Towards Transculturality: English as a lingua franca in intercultural communication and in online language learning

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Abstract

With increasing social tensions in the world today from a variety of causes, one positive, pro-active measure educators (and others) can take is to bring together individuals from different cultural backgrounds in conversation or in common pursuits, in an effort to generate curiosity and encourage acceptance of cultural others. That in itself will not solve global crises, but it may ease divisions on a person-to-person scale. The approach advocated here is to leverage the worldwide network of English users and learners to create opportunities, especially online, for engaging with one another and with English language media. That process can lead to improving language skills and to students getting to know other English language speakers and communities. Furthermore, research in English as a lingua franca (ELF) has shown that interactions in that space make extensive use of negotiation and adaptation in regard to both language and culture, leading characteristically to a spirit of cooperation, accommodation, and solidarity. That outcome, however, is neither automatic nor universal. Nor are online exchanges without risk (Internet trolls, misinformation, addictiveness). Ideally, ELF English activities online can be mediated, if taking place in a formal instructional setting. In order to understand the unique position of English in today's world, it is helpful to place the use and study of ELF in the wider contexts of intercultural communication and of complex dynamics systems. Given the fluidity of people, language, and culture, it is asserted here that the term transculturality is today more appropriate than intercultural, as the latter implies a duality that belies today's cultural complexity.

Keywords: English as a lingua franca, intercultural communication, online language learning, complexity theory, English language pedagogy

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Introduction

In recent years, globalization has come increasingly under attack. The flow of international trade, the rise of multinational corporations, and increasing international travel/migration are developments felt by many to be benefiting only the well-to-do and elites, leaving in their wake local un- or underemployment and uprooting traditional ways of life. Arising out of fear and resentment, nationalism and xenophobia are on the rise in many countries. This has the unfortunate byproduct of increasing intolerance and discouraging acceptance of different cultures and worldviews, as "the world is witnessing serious deterioration of solidarity and respect for human diversity" (Ortega, 2017, p. 1). While changing the climate of distrust and animosity is difficult at the macro level, it may be possible on a person-to-person scale to restore trust and comity, with the hope that over time individual change can lead to behavior modification at the group level.

One avenue available, especially to educators, is to enable direct contact with representatives of other cultures through online tools and services. Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis (1954) and work by more recent researchers (Helm, 2018; Paolini, Harwood, Hewstone, & Neumann, 2018; Turner & Cameron, 2016) suggest that, when done under the right conditions, person-to person contact between members of disparate and culturally different communities can facilitate mutual understanding, cooperation, and acceptance. Those outcomes, however, are by no means assured (Flowers, Kelsen, & Cvitkovic, 2019). Studies have shown, for example, that online exchanges between groups of language learners from different cultures can have the opposite effect, reinforcing stereotypes and hardening already held views (Guth, Helm, & O'Dowd, 2012; Kirschner, 2015). Care, reflection, and guidance are vital in the process. An approach possible today will be discussed here, namely leveraging the combination of the widespread knowledge of English and the availability of online communities/services to develop greater intercultural competence and in the process to encourage tolerance and a sense of global citizenship. English teachers (and English as a medium instructors) can play a crucial role by encouraging participation in online activities and interest groups and arranging for thoughtful discussion of experiences (Godwin-Jones, 2018c), through a process of pedagogical mentoring (O'Dowd, Sauro, & Spector-Cohen, 2020).

It has been increasingly recognized that exchanges, in person or online, using English as a lingua franca involve negotiation of both linguistic forms and cultural frames of reference (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019; Kramsch & Hua, 2016). That experience can foster a spirit of cooperation and accommodation, modeling a process of cultural translation, seen as "the negotiation of meaning between people with different value systems and different communication cultures" (Kramsch & Hua, 2020, p.2). Given the global significance of English today, providing second language (L2) English learners with this mind- and skillset can be a positive step towards cross-cultural understanding.

Intercultural communication and English as a lingua franca

To understand how exchanges in English as a lingua franca (ELF), both in person and online, can contribute to intercultural understanding, it is instructive to examine briefly how the fields of intercultural communication (henceforth IC) and ELF have developed.

Research in the two areas share a common concern with understanding and facilitating communication among participants representing different cultural backgrounds. Indeed, ELF is fundamentally a form of intercultural communication and may be the most common form of IC today (Baker, 2015). Examining ELF exchanges provides a "readily accessible window" into IC practice (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019, p. 476). However, the two fields of study have not shared research until recently (Baker, 2017; Hua, 2016). Indeed, ELF research has been marginalized in IC scholarship (Baker, 2017). There are, in fact, significant convergences in research between IC and ELF which provide the potential for useful synergies (Hua, 2016; Jenkins, 2017). Combining findings from both fields, informed by contemporary ecological approaches to linguistics, can help illuminate how best to approach online ELF interactions (and English language instruction generally), so as to maximize both language gains and enhance intercultural communication competence.

Of the two fields of study, IC research is older and better established. Its origins are generally traced back to the work of anthropologist Franz Boas and later that of Edward Hall and Curt Hofstede (Rogers & Hart, 2002). The approach to IC that developed from the work of Hall and Hofstede focuses on a set of cultural characteristics that distinguish individual cultures, with "culture" being largely understood as identical to the mainstream values, beliefs and behaviors within nation-states. Based principally on Hofstede's research (1980) on international IBM employees in the 1980s, the cultural taxonomies identified feature dichotomies such as individualism versus collectivism and low-context versus high-context communication; they include as well contrasting acceptance of power distance (social hierarchies), and uncertainty avoidance (attitudes towards ambiguity and innovation). Hofstede's approach to IC is still prevalent today, especially in communication-oriented textbooks, professional workshops, and in popular culture (Baker, 2015; Godwin-Jones, 2013). However, this perspective on IC has come under attack for its assumption that individual identities are shaped by national origins and that nation-states have homogeneous populations and therefore widely shared cultures (Holliday, 2010; Piller, 2017). This approach is particularly problematic today, given the forces of globalization, mass travel, and the ubiquity of online forms of communication and community-building. Individuals are increasingly diverse in their identities, belonging simultaneously to different social groupings, interest groups, and online communities (Larsen-Freeman, 2019a; Norton & Toohey, 2011).

The traditional approach to IC has been criticized as well for its Western orientation. The early history of the academic field was dominated by North American researchers. However, beginning towards the end of the 20th century, there have been significant contributions to the field from scholars from different areas. European scholars have contributed important new insights and approaches (Byram, 1997; Holliday, 2010; Hua, 2013; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009), as have Australian and New Zealand scholars (Piller, 2017; Schirato & Yell,

2002). Through the contributions of researchers from Africa, China, Latin America, and India, there has been a growing recognition that Western approaches to intercultural communication need to be supplemented – and in some cases corrected – through the different life experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives offered by non-Western scholars (Miike, 2007; Jia & Li, 2019).

