval rating among students, because it seems that they do not wish to learn to speak with such an accent. The hearers indicated that the accent is clear, well pronounced, and slow. Also, they said that the interlocutor was able to understand the Chinese speaker; this was provided as a reason to label this accent as properly uttered. Nevertheless, most students declared that they did not want to learn this accent. There were several reasons for this, for instance, bad articulation, lower perception of proficiency, difficulty in understanding, unusual pronunciation, and a sense of weirdness and unfamiliar pronunciation.

According to the survey respondents, the following statements can be made: Pronunciation is an important skill to acquire, but it is not given enough emphasis. This lack of emphasis increases the perception of difficulty, still, it is considered essential for effective communication. In this study, it seems that native varieties are to some extent more intelligible than non-native varieties, numbers suggest that there is no consensus, and the answers led to conclusions that indicate exposure as the determining factor for intelligibility. Likewise, there is no consensus about varieties' ease of pronunciation, native and non-native in question 5, and similar conclusions about the influence of exposure can be extracted. Regarding effective communication, it seems at first glance, that intelligibility is preferred over naiveness. Previous research supports such ideas. Jenkins herself promotes the LFC based on the fact that learners neither want nor need to apply native standards of pronunciation, and later, Munro (2008) will state that "native pronunciation in the L2 is not only uncommon but unnecessary.". Nonetheless, these conceptions should be contrasted with the other results. Both the study of perception and the questions of the study of attitudes reveal that there are factors that favour intelligibility and are not directly connected to

phonetics. As pointed out before, there is a direct correlation between the frequency of exposure (question 4) and the perception of intelligibility. English with a Spanish accent obtained the highest rates of both exposure and intelligibility; similarly, it was followed by the American accent, and then the British. A study conducted by White et. al (2016) suggests that accent familiarity can aid listener comprehension. Hence, students' comprehension of a particular accent might be connected to familiarity, which is related to the frequency of exposure. Zhang & Hu's (2008) study is also relevant in this respect, their conclusions suggest that exposure also enhances attitude towards an accent. The second factor is attitude. American accent was described by many students in the study of perception as a desirable goal for pronunciation. It was followed by the British accent, and then Spanish. Thus, it seems that, regardless of intelligibility, native accents are still more valued than non-native accents, a perception directly related to attitudes. In this sense, Giles & Coupland (1991) said "evaluations of language varieties do not reflect intrinsic linguistic or aesthetic qualities so much as the levels of status and prestige that they are conventionally [the authors' emphasis] associated with in particular speech communities". Thus, attitude and frequency of exposure are as relevant as phonetics for intelligibility. Last but not least, students agreed that an accent somehow expresses one's national identity, but at the same, this notion was rather irrelevant for their learning of pronunciation, since non-native speech is something natural. In conclusion, it seems contradictory that regarding English learning of pronunciation, students emphasise that it is enough to be understood, but their attitudes toward non-standard accents are an obstacle to the expansion of the LFC. Even so, the concept of familiarity gains importance, since, beyond native accents, students do not find problems in speaking like non-natives as long as they are understood and as long as they use their L1 variety.

Below, a series of concluding points can be found. The final ideas extracted from both studies, as well as the analysis of implications, challenge ELF ideas and expose certain weaknesses in the application of the LFC, reducing the possibility of its future implementation:

1. There is no consensus about native accents being more intelligible than non-native accents or vice versa, as much contradictory research has shown.
2. Even though at first glance intelligibility is said to be a sufficient goal for pronunciation, in reality, native accents together with English with L1's accent are preferred and valued as more plausible varieties to learn.
3. Attitudes and perspectives on non-native accents different from L1's variety are not desirable. Students acknowledge the sociological connotations behind certain varieties, and, rather unconsciously, they seem to support standard models, native over non-native.
4. As long as the LFC is not established as a widely spoken variety of English, LFC speakers may be efficient speakers, but listeners with difficulties.
5. National identity can be expressed through language usage. However, it is not perceived as an important factor for intercultural communication in English. It is not one of the main objectives of English learners, who can find other ways of expressing their identity.
6. Native models also promote intelligibility
7. Frequency of exposure and attitude are crucial factors for the perception of intelligibility.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, there has been an account of the global status of English in the past and its development until our days. The analysis has focused on the factors involving communication in English as a lingua franca. Thus, it deals with the ideology of ELF and the research on the subject, that led to the creation of the LFC. There has been a review of the LFC, and an examination of its implications regarding the expert community, teachers, and more importantly, students of English as a second language. The objective of this debate has been the evaluation of ELF ideas in order to assess its purposes and the possibility of the application of the LFC. In addition to the examination of implications, two studies have

been carried out, one on attitudes, and one on perception. The discussion of the results has led to the conclusion that the LFC implies several disadvantages that make it an unfeasible possibility in this context.

The ambiguity of certain results seems to favour the LFC since it has not been demonstrated that native models are more intelligible than non-native ones. Even so, as Jenkins rightly points out, the preferences of the students must be taken into account. For this reason, even if we prove that intelligibility is higher in non-native accents, the majority of students may still choose native pronunciation models. The reasons are diverse, but it is accurate to state that the choice of an accent to learn is strongly influenced by external agents that have nothing to do with phonetics. This is clearly reflected in the attitude study, where the preference for the American accent is largely due to media exposure. This is why the LFC is not a viable option, because it does not take into account the sociological aspects of language, and does not provide a better alternative beyond effective communication based on intelligibility. Likewise, the fact that national identity is an irrelevant issue for learners when speaking English does not favour the LFC either. In such a case, students choose to speak with the accent of their L1, which they do not need to learn. Similarly, learning intelligible pronunciation does not guarantee a better perception of other accents. Standard pronunciation models also aim at intelligibility, which is just as important as the correct pronunciation of the variety being learned. In this sense, native models provide a desirable and effective exemplar of pronunciation. Thus, if there are no receptive attitudes towards the LFC, there is no reason to promote a paradigm shift in English language teaching.

Despite these findings, there are some limitations to this study. There could have a larger proportion of subjects to study, in more diverse places, and with different levels of English proficiency. The future avenues of research should focus on the difficulty of each model to elucidate the actual efficacy of the different models. Besides, there should be a study of attitudes toward teachers, since they are the agents involved in the implementation of a model. Moreover, the LFC should be put to test in more contexts and be compared with the standard models it is trying to substitute. Similarly, preconceived

attitudes are not enough evidence to support absolute ideas about an accent's intelligibility, it must be accompanied by a study of perception that shows listeners' actual understanding.

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