‘But in movies they speak different’
— Meeting Young Learners’
Expectations

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Introduction

Along the 20th century many technological devices were developed. Around the world many people believe globalization provided an opportunity to share the resources equitably to everyone and turned communication into a much easier reality; social networks, and internet increased and changed the relationship between knowledge and apprenticeship, between school and practical connections outside, and their due validation.

In our current days, globalization relies upon an unprecedented market expansion and the use of a communication network, covering most of the globe. People from different countries or continents became leading characters to others, no matter where they stand and a reference in the development of one’s intellectual and social thought. English became the key language in the science and technology fields, as well as in the leisure time activities such as sports, music and cinema.

It’s the result of a long path in the expansion of English from the British Empire and the Industrial Revolution up to the global revolution of the late 20th century and beginning of our 21st century, in which users of English perform a core role, “In other words: the fact that English is now an influential world language is not really due to its superiority as a language, but it is the result of the activities of its speakers over the centuries” (Melchers & Shaw 9).

Following this process, English is the language most people use in their connections and eases the social-cultural identity experienced as a way of being part of a community. Graddol highlights that fact and the age of learners, “More people than ever want to learn English. (...) English learners are increasing in number and decreasing in age” (Graddol 10).

Such a context depicts the assertion that mastering the English language ensures opportunities leading to a better future in a global world.
New roles of English and the concept of ELF

For the very first time, in current times, the number of non-native speakers of English overcame the number of native speakers; referring to Kachru (1985) and his terminology from his model on the expansion of English, this language became a connection tool used, not only by speakers from countries of the inner circle, but also from the outer circle and expanding circle.

Indeed, English changed its role from the native language of a certain number of speakers in a certain geographic area to another distinct one, which included contributions of native and non-native speakers. Higgins states her opinion on the possession of the language in a clear way, “Learners who view themselves as legitimate speakers of English can own English” (617).

Every day and everywhere one bumps into the notion that people, who manage to use English efficiently, get into the markets and achieve success. It became fashionable, and shaped the way people live, thus young learners perform the action that not the entire generation before did achieve: learning and using English.

Thus, there is a need for an efficient lingua franca to be understood in different contexts by distinct speakers. Accordingly, Guerra stresses the role of the users in the process of the spread of English, “Any development in the debate about the role of English in the 21st century as a language of international communication cannot be promoted without an active participation of users of English as a foreign language” (2).

In similar vein, a characterization of the new speaker is purposed, “The new speakers are not just passively absorbing the language; they are shaping it” (Nihalani 15). The language became the speakers’ opportunity to build a tool that can lead to an effective global communication.

Global mobility is a current fact, throughout all continents and Europe in particular, people travel: language users travel in and out for social, professional, economic or leisure reasons and look forward to be successful in the most of their communicative acts, although their diverse performance.

Across Europe, the expansion of English is also connected to a specific role performed by several European Institutions: English is used in
most of the summits, conferences or working groups, although other official working languages might be considered as available tools.

Framing up the political context, along the past 50 years the Council of Europe (COE) has supported and developed European cooperation programs and reference tools in the scope of the Language policy. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) constitutes a core document, since it provides a common basis across Europe for the language syllabuses as well as curriculum guidelines. It also defines levels of proficiency and describes what learners have to learn, which skills to develop on a life-long basis and in order to communicate and understand others’ utterances.