Coming from the field of second language acquisition (SLA), a more nuanced and updated model of IC is represented in the work of Michael Byram (1997, 2011). His notion of intercultural communication competence (ICC) emphasizes the need for individuals to achieve critical cultural awareness, an ability to view/assess other cultures critically as well as one's own. Byram's model has been widely influential and is still frequently used today in research on IC, although often in modified form (Godwin-Jones, 2019b). At the same time, it too has been criticized for its assumption that culture is synonymous with political/geographical entities (Baker, 2015; Holliday, 2010). More recently, other scholars from the field of applied linguistics have contributed new perspectives on IC, especially with greater attention paid to intercultural pragmatics, applying conversation analysis to understanding intercultural interactions (Hua, 2013; McConachy, 2017; Piller, 2017).

The study of ELF is more recent (Hua, 2016). It coincides with the explosive spread of English as a world language, a phenomenon of historic proportions: "The domination and near-hegemony of English in international communication is unmatched in the history of our species" (Regan & Osborn, 2019, p. 85). As a result, L2 users of English now outnumber native speakers three to one (Baker, 2015; Regan & Osborn, 2019). That has important implications in terms of how we see English as a language and as a medium for intercultural exchange. Assuming the continued growth of English worldwide, ELF is a central way language will likely be used in the future, i.e., "as grounded in contextualized communication and discourses" (Baird, Baker, & Kitazawa, 2014, p. 12). The major context will be the online use of English, which in fact has increasingly become the preferred way many human beings communicate. ELF has been defined as "any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often only option" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). It is distinct from the study of World Englishes, which focuses on localized versions of English, such as Indian English (Larsen-Freeman, 2018).

The field of ELF has been somewhat contentious in that English language teaching emphasizes standard English language use, so that concerns have arisen (especially among English teachers) over introducing aspects of ELF into the classroom, as utterances and practices may represent nonstandard English usage (Seidlhofer, 2011). Critics of ELF as a research field have also expressed concern over the possible reification of ELF as a distinct variety of English (O'Regan, 2014; Park & Wee, 2015). In fact, ELF scholars have in recent years moved away from a primary concern with specifying linguistic forms that characterize the English used in that space towards identifying frequent patterns in interactions. The suggestion has been made that a better term for this phenomenon is "Lingua Franca English" in that the language is negotiated in use and not possible to describe a priori (Canagarajah, 2007; Pennycook, 2019). However, that term implies a distinct variety of English (like "World

English") with specific norms and forms, rather than the more appropriate understanding of ELF as, not a variety of English, but a set of practices adapting and aligning different varieties of English to establish communicative effectiveness and mutual intelligibility.

House (2014) replies to another controversy surrounding ELF, namely that "the dominant role of English as a lingua franca (ELF) is a menace to other languages, to multilingual communication and to the profession of translation and interpreting" (p. 363). She asserts that ELF functions as a useful, additional language, not as a substitute for other languages, "as these fulfil different, often affective and identificatory, functions" (p. 375). However, one should acknowledge that the role of English in particular cultures has led to "the promotion and maintenance of structural inequality" (Regan & Osborn, 2019, p. 86), given the lack of universal access to English learning opportunities. In that sense, English can serve not only, as argued here, a tool for bringing people together, but in an exclusionary fashion, "favoring particular people, countries, cultures, forms of knowledge, and possibilities of development" (Pennycook, 2019, p. 171). Just as there is a "digital divide" in technology access, a similar divide exists for English language learning, in situations in which for economic, geographic, political, or cultural reasons no instruction is available locally, or is insufficient. Studies have shown the consequences for political/economic justice, social mobility, and educational/employment opportunities (Ferguson, 2013; Ramanathan, 2005; Tollefson, 2000; Tupas, 2010)

One of the principal characteristics of much work in IC is the underlying assumption that intercultural conversations are likely to be problematic due to fundamental differences in cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors. In contrast, the emphasis in the study of ELF conversations has been on the ways in which conversants find means to communicate effectively despite personal, linguistic, or cultural differences (Hua, 2013). Logically following from that perspective has been an emphasis on the interactive processes of negotiation and adaptation. This aligns ELF research with studies in lingua francas (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2004) as well as in language use in contact zones (Canagarajah, 2013). While IC studies have largely started from a perspective of difference, ELF research stresses what is shared through processes of cooperation and accommodation (Baker, 2015; Hua, 2016). That necessarily leads to greater attention paid to language per se than is the case in IC studies. Indeed, in the latter field language has conventionally been treated as unproblematic (Baker, 2015; Piller, 2017). Widely used IC textbooks (especially in the USA) typically pay scant attention to language issues (Godwin-Jones, 2013).

Because research in ELF looks predominately at how English is used in conversational exchanges, researchers study and analyze actual examples of usage. This research has been aided by the collection of ELF corpora (large collections of analyzed language use), including the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE, 2013), the Corpus of English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings (ELFA, 2008), and the Asian Corpus of English (ACE, 2013). The largest collections of texts are in the areas of business and academic English use. ELF research has been criticized for a focus on "elite" speakers (Kramsch & Hua, 2016; Mauranen, 2017), given that English today is used by a large cross-section of humanity

as a lingua franca. Cogo (2015) offers a further cautionary note on extrapolating general ELF characteristics from corpora in that such data is presented without "contextual aspects of institutional culture, ideologies, and power relations" (p. 154). She highlights the need for ethnographic investigations of ELF exchanges that allow clearer evidence of institutional or hierarchical relationships (see Lin, 2019, for an example). Others have as well called for more consideration of how structures of power and inequality affect ELF exchanges (Hua, 2016; Kramsch & Hua, 2016; Piller, 2017). It is also the case that corpus data provide only a snapshot in time. Analysis of that data provides important information about a fixed historical moment but does little to reveal development over time.

New perspectives on language and culture through ELF

An examination of recent scholarly work in ELF shows how close analysis of exchanges provides new perspectives on language, especially issues of pragmatic language use, the dynamics of multilingualism, linguistic creativity, and cooperative communication strategies. Increasingly, scholars are focusing as well on the complex cultural interplay in ELF. The findings provide important insights into how linguistic and cultural negotiation and adaptation lay a foundation for the development of cross-cultural understanding.

Scholars of ELF initially focused on linguistic variations of English among speakers (Baker, 2015). In recent years there has been a shift to an examination of interactional practices and on how interactions in ELF are distinct linguistically and culturally from native speaker norms (Baker, 2015). Research today in ELF focuses largely on pragmatic behaviors, how mutually understandable and contextually appropriate language is jointly negotiated (House, 2014). Studies have shown that a range of strategies are deployed (Hülmbauer, 2013; Pietikäinen, 2017). Those include pre-emptive measures, in which speakers' awareness of potential mis- or non-understanding may lead to explanations of terms or references anticipated to be unfamiliar (Cogo & House, 2017). During the exchange a range of practices are commonly used to negotiate meaning. Those include repetition, rewording, elaborating, comprehension checks, or engaging in self-repair (Mauranen, 2017). Cogo and House (2017) point to the frequency of co-construction of utterances in ELF exchanges, which may include jointly completing sentences or searching together for the appropriate English word or construction. The authors also highlight the rich use of discourse markers, interjections, cooperative turn-taking, and back channeling (verbal or nonverbal encouragement), all devices to keep a conversation running smoothly.

The strategies discussed in Cogo and House (2017) demonstrate the spirit of cooperation typically invoked in ELF exchanges. At the same time, they contribute to building a spirit of solidarity and cooperation among the conversants (House, 2014). In that sense, ELF conversations do not place importance on adherence to native speaker norms, but instead emphasize pragmatic competencies, i.e., the ability to use language to communicate effectively and appropriately in a given real-world context (Ellis, 2019; Ortega, 2019). Communicative appropriateness is more important in ELF than linguistic accuracy or adherence to grammatical

rules. The negotiation and adaptation that are hallmarks of ELF point to the dynamics of interaction between individual speakers' idiolects (individual modes of language use) and commonly and generally accepted standards of usage (Larsen-Freeman, 2018; Mauranen, 2017).

ELF conversations can involve different uses of standard English constructions or lexis or even include neologisms. Those might be fairly easily understandable, such as the creation of the word "prepone" as an analog to postpone (cited in Hülmbauer, 2013). In other cases, there might be an idiomatic expression used differently than in native-speaker speech or instances of pragmatic transfer of idioms or conventionalized language from a conversant's L1 (multiple examples in Hülmbauer, 2013; Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019; Hua, 2015). Cogo and House (2017) provide the case of a Japanese L1 speaker translating into English the Japanese idiom "stepping on the stones" (meaning to take care), first introduced in the conversation with a pre-emptive explanation, followed by discussion and then further clarification. The dynamics of how or if such linguistic transformations and innovations occur will depend on the conversational context. The fact that "linguistic structures reflect the demands of communication" (Mauranen, 2017, p. 13) aligns with usage-based theories of language (MacWhinney, 2005). Instead of relying on a priori resources, needed resources are "discovered as they emerge from the interaction" (Mauranen, 2017, p. 15).

The process of flexible, in situ language use in ELF makes it difficult to characterize generally the nature of intercultural pragmatics at play in conversations. Context will play a determining role:

> Specifying what is, or is not, socially acceptable or appropriate is not possible in anything but the most general, obvious and tentative manner. The context or the communicative event itself is crucial to understanding what is considered appropriate amongst the participants and this can only be established in retrospect. Prescribing a set of rules of social norms is as likely to hinder successful communication as it is to aid it. (Baker, 2015, p. 138).

Predicting the course of ELF conversations is problematic, as the twists and turns of a conversation will be determined on the fly through the personal, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, attitudes, and knowledge of the conversants. The direction in which a conversation moves depends as well on contextual factors, including the physical setting (or online tool/service being used), the personal or community relationships/memberships, and possible social/political positioning. Henry (2016) in studying language issues among migrants to Sweden demonstrates how the use of ELF or Swedish is shaped by contextual factors, and "how, in their language choices, they evaluate, relate to and resist macro-social structures" (p. 442). Interestingly, the study also shows how different varieties of English are shown to offer different communicative opportunities for migrants. A study of Filipino domestic workers and their Hong Kongese employers demonstrates how power relations affect ELF use (Kwan & Dunworth, 2016) to the extent that the accommodating elements identified as

typifying ELF exchanges are often missing: "The pragmatic strategies that have been described within the literature for English as a lingua franca contexts may be subjected to contextual factors that distort the cooperative goals that have been identified within that paradigm" (p. 14). This is a reminder that while frequent patterns of communicative practice in ELF have been identified in research studies, those have mostly represented relatively homogenous populations from a socio-economic perspective. Fortunately, we have begun to see more studies dealing with more marginalized communities, particular migrants (Canagarajah, 2013; Guido, 2008, 2017, 2019).

The complexity and unpredictability likely in ELF encounters call for interlocutors to be flexible and accommodating in their interactions with other speakers. Part of the negotiation process may involve the participants' backgrounds of linguistic and social experiences related to learning English:

> What is shared in ELF interactions that enables the participants to refer to the language as English is related to social experience rather than abstract rules. In many cases these shared experiences will be learning English as a subject at school and then later engaging with wider communities which also make use of English. Thus, ELF users share overlapping repertories of communicative practices and the associated conventionalised, but adaptable and variable, linguistic forms which form part of these practices. (Baird, Baker, & Kitazawa, 2014, p. 182).

Because ELF speakers share experiences and status as English learners, native speakers of English (especially monolinguals), accustomed to standard norms of usage, may have a harder time adjusting than is true for L2 English speakers. The move referenced in the citation above away from the concept of competence to that of a set of communicative repertoires has been widely embraced in ELF as well as in SLA research generally (Blommaert, 2010; Busch, 2012; Hua, 2013). That term emphasizes the fact that speakers adapt their English to specific contexts, so that language use is typically fluid and variable. That process is demonstrated in Hardy (2016), which show how different contexts of use shape language choice and different pragmatic practices of migrants in Sweden. This emergentist view of language has its roots in Hopper's concept of emergent grammar (1987), the idea that rules of grammar come about as language is spoken and used, so that learning a language is not a question of acquiring grammatical structures but of expanding a repertoire of communicative contexts (Baird, Baker, & Kitazawa, 2014). A similar conception is that of language as a set of mobile semiotic resources (Blommaert, 2010, p. 43), which emphasizes the dynamics of language movement and exchange, and also points to resources beyond verbal language, i.e., non-verbal signs and actions.

Another aspect of ELF that has been a subject of recent research is its multilingual character (Jenkins, 2017; Mauranen, 2017). ELF conversations are understood to be between multilinguals, although monolingual English speakers may be present as well. The other languages spoken or understood may be referenced in ELF conversations. Most commonly,

that will involve code-switching, with words or expressions from the other languages integrated into the English utterances. Here too, conversational analysis has demonstrated the extent to which that occurs. Cogo and House (2017) point out that this happens most frequently among speakers of the same first language (L1). Code-switching into the L1 may occur particularly in routinized parts of a conversation, such as small talk or conversation closings (Cogo & House, 2017). Much code-switching may be automatic and unconscious or may be used to clarify expressions arising in the conversation. Interestingly, Cogo (2009) found that interactants sometimes switch not to their L1, but to a shared third language.

Because ELF is used in multilingual contexts, a speaker's use of L1 expressions is typically integrated seamlessly into a conversation. In some cases, that may mean that the L1 reference was understood; in other cases, it may be that a let-it-pass approach is taken out of politeness, face-saving, or an assumption that the meaning is not significant to the conversation (Baker, 2015; Canagarajah, 2013). Code-switching, along with possible non-standard English constructions, lead to ELF dialogs being potentially quite different from what one would encounter in those among monolingual English speakers. What might be viewed as incorrect or non-standard usage, is, from an ELF perspective, negotiated meaning-making using all available resources, i.e., a creative and flexible process:

> Instead of applying rules, there is a tendency for speakers to reuse existing forms as much as possible, even if the forms already have other functions. This process of bricolage works in both directions. Since ELF interactions are multilingual, it is possible not only for inventions to surface in English, but also for new forms to be adopted into the contact language (Larsen-Freeman, 2018, p. 86).