Under the same paramount perspective, the European Union (EU) has drawn a special attention to language policies encouraging the early learning of two different languages out of the Early Language Learning Policy Handbook (2011). Facing the challenge from the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment (2000), several political documents have been released. Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council defines the eight key competences for lifelong learning, followed by the description of the related essential knowledge, skills and attitudes, on what concerns foreign languages,

(...)

communication in foreign languages, which involves, in addition to the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue, mediation and intercultural understanding. The level of proficiency depends on several factors and the capacity for listening, speaking, reading and writing; (...). (Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006)

Later, in 2009, these previous documents were followed by the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2010) and have reinforced the account that the communication skill in foreign languages contributes to the fulfillment of the strategy goal of turning the EU into the most competitive learning society. In all the documentation the core indicators, allowing an overall assessment of basic skills for young learners, define language skills as key ones. But considering the increasing number of learners and users of English throughout Europe the awareness of the importance of ELF as a communicative strategy, arises.
The research on ELF issues arose in the decade 90 of the 20th century, but this 21st reflects an increased interest about this theme. Several approaches of English as a lingua franca by authors, as Seidhofer (2001), Jenkins (2006) and others are to be considered. Starting with Seidhofer’s view, she states, “(...) I (...) attempt a characterization of English as a Lingua Franca. It should be noted that this is indeed a characterization rather than a strict definition — language varieties do not readily lend themselves to definition as such” (40).

Jenkins (2006) outlines key characteristics of ELF, “It is by now a well-rehearsed fact that English has become an international language used most frequently as a lingua franca among its (so called) non-native speakers from different L1 background” (32). This same author also stresses the fact that the main influence in ELF interaction does not arise from whatever the mother language might be, but instead the focus is placed in the communication acts skilled by the speakers. Modiano states the importance of a pro-active attitude,

As English takes on responsibilities of a lingua franca, non-native speakers are taking a more active role in the development of the language, not only in respect to the manner in which they develop educational models for the teaching of local varieties, but also in their understanding of how the language is used in cross-cultural communication. (23)

Since there are no native ELF speakers, there are not any native patterns to be followed; every speaker shapes the language in contact with non hegemonic groups, arising the polymorphous characteristics of it, and in this way the language became a property of all. These facts stress the goal of converging into a successful communication and to achieve it any creative and pragmatic strategy is worth. In fact, if speakers use ELF and communicate even when they do not follow the core rules of English, as the use of the ‘s in the third person singular of present tense verbs, or adapt or appropriate English for a special use, such facts point out the dynamics, and the way the language is shaping to particular circumstances. Different people from any cultural background use ELF and that makes that there can be found distinct levels of proficiency or constraints in the choice and shape of the discourse, “The speech community of ELF is by definition diverse and heterogeneous”. (Prodromous, “Defining” 57). Indeed, this
conception builds up its richness and challenging nature and emphasizes the importance of the negotiation of meanings between speaker and listener, binding both together.

Some projects have been developed under the umbrella of ELF and out of them one can bring forth, the English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings (ELFA), developed at Helsinki University, Finland, and the Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) at Vienna University, Austria. ELFA points out to a compilation of a one-million word corpus of spoken academic ELF; VOICE seeks to capture lexico grammatical and discourse use of ELF in a computer readable corpus. Seidlhofer (2006) justifies such a research, valuing some of ELF speakers’ competences, “The analysis of ELF corpora will afford us a better understanding of what ELF speakers do to better understanding each other” (44).

Nonetheless, there is still other research to be fulfilled. In a world of rapid changes, language follows that mainstream and so, ELF became a socially accepted trend and a resource in the English speaking world.