The use of English as a lingua franca focuses attention not on what is considered proper English according to native speaker norms, but what is contextually appropriate. EFL speakers are not deficient English speakers, but linguistic innovators (Mauranen, 2018). ELF is a prime example of language development arising out of language use (Larsen-Freeman, 2018). Usage-based linguistics has shown that the two go hand-in-hand (Ellis, 2019; Ortega, 2017).

Code-switching in the use of ELF can clearly occur for linguistic reasons, to clarify or explain, but can also have social aspects. That can include establishing a sense of solidarity as non-native English speakers and thereby creating an intercultural identity (Cogo & House, 2017). In IC research, cultural identities are often treated as fixed, identical to a person's national origin and as a crucial factor in IC exchanges. In contrast, ELF has sometimes been seen as culturally neutral (discussion in Baker, 2015). As the phenomenon of code-switching suggests, that is hardly the case. Recent research has shown how ELF is both multilingual and multicultural (Baker, 2015; Hua, 2016; Mauranen, 2017). In using one language, conversants do not shut off access to other languages they know. The complex linguistic and cultural interactions in code-switching as well as the integration of other modes of expression (images, video, nonverbal communication) have led scholars to use the terms of translingual

practice (Canagarajah, 2013) or translanguaging (Garcia & Li, 2014; Li, 2018) to describe this dynamic mix of modes and language:

> Humans make meaning by assembling linguistic signs but also by pooling language (and all their languages) together with whatever other bits of semiotic repertoire they have, to the point that meaning making is always multisensory, multimodal, and always involving much more than language. (Ortega, 2017, pp. 290–291)

Translanguaging has been shown to be prevalent today, both in face-to-face and in online conversations (Li & Ho, 2018). The phenomenon is particularly applicable to ELF in that speakers' goal is to communicate through whatever means are most effective, which in many cases extends beyond standard English lexis and structures, to embrace innovative linguistic forms, borrowed expressions from other languages, as well as non-verbal communication in terms of paralanguage, discourse markers, facial expressions, or body language (see Baumgarten, & House, 2010; House, 2013). Intelligibility is contextually determined and does not rely solely on verbal utterances, as Canagarajah (2013) describes in his study of African skilled migrants: "Communication doesn't rely on words alone but alignment of different contextual, environmental, and ecological affordances for meaning making. Words are matched with gestures, objects, setting, and topic" (p. 85). The author provides case studies in English-language contact zones in which conversations extend well beyond English, incorporating multiple other languages.

This phenomenon of the fluid mixing of languages and cultures has been described as well using the term superdiversity (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). A number of studies have shown how translingual practices manifest characteristics identified with this concept, namely mobility, complexity, and unpredictability (Bloomaert, 2013), such as the remixing of Japanese manga in Sweden (Jonsson & Muhonen, 2014) or the linguistic complexity of Dutch-Chinese young people using those languages plus English (Li & Juffermans, 2011). A striking example is that of a hip-hop singer in rural China who raps in a combination of local dialect, Mandarin, and English, and posts his creations on the Internet (Wang, 2012).

Translanguaging inevitably brings into play cultural practices and behaviors associated with those languages. The interconnection between language and culture has been richly documented, going back to Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, and more recently in the work of Agar (1994) and Risager (2005) on languaculture, a term which characterizes language and culture as inseparable. In ELF the cultural backdrop is represented not only by the other languages spoken by the interlocutors, but also by Anglophone culture (Baker, 2015). The cultural content of most commercial English language textbooks centers on first-circle countries, with emphasis normally on life in Great Britain or the USA (Kachru, 1992, 2006); that is reflected in English language instruction worldwide (Widdowson, 2003). Added to that, as Kramsch (2016) points out, is exposure through popular and online media, much of which originates in and reflects Anglophone cultures. While that backdrop may be common among English L2 learners, the specificities in terms of Anglophone cultures will

vary, based on national or regional English language curricula. In ELF exchanges, cultural knowledge among participants cannot be automatically assumed, but rather is something negotiated and emerging. Some cultural references will likely need explanations while others may be universally recognizable through global popular youth culture.

ELF conversations are prime examples of the dynamics occurring in intercultural communication. The term interculturality has been used to describe the fluidity and flexibility found in these exchanges in terms of language and culture (Hua, 2013). As practiced by Hua (2013, 2016) studies of interculturality focus on how participants in IC "make (aspects of) cultural identities relevant or irrelevant to interactions through the interplay of language use and social relationships" (Hua, 2015, p. 72). Her analysis shows how nationality or ethnicity can often be a topic raised by ELF speakers negotiating different views and attitudes towards their own and others' cultural identities. Baker (2015) proposed a similar concept, intercultural awareness (ICA). ICA builds on Byram's framework, especially the concept of critical cultural awareness, but moves to a more nuanced view of the relationship between language and culture, incorporating "an understanding of the fluid, complex and emergent nature of the relationship between language and culture in intercultural communication through ELF" (p. 163). The term intercultural, however, implies that the interaction is happening somewhere between ("inter-") two languacultures. That, however, as we have seen, oversimplifies the linguistic and cultural multiplicity characteristic of such exchanges.

Baker and Sangiamchit recently (2019) have suggested the use of the term transculturality to characterize ELF exchanges, in that it points to the fact that the conversations occur across and through a variety of cultures. In fact, usage of this term is not new. Welsh (1999) argued in is favor, given the increasing interaction of diverse social influences in today's world. Baker and Sangiamchit (2019) describe transcultural communication as "communication where interactants move through and across, rather than in-between, cultural and linguistic boundaries, thus, named languages and cultures can no longer be taken for granted and in the process borders become blurred, transgressed and transcended" (p. 163). Baker and Sangiamchit (2019) point to a "trans- turn" in applied linguistics and intercultural communication research (i.e. transcultural, translanguaging, transnational, transmodality):

> The trans prefix has been adopted to emphasise dynamic and fluid perspective on languages and modalities, where distinctions between separate named languages (e.g. English) and modes cannot be easily maintained, and where artificially isolating and delineating different elements may restrict a more holistic understanding of communicative practices and meanings (p. 471).

While "intercultural" has a firm foothold in research and in popular culture (and therefore is referenced in this article), it may be time to start moving to a concept which better describes the dynamism and complexity of today's cultural landscape.

Language and culture as complex systems

A widely recognized limitation of initial theories of IC, many of which persist today in professional and educational contexts, is the tendency to reduce culture to a pre-determined set of characteristics, drawn broadly based on perceived national traits (Baker, 2015; Holliday, 2010). That kind of essentialism and reductionism is not viable in the dynamic and fluid cultural landscape of today, as the term transculturality implies (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019).