Meeting young learners’ expectations

At a time when English is increasingly spoken by Europeans, it is required to meet young learners’ expectations, accordingly with teaching and apprenticeship environments. Portuguese learners get into connection with English, by means of movies, games, TV, songs, social networks, not only during their leisure time outside school, but also inside, regarding the vocabulary used in ICT activities, sports or educational projects, at a fast and increased way and at younger ages. Even those young learners might notice that there are certain «differences» of accent and grammar rules, while watching a video or a YouTube film, when considering some of the English language used and heard in classroom and outside it. Young children state their opinion in a clearly true way and, therefore — “But in movies they sometimes speak different”— becomes a repeated statement English teachers of extracurricular activities listen to, since such an apprenticeship focus on speech rather than reading or writing activities, according to Portuguese Programmatic Orientations, published by the Ministry for Education and Science. In fact, these legislative tools refer that the early learning of the English language aims at the global develop-
ment of the child beyond just the knowledge of another language. During the initial phase of schooling in the first basic education cycle, focused activities on listening and speaking are valued. Still, according to those Programmatic Orientations, methodologies like ‘Total Physical Response’ and ‘Task-Based Learning’ should be considered and developed. Total Physical Response is based in studies of the brain and states that, before mastering a language, there exists a prior time period of internalization, in which the learners listen to the inputs, without production, but with physical response to stimulus. Task-Based Learning states the importance of performing tasks, related to the common day basis of the learners, emphasizing the use of vocabulary and structures to communicate. Accordingly, Nihalani (2010) reflects upon the core role of language teaching, “Communication is emerging as the supreme value of language teaching for first language users as well as second language learners” (35). Therefore, learning arises as an outcome out of the integration of all the perceived and processed sequences of information, in consequence of brain structural connections.

Portuguese young learners are also learning to master their own mother language, so it might be understandable if they lean on Portuguese pronunciation rules; globally, one can state that the learning of English takes place in multilingual contexts. Nevertheless, these young learners look forward to fully understand the lyrics of their favourite songs and TV serials, or internet sites, or the rules of any online game, and so expect parents to follow and measure their youngsters’ steps through an effective communication in English. Under this process, and following the Programmatic Orientations in the scope of encouraging the early learning of two different languages, teachers have to deal with the issue of language deviation, eliciting correctness or effectiveness of communication acts. Jenkins (2006) also approached this issue in her research,

The problem with assigning the status of error to any and every item affected by L1 transfer is that it attaches a ‘contamination’ metaphor to current language contact while ignoring the vast amount of previous language contact which influenced the development of English from the days of Old English onwards and resulted in much of the present-day Modern English(es) now spoken by the Inner Circle’s educated NNs. (34)
It becomes important for teachers, not only to go beyond the rule, to develop tolerant attitudes towards differences, but also to create confident apprenticeship environments while enabling the learning of this language of modernity. Teachers perform an even more important role in establishing bonds with young learners, as Prodromou reflects, “The mediating role of the teacher will be crucial in motivating learners to become active participants in the co-construction of ELF in the classroom (English as a Lingua Franca 253). Such a challenging task this is, and sometimes a frustrating one, while teachers should be able to master in adjusting expectations according to the settings, nurturing learner’s uses of the language. Later on they have to learn English in a compulsory basis in the Portuguese curriculum of education, so the more they easily start this path, the better for them. To balance this relation teacher-student in a sustainable way, the role performed by a native teacher or a non-native one might be considered, in order to answer to every learner’s expectations. Thus, the question can be posed in terms of whether a native teacher will emerge them into English or if a non-native teacher will lead them with the emotional factor of the possibility of switching into their mother tongue, when it is needed by any involved part. Several researchers provide arguments on this issue; Jenkins states her opinion in a favourable way towards non-native teachers, “(...) the accents of bilingual NNS teachers of English who share their learners’ L1 are the most appropriate — not to mention most motivating — as classroom models”. (Jenkins 34). Taking into account other researches, implications of performances of native teachers in a non-native educational environment should be considered,

Native speakers of English (...) are less likely to be proficient users of EIL [English as an International Language] and are unlikely to be as sensitive to the needs and wants of the learners. They are also more likely to teach features of standard Englishes which are not relevant for learners of EIL (...).
(Tomlinson 140)

However, facing the world we live in, a native teacher can easily have access to due information about the cultural context of the students and stating that any teaching act is performed in a bi-directional way, everyone who is involved, develops competences and influences each other’s achievements.