One of the benefits of using the term transculturality is that it points to the complexity of intercultural communication in ELF exchanges. That is true first in a conventional sense of the word, namely that such interactions are complicated and challenging to describe and analyze. But it also is useful here to invoke a different sense of complexity, namely that represented by complexity theory (CT), also known as complex dynamic systems. This is a theoretical framework or metatheory originating in the natural sciences but since widely applied in the social sciences as well (Mitchell, 2009; Osberg, & Biesta, 2010). In linguistics, the use of CT to describe language and language learning dates back to the seminal work of Larsen-Freeman (1997). It has since been widely applied in the fields of IC (Baker, 2015), ELF (Baird, Baker, & Kitazawa, 2014), and online language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2018a). Originating in chaos theory as applied to mathematics and physics, CT seeks to describe the formation and development of phenomena which consist of different but interrelated systems. It emphasizes the unpredictability of complex systems in that, due to the interconnectivity of sub-systems, minor changes in conditions can have major and surprising effects. That has been popularized in the butterfly effect, the idea that a minor event, such as the flapping of a butterfly's wings, could have oversized consequences, such as changing weather conditions. Different initial conditions may lead to different outcomes, depending on contact with variable factors in the environment. This is an idea related to the concept of Umwelten (portion of the environment important to a species) by biological pioneer Jakob von Uexküll (1909), referencing the dynamic relationship between organisms and their environments (Fraser, 2001). It aligns as well with theories around enactivism (Maurenen, 2017) and emergentism (Ellis, 2019). CT emphasizes the likelihood of continuous change as environmental factors lead to adaptation and the eventual emergence of conditions and outcomes that may vary considerably from case to case.

That human language can be understood as a complex system has been convincingly demonstrated by Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) and others (de Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007; Five Graces Group, 2009). Language development in both first and second language is not a linear process. Our ability in a given language depends on a whole range of variables, including, but not limited to, the nature and extent of our exposure to the language, our need/motivation to learn it, the native language (and other languages) we speak, and our age/aptitude for language learning. Individual differences among learners itself has been shown to be highly variable (Dörnyei, 2009), rather than fixed and static, as a set of inborn "good learner" attributes. That variability has only increased today with the wide availability of online language learning opportunities (Godwin-Jones, 2018a).

This complex, dynamic view of language in linguistic research has increasingly displaced the traditional treatment of language as a set of fixed rules. Through research in corpus linguistics and studies relying on conversation analysis, linguists have embraced a usage-based model of language, which emphasizes the central role of patterns, frequently used combinations of words which over time become sedimented into common usage: "Learning a language involves the learning of constructions. These are the form-function mappings that are conventionalized as ways to express meanings in a speech community. Constructions range from morphemes—the smallest pairing of form and meaning in language—to words, phrases, and syntactic frames" (Ellis, 2019, p. 50). This dynamic can be seen in the incremental development of lexical knowledge, as individual words are learned first in their literal meaning, then in collocations, and finally as used within idiomatic expressions (see Godwin-Jones, 2018b).

If language is complex and dynamic, that applies all the more to culture. This has been increasingly recognized in research in IC (Baker, 2015; Holliday, 2010) and is truer today than at any other time. Nation-states have lost much of their cultural homogeneity through the combined forces of globalization, mass migration, and the growth of online communities. Identity formation has become much more dynamic than in the past, with multiple and diverse influences through interactions with and participation/membership in different social groups having become a characteristic of most lived experiences. Cultural identities are thus developed in a dynamic, non-linear fashion. Baker (2015) provides this view of culture from a CT perspective:

> We can conceptualise culture as a complex social system, as opposed to natural system, that emerges through individuals' joint participation in the world giving rise to sets of shared knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes and practices. This sharedness comes about through the social sedimentation of particular sets or systems of knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes and practices in which repeated usage gives rise to the emergence of norms and patterns. (p. 71).

When individuals interact, they draw on different cultural systems (sets of beliefs, norms, and behaviors). Those cultural backgrounds may be embodied in cultural schemas, set, learned/conditioned combinations of language and behaviors instinctively used in particular situations (Hua, 2013, 2015). However, individuals are also "free to ignore these norms or they may follow the norms, but reject the beliefs" (Baker, 2015, p. 73). Their cultural orientation may be affected as well through perspectives shared by conversation partners. Contrary to assumptions often made in IC scholarship, individuals engaging with cultural others generally have an awareness of that fact and will therefore adjust their linguistic and cultural orientations accordingly. That has been shown to be particularly the case in ELF (Baker, 2015).

One of the benefits of applying CT to ELF is the recognition of the dangers of reductionism and simplification, as often seen in IC research (Holliday, 2010; Piller, 2017). Baker

and Sangiamchit (2019) point out that when referencing culture, simplification can lead to a slippery slope: simplification => generalization => stereotyping => insensitivity => caricatures. That is a recipe for prejudice and overt racism. Simplification and essentialism in IC have often taken the form of setting out dichotomies (i.e., individualism versus collectivism). Applying dichotomies to ELF oversimplifies the dynamics of the exchanges:

> Dichotomising along the lines of standard vs. non-standard, ENL/normative vs. ELF/expressive or perhaps worse creative vs. conforming is to vastly oversimplify the linguacultural landscapes in which language is performed, the backgrounds and roles of the interlocutors, and the contextual identification processes involved in interactions. (Larsen-Freeman, 2017, p. 157).

Not characterizing speech and behaviors as right or wrong is especially important in ELF. That includes categorizations like correct and incorrect in terms of grammar. Larsen-Freeman (2013) advocates moving away from viewing "grammar as a decontextualized body of knowledge, a static system of rules, rather than experiencing it as a dynamic system interacting with the environment, resulting from speakers' choices" (p. 117). A rule-bound understanding of grammar can make it more difficult to apply that knowledge in actual language usage. That complexity has not generally been recognized in IC studies.

Given the practical origins of IC – the need to have diplomats engage effectively with foreign cultures — the tendency has been to find simple and easily understood responses to cross-cultural communication. Such pat answers are appealing in their simplicity but belie the nature of our world today. National cultures are not unchanging and unified. Moreover, national origin is only an initial orientation point among others (Palfreyman, 2013). In contact with others, face-to-face, in media reports, or in online encounters, individuals are affected by many different viewpoints and sets of values and behaviors. This is especially characteristic of ELF exchanges:

> Cultural characterisations emerge from a conglomeration of multiple individual interactions but are not reducible to those individual interactions. Crucially, this entails that while cultural characterisations may influence individuals they cannot be read directly back to those individuals. In other words, a British person may be influenced by the notion of ‘British culture’ (to take a national cultural characterisation) and in turn their interactions may contribute to a characterisation of British culture, but their actions, beliefs and values are not synonymous with British culture. Such a dynamic view of culture means that any cultural characterisation is in a constant state of emergence but never finalised with continuous change and adaptation. (Baker, 2017, p. 29).