As it has been stated before, teaching young learners implies a
multidimensional approach, using imaging, exposure to songs and rhymes
and advertisements and focus in oral work. Young learners are active and
they are able to develop understandings of the phenomena around them;
therefore education needs to take into account stimulating activities,
combining the distinctive mind and individual conceptualization of their
world. Such different approaches empower young learners and raise their
awareness of the variety of Englishes, which they will find in or outside
the classroom. During the learning procedure, memory is activated and
learning turns out to become possible to storage thanks to it. Indeed, the
maintenance of a stimulating environment, as well as a combination of
motivation and self-esteem are fundamental to successful learning, and
might reduce difficulties and any lack of confidence while using English
language in communication acts, no matter in what social or cultural
context those take place. According to OECD research (28), language is
a human cognitive function and the brain is considered, biologically
primed to acquire it; any communication act relates, at least, one speaker
to one listener, and each one can take changeable roles. The importance of
emotional components has to be reevaluated in the apprenticeship context,
based upon recent outcomes of neuroscientists revealing that emotions arise
from cerebral connections and stressing their importance for the adaptation
and regulation of human behavior.

Emotions are complex reactions generally described in terms
of three components: a particular mental state, a physiological
change and an impulsion to act. (…) If a positively perceived
emotion is associated with learning, it will facilitate success,
whereas a negatively perceived emotion will result in failure.
(OECD 25)

Since core activities with young learners relay on spoken language,
formative evaluation is considered as a highly effective tool in improving
their ability to learn and pronounce words. Jenkins (2006) delineates the
relationship between production and understanding,

(…) there still has to be sufficient common ground for lingua
franca communication to achieve success, and as far as
pronunciation is concerned, this means that speakers need to
be confident that their accents will not prevent them from
understanding the propositional content of one another’s utterances (…). (36)

Besides using language to fulfill understanding and perform actions, learners are also able to use the language to state different communicative intentions. The area of linguistics that studies these aspects is the Pragmatics. Austin (1962) developed a theory stating as speech acts a considerable number of instances in linguistic behavior or act performed in a certain context, thus naming his theory as Speech Act Theory. There are contextual conditions for the successful performance of speech acts, such as preparatory, sincerity or essential conditions to be fulfilled by the person performing the act, or the due act carried out. Indicators are also defined in order to provide an evaluation on the communication state. Grice (1975) first worked out ideas considering that communication is a rational and cooperative activity, naming that research as Collaborative Principle. There are different sub-principles referred as the maxims of the cooperative principle. The speaker must use a clear language message and provide due information. Summing up, communicative principles influence communication acts, “Crucially, interlocutors assume their conversational partners are cooperative and follow the maxims” (Plag, Braun, Lappe, Schramm 199).

These are factors every teacher should be aware of, and be taken into account while evaluating learners formatively.

Even though the role of the education agencies, such as the British Council in developing learning materials and pedagogical strategies has to be stressed, they support the forces of standardization of English, instead of ELF variation. In fact, often, British Council promotes accredited teacher training or workshops, in cooperation with Portuguese authorities as a way of updating and debating the pedagogical practice and encouraging the exchange of good practices. However any reference to current research on ELF is not a usual content, and on the mean time Standard English issues are most welcome. The same trend states for available students’ books, which keep the knowledge of the grammatical system of English as it is codified in the traditional grammar books. This means an additional challenge for the teacher in order to, in classroom, use context example tools that connect to the reality learners are faced up with the world movies, internet sites and media present.
Aiming at overcoming such a gap and developing the communicative skill in every learner it seems understandable to adjust the teaching of English introducing aspects related to ELF studies.

Conclusion

Considering global changes the language has faced, English language teaching may also be reconsidered in order to bump into the needs of our present day reality. It is acknowledged that any communicational act implies effort and is built on making allowances and the use of ELF does not mean it eases this process but that, instead of providing rules, alternative possibilities might be considered. To sum up, an open minded acceptance of whatever variety of English is desirable, meaning that it enables true confident and effective communication. Numerous researches on the functioning of our brain trigger that early exposure to different languages leads to success in the language learning, both mother and non mother language, and so the maintenance of the current trend of extracurricular activities with young learners of English should be sustained and still improved. It seems crucial the use of a holistic approach in the classroom activities, recognizing the close interchange of emotional and cognitive performances.

Nevertheless, it appears compulsory to develop activities according to linguistic European and national policies. And thus, teachers of extracurricular activities face a demanding challenge, regarding young learners’ expectations and willingness in mastering a language they look forward to use in the future, in their personal and professional paths, and provide answers according to what the Portuguese Ministry for Education and Science expects from their performance. Currently, special attention should be paid to new experiences of Bilingual Schools carried out in seven Portuguese pilot state schools, which have began in September 2011. This new project is being developed in cooperation with the Ministry for Education and Science and the British Council Portugal. Outcome results and suitable evaluation might become a further ground for research studies.

Considering this context of experiments, expectations of learners of English in general and young learners in particular, attending extracurricular activities of English language, as well as their families are quite
highlighted and deserve to get fulfilled. Higgins (2003) argues on the relationship between the learners and their object of apprenticeship, “In other words, speakers’ investment in English yields legitimacy for them because it allows them to participate more fully in their societies, equipped with all the necessary resources” (621).

Challenges and future directions point out a path through, in which learners with teacher’s help are involved at building their apprentice environment, experiencing an active citizenship, so that the result of such a process might be a meaningful, sustainable learning, since early ages to a lifelong commitment.

Works Cited


ABSTRACT
This chapter argues on balancing young learners’ expectations with teaching and apprenticeship environments and teacher’s choices for models in the context of extracurricular activities. It reflects upon implications in pedagogy, which may lead to adjustments of the teaching of English to the current global reality.

At a time where English is increasingly spoken by Europeans and following approaches of English as a lingua franca (ELF) by authors as Barbara Seidlhofer (2001), Jennifer Jenkins (2006) and others, reflections on new roles played by English and ELF concept are considered.

Portuguese learners connect with English inside and outside school. Young learners notice certain «differences» of accent and grammar rules, considering English language used in and outside classrooms. Aiming at overcoming that gap and developing the communicative skill in learners, it seems understandable to adjust the teaching of English introducing aspects related to ELF studies.

Nevertheless, developing activities according to linguistic policies is required. Thus, teachers face a serious challenge in not letting down expectations of young learners in mastering a language they look forward to use in the future, in their personal and professional paths.

KEYWORDS
Communication; Globalization; ELF; Language policies; Young learners

RESUMO
Este capítulo equaciona expectativas de jovens alunos face a realidades de aprendizagem e escolhas de professores, em contexto de atividades de enriquecimento curricular. Reflete sobre implicações pedagógicas que podem vir a concretizar-se em ajustamentos no ensino de inglês, tendo em conta a atual realidade global.

Numa altura em que o inglês é cada vez mais utilizado por europeus e seguindo as investigações sobre English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) realizadas por autores como Barbara Seidlhofer (2001), Jennifer Jenkins (2006) e outros, são apresen-
tadas reflexões sobre os novos papéis desempenhados pelo inglês e conceito de ELF.

Os alunos portugueses contactam com a língua inglesa, dentro e fora da escola, apercebendo-se de “diferenças” de pronúncia e regras gramaticais nesses contextos. Para ultrapassar essa constatação e desenvolver capacidades comunicativas, afigura-se como vantajosa a inclusão de conteúdos decorrentes da pesquisa sobre ELF.

Contudo, as políticas linguísticas condicionam o desenvolvimento das atividades. Consequentemente, os professores enfrentam sérios desafios de forma a não desiludir os alunos e as suas expectativas em aprender, com eficácia, uma língua que irão utilizar no futuro, na vida pessoal e profissional.

Palavras-chave
Comunicação; Globalização; ELF; Políticas linguísticas; Jovens alunos