Individuals are simultaneously members of many different social groupings – some fleeting and inconsequential, others long-term and meaningful – on a variety of size and geographical scales: local, regional, national, international, online. Hence interactions are

complex and unpredictable. Hua (2016) emphasizes that in IC, negotiation occurs not only in terms of linguistic forms, but also in cultural frames of reference, which each participant brings into the mix. She advocates that IC be "primarily concerned with how individuals, in order to achieve their communication goals, negotiate cultural or linguistic differences which may be perceived relevant by at least one party in the interaction" (Hua, 2015, p. 65). The author emphasizes that, in studying IC interactions, the focus be on how the processes of negotiation and adaptation play out. Using this approach, Hua (2015) provides conversation analysis of exchanges in which individuals move in and out of cultural frames in order to accommodate communication and establish a spirit of cooperation and solidarity:

> We are able to focus on individuals taking part in interactions along with their agency rather than cultural groups, the here-and-now nature of interactions rather than assumed or predicted course of actions, the resources individuals bring with them rather than problems, and the process rather than the outcome. (Hua, 2015, p. 84).

We can describe an IC or ELF exchange in retrospect, but hardly predict its flow, given the interplay of negotiated identities and cultural frames of reference. Interactions need to be analyzed in context in order to discover how individuals make use of their different linguistic and cultural resources to negotiate understanding as well as to deal with difference (see Kramsch & Hua, 2020).

IC and ELF in online environments

We have seen that to understand the interplay of language and culture today, it can be helpful to use the perspectives gained from the concept of transculturality and from the metatheory of complex dynamic systems. Individuals' linguistic and cultural knowledge and practices are shaped by an array of interconnected factors, resulting in emergent identities that vary considerably and are not likely to be easily pigeonholed as "German", "Thai", or other nationalities. At the same time, individuals' use of English will be shaped by their initial learning and subsequent experiences with the language, but also through specific context and environment, as well as affected by other languages spoken. An area where transculturality and complexity are in abundant evidence is in online interactions. Given the instant connectivity online to people from any given cultural or linguistic background, the Internet today has become for many the primary contact zone with cultural others (Pratt, 1991; Canagarajah, 2013).

Most recent studies of ELF analyze exchanges recorded in corpora representing face-to-face conversations. Many of the characteristics of ELF emanating from those studies apply to language use online as well. However, the online space has significant differences as well, with a dynamic that is characterized by even greater multilingualism and by multimodal communication options through the integration of images, sound, and video (Li & Ho,

2018). Baker and Sangiamchit (2019) describe the Internet as a "superdiverse space per excellence" (p. 474). The Internet provides opportunities for encountering a greater diversity of people and cultures, yet it also offers the possibility of finding an affinity group tailored to ones personal interests. We will be looking in turn at three specific areas of online activity involving ELF exchanges: social networks, telecollaboration, and informal language learning. The pedagogical implications of the availability and usefulness of online resources for the development of ELF and IC will be discussed as well.

Social networks

Online social networks are used worldwide and have become especially popular since the rise of smartphones (first Apple iPhone in 2007), as those devices provide a means to be continuously online, responding to posts and staying in touch with friends and family (Godwin-Jones, 2017). Social network tools/services (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) can bring people together, as well as, as we have seen in recent times, stoke divisions. If used within educational settings, monitoring and counseling are highly advisable. Studies have shown that when used appropriately, social media can lead to both language gains and boost transcultural competence, including Facebook (Jonsson & Muhonen, 2014; Kulavuz-Onal & Vásquez, 2018), Twitter (Baz & İşisağ, 2018; Rosell-Aguilar, 2018), Instagram (Al-Kandari, Al-Hunaiyyan, & Al-Hajri,) and even Tumblr (Hillman, Procyk, & Neustaedter, 2014).

Recent studies have highlighted the variability of situations in which language is used in Facebook, one of the most widely use social networks (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019; Sangiamchi, 2017). Facebook users read friends' posts, stories in their newsfeed, and follow links that may take them to resources outside the social network. They write their own initial posts, comment on those by others, and may initiate individual chats with other Facebook users. Depending on the individual user, language use may be entirely or nearly so in the L1. For ELF users, however, the language tends to be richly multilingual. That may mean posts both in the L1 and in English as well as combining expressions from different languages.

As an example of a transcultural ELF Facebook exchange, Sangiamchit (2017) provides an example from a Facebook messenger exchange, based on a cartoon shared by one of the participants. The exchange is in English between speakers of different L1s (From India, Thailand, and Columbia) and includes an interjection in Spanish. That use of a different language does not disturb the flow of the conversation, and indeed is not remarked upon by the others. Baker and Sangiamchit (2019) provide the transcript of an exchange, in which a young Thai posts a YouTube clip on his Facebook wall of an ironic music video made on the launch of the latest iPhone in Thailand. As the video is primarily in Thai and contains a number of linguistic puns and jokes (revolving around the iPhone and the Thai word for buffalo), it was intended for other Thais. However, a Greek Facebook friend liked the video and asked about it, which led to a lengthy exchange involving multiple local and global references, exhibiting "multiple, overlapping cultural scales simultaneously present ranging from the global scales (iPhone), regional (Asian images of buffaloes) and national (Thai, Philippines) and local" (p. 479). Added to those references are less geographically defined

groups such as working class, political protest music, and youth culture. Such examples point to the prevalence online of translanguaging:

> The digital wilds are so pervasively multilingual in many cases (e.g., when we see large translocal groups of friends on Facebook with different linguistic repertoires and language ideologies) that so-called monolingual members in those affinity spaces learn to cope, let it pass, or even enjoy and celebrate multiple languages and translanguaging. They can do this by ignoring messages in languages they do not understand, by contenting themselves with only partial comprehension of those messages, or by using the automated translation function if the application has one. (Ortega, 2017, p. 296)

Sangiamchit (2017) and others have pointed as well to the multimodal character of social networks today. Facebook users post and respond to photos and videos and may engage in audio and video exchanges. That is true of other services as well, such as Twitter or Instagram. This multimodality creates a rich semiotic environment, with visual, auditory, and symbolic means to express meaning and to act out identities. For ELF users, this is a further option to illustrate meaning nonverbally (emoticons, thumbs up, pictorial responses). In that way verbal ability in this environment is just one aspect of communicative competence.

Telecollaboration

Telecollaboration, also known as virtual exchange, involves students, either on their own or more commonly in an organized class environment, communicating with one another online (Avgousti, 2018; Çiftçi & Savaş, 2018; O'Dowd, Sauro, & Spector-Cohen, 2020). Telecollaboration has been widely used in language instruction, with the tandem model having been used most frequently (Godwin-Jones, 2019b). That involves students who are learning each other's L1 engaging in chat sessions conducted half the time in each language. The tandem partners serve as a conversation partner and a cultural informant. Such exchanges were initially done asynchronously, through email, but today typically are conducted over online video. That has been enabled by the popularity of video-capable mobile devices as well as by free videoconferencing/messenger tools such as Skype or WhatsApp.

While originating in language learning environments, telecollaboration has become widely used in other domains, including political science, health-related fields, or environmental studies (Moore & Simon, 2015; O'Dowd, 2016). One of the benefits of virtual exchanges is the opportunity that they provide to engage with content through different cultural lenses. Depending on how such exchanges are set up, that might include de facto team teaching, so that students have the opportunity to be exposed to contrasting instructional methods and pedagogical models (O'Dowd, Sauro, & Spector-Cohen, 2020). In the process, virtual exchanges offer opportunities for engaging in intercultural communication. In fact, using telecollaboration for furthering intercultural understanding and competence has become a major goal for many using this tool (Godwin-Jones, 2019b). That includes exchanges with

the principal purpose of enhancing language proficiency, as well as those focusing on a particular content area (Lewis & O'Dowd, 2016).

Many exchanges today are conducted in ELF. They might be for the purpose of English language practice or with other instructional goals in mind. Although traditionally telecollaboration has involved a class to class exchange between two cooperating institutions, increasingly multilateral exchanges have become common. The Soliya project, for example, involves students from a variety of cultures and focuses on enhancing mutual understanding between inhabitants of the Middle East and those from Western countries. In the European Union, the Erasmus+ pre-mobility programs also feature ELF exchanges, with the goal of preparing students for study abroad (Batardière, Giralt, Jeanneau, Le-Baron-Earle, & O'Regan, 2019). One of the lessons from practice and research in this area is that the process of intercultural learning is considerably enhanced if participants are provided the means for reflecting on their experiences. In the Cultura exchanges, initiated at MIT, students discuss their experiences in online forums as well as through in-class discussions (Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet, 2001).

The Soliya project uses trained mediators to facilitate interactions and to encourage thoughtful responses (Helm, 2013, 2018). Given the potentially contentious nature of topics involving the Middle East one can understand the appropriateness of mediation for such an undertaking. However, no matter the cultural backgrounds of the participants, there is always the possibility for misunderstandings to arise, which if unmonitored and undiscussed, could lead to hurt feelings and possibly even reinforced stereotypes. It may be that critical incidents, where communication breaks down or raw feelings are exposed, can serve as "rich points" (Agar, 1994), illuminating key cultural behaviors and values. Indeed, some have argued that exchanges should not just focus on "safe" topics such as food, festivals, or youth culture, but instead include more controversial political or social issues (see Lenkaitis & & Loranc-Paszylk, 2019). Telecollabortion involves typically students from two different cultural backgrounds and thus there is a natural tendency for participants to assume a cultural dichotomy. That is a further reason for participants to engage in thoughtful reflection and discussion, to expand from the duality involved to a transcultural dimension. Recent studies have discussed that process, advocating for exchanges to encourage a sense of global citizenship (Baker, 2015; O'Dowd, 2019; O'Dowd, Sauro, & Spector-Cohen, 2020). That can translate into participants seeking opportunities for both local and global engagement as citizens, with the hope that they develop a sense of social responsibility (Lenkaitis, & Loranc-Paszylk, 2019). Given the fact that it is normally young people engaged in virtual exchange, those cross-cultural learning experiences early in life may prove to be helpful in subsequent life experiences by becoming more accustomed to and accepting of cultural difference.

Informal language learning

In recent years there have been a number of studies which explore independent, often autonomous, language learning through the use of online tools, services, and communities. This phenomenon has been most noticeable for English, for which more online resources are

available then for any other language. Studies have shown how learner/users engage deeply with English language media such as pop songs, television series, or full-length films (Kusyk, 2017; Sockett, 2014; Sundqvist, P., & Sylvén, 2016). These materials are available worldwide for free or through inexpensive streaming services such as YouTube or Spotify, as well as through subscription services like Netflix or Hulu. English user/learners engage in these activities – and others involving use of English such as social networks – not principally for language learning, but for entertainment or socialization. However, a byproduct of these activities is an enhancement of English language skills and making contact with other ELF users.

Users are more motivated to engage in such activities in comparison to formal language instruction, and therefore willingly seek out opportunities to watch or listen, resulting in more contact time with English. This is enhanced through the availability of watching entire series of a TV show or binge-watching a whole season of episodes. Particularly effective are programs such as soap operas or situation comedies, as the same characters reappear in each episode, so that users tend to hear similar language and expressions repeated, often in slightly different contexts (Sockett, 2014). This process of iteration has been shown to be effective, especially in lexical development, and is in line with usage-based linguistics, which emphasizes the role of language chunks (Godwin-Jones, 2019b; Larsen-Freeman, 2013). Online videos are often available with subtitles (in multiple languages), offering in that way scaffolded learning, through students turning subtitles on and off, or switching from their L1 to English subtitles (Sockett, 2014). Often users will not only watch videos but also discuss them online. That may happen, for example through reading and writing comments on YouTube or on other video services, a process that brings individuals together using ELF. This process has been shown to foster IC competence (Benson, 2015). That is the case as well for vlogging (video blogging), connecting with others through recording and sharing short personal videos (Combe & Codreanu, 2016).

In addition to using the video channels discussed above, users can follow their own interests to discover and interact with online artifacts or communities that offer exposure to English. Popular music might offer one such avenue, with fans listening repeatedly to songs and possibly interacting with the lyrics, typically easily available online today (Sockett, 2014). While engagement with audio or video media clearly helps develop receptive skills in English, studies have shown as well gains in productive language skills (writing, speaking) through extensive engagement with media (Scholz & Schulze, 2017). It is also the case that media consumption can lead to active involvement with sites and communities connected to artists, actors, or storylines. That might involve engaging in fanfiction, in which fans of particular books (Harry Potter) or movies (Star Wars) read and write their own sequels or offshoots (Sauro, 2017). Fanfiction activities typically involve fans from a variety of national origins and languages, most often conversing, reading, and writing in English. Those activities therefore offer rich opportunities for transcultural engagement (examples in Black, 2006; Sauro, 2017).

Implications for English language instruction

Language development through online resources and communities provides an ideal illustration of complex dynamic systems (Godwin-Jones, 2018a). Users today, particularly in English, have such a wide range of possible L2 exposure online that individual learning trajectories are likely to vary widely. There are a good many factors which will impact the trajectory, including a learner's initial level of proficiency, interest in finding appropriate online resources, and the time available to engage in such activities. Studies have shown that individual users' activity levels tend to be highly variable – and therefore learning – may vary as well. Language learning is never a simple, linear process. That is even more the case for the development of intercultural competence. Language learning involves cognitive, emotional, and social components, while attitudes towards other cultures are potentially subject to even more influences, particularly from posts and news reports in social and other media.

One should add, that access to online services and materials by English learners should not be seen as a universal given. The digital divide, deriving from economic inequality, means that available or affordable online access varies substantially, not just from one country to another, but within a country as well, with minority group and rural communities typically having less access. For contexts in which online access is routine, myriad opportunities for online engagement with English language materials and with other English learners provide resources which English teachers can ill afford to ignore. As we have seen, that engagement can occur in peer interactions – ELF conversations through social media or through organized virtual exchanges. Additionally, English learners can build language skills through accessing English language media online. The fact that engaging in such activities provides socialization and entertainment can lead to deeper involvement with materials and with English. Substantial emotional commitment has been shown to lead to increased motivation and greater linguistic uptake (Norton & Toohey, 2011). That emotional connection is more likely through the medium of video, which supplies an immediacy and verisimilitude generally lacking in written materials. The cultural elements embedded in multimedia content are likely to be more memorable as well. Integrating the use of online materials into English language instruction aligns as well with the lived experiences of many young people today:

> As educators we need ways to appreciate and facilitate what learners may be bringing to the table. Students are online in our classes, and their offline lives are part of their online activities. They are sitting in our classes, watching us (now and then), checking their mobile devices (more often), and living in multiple linguistic, cultural, and spatial worlds. Varied modes of popular culture form not just a backdrop to their daily lives, not just a pastime when they are not doing something else, but a fabric around which parts of their lives are built (Pennycook, 2019, p. 170). Given that dynamic, an argument can be made for integrating directly into the classroom the most widely used devices for online access – smartphones (Godwin-Jones, 2018d).

Young English learners are likely to find English language materials on their own. However, given the plethora of options today – with an ever-increasing number of video streaming services, for example – guidance or recommendations can be helpful. That could come through peers or through online reports or reviews. English teachers can play an important role by encouraging students to seek out and use online learning opportunities. Modeling their use in class can provide useful access information and imbue extramural language activities with a stamp of academic validity. Useful as well are discussions in class or online about language learning experiences. Such conversations can range from basic topics such as the linguistic benefits of different online resources to deeper discussions about the embedded cultural content. These practices are important in leading students to reflect on interactions with online partners and communities, so as to foster greater understanding of cultural issues. This is particularly the case, as we have seen, when students engage in telecollaboration.

By encouraging and integrating online resources in ELF communities into formal language instruction, English teachers embrace an ecological approach to language learning and intercultural competence. Increasingly, formal language instruction is one component of a larger language learning system which can include local communities as well as online resources. Formal and informal language learning can be reciprocally beneficial, as Canagarajah (2013) comments: "We have to ask how we can let students bring into the classroom the dispositions and competencies they have already developed richly outside the classroom" (p. 99). A benefit of this approach is that it can encourage students to become autonomous language learners as well as to develop the sense that they are members of a larger ELF community (Godwin-Jones, 2019a). That can build confidence, important for both a learner's self-image and for life-long learning. Given how deeply culture is embedded in language (and vice versa), it can be argued that language learning, among all academic fields, supplies a uniquely advantageous vehicle for developing intercultural understanding (Levine, 2020). Providing exposure to online language use, contact with other English user-learners in an extramural setting, and opportunities for reflection on experiences can help develop habits and practices that can not only improve English language skills, but potentially develop meta-linguistic insights that can help in learning other languages in the future.

At the same time, there are potential issues with online resources that need to be addressed. Kramsch and Hua (2016), for example, list several concerns in the use of online resources for language and culture learning. Specifically, they raise doubts over the transferability of communicative skills from online to face-to-face, an issue connected with the contextual nature of learning (see Larsen-Freeman, 2016). Kramsch and Hua (2016) also express concerns over the potential lack of privacy in participation in online communities. They caution as well about the potential for the development of narcissism in social media, as well as a possible undue influence of peers. We know as well that online activities can become addictive. Additionally, there is the problem of cyberbullying and online harassment, as well as the ever-present issue of widespread mis- and disinformation. These concerns make it all

the more important that online ELF activities, whenever possible, be monitored and discussed in instructional settings. That includes the possibility for students to be provided with safe access options to report concerns and possible abuse.

ELF occurs in many different contexts, from brief dialogs in service encounters to semi-fixed environments such as class lectures to more permanent communities of practice (Cogo, 2015). The context will shape linguistic and cultural interaction, which could offer significant contrast between first encounters with individuals compared to conversations within regularly meeting communities. Given that reality, English teachers would be well-advised to prepare students for the linguistic and cultural diversity and variability they are likely to encounter in their English use, i.e., viewing language as a "process of adaptation" (Larsen-Freeman, 2013, p. 122). That also entails teaching (and assessing) not just linguistic proficiency, but also interactional skills, as practiced in ELF (Larsen-Freeman, 2019b). That might include showcasing different examples of English found in online usage, local examples (linguistic landscapes) or instructional materials.

Unfortunately, English language textbooks are unlikely to provide much assistance. Baker (2015) asserts that studies "have documented the fluid and flexible way linguistic forms are adapted in response to specific functions, settings and interlocutors often far removed in form from the models of standard native English presented in teaching materials" (p. 177). He suggests that intercultural communicators need to be able to use language in a more flexible way, "rather than adhering to the fixed code presented in the majority of ELT materials and the underlying scaled-down construct of communicative competence" (p. 177). An exclusive focus on linguistic competence and on standard language use, as is the case in most textbooks and in formal English language instruction, runs counter to research findings in ELF, as we have seen, that stress the importance of interactive competence with an emphasis on adaptation and negotiation. The extent to which English teachers in institutional settings are able to adopt an approach to teaching English that reflects real-world usage, including in ELF contexts, will vary. Often official curricula and standardized testing will make it difficult to venture beyond a conventional emphasis on grammar and lexis. In such cases, encouragement to learners to explore extramural language development is all the more important.

Conclusion

English teachers – and all the rest of us – are living in a time which presents challenges well beyond language learning. Those challenges include the need to contend with attitudes and behaviors which deny basic respect for human difference, which distrust the idea of working cooperatively to solve common problems, and which exhibit indifference, if not contempt, for those less fortunate. The growth in nationalism and xenophobia in many parts of the world has led to a desire to close borders and a tendency to look inward. Yet, global

crisis such as pandemics, climate change, or mass migration caused by economic inequality know no borders and can only be solved through international communication and cooperation. These problems are long-term and have a variety of causes. They have repercussions in human lives, both local and global. Common to these developments are ubiquity and complexity – the problems are interwoven in local and global contexts and evince multiple causes and unpredictable outcomes:

> In short, everywhere in the world complexity is staring us in the face; its overwhelming impact – socially, economically, ecologically – is increasingly undeniable and inescapable. That the world is terribly complex is now a vital part of global cultural experience, a structure of feeling which has grown more pervasive in the twenty-first century (Ang, 2011, p. 779).

While the dynamics of complexity are often not recognized in mainstream IC research, the concept and its consequences have been raised increasingly in the field of ELF (Baker, 2017; Baird, Baker, & Kitazawa, 2014). The study of ELF exchanges — in recorded corpora and in online contexts – has shown how that complexity plays out in the dynamics of person-to-person communication. Those dynamics are characterized above all by cooperation and negotiation. ELF conversants use strategies such as preemptive clarification, elaboration/rewording, or co-construction of utterances (Cogo & House, 2017). Conversing within a multilingual context, ELF speakers engage in cross-language borrowing and adaptation (Mauranen, 2017). We have seen that this phenomenon of translanguaging is particularly evident in online spaces, such as in Facebook exchanges, organized peer contact, or in communities of practice/interest built around social platforms or around common interests such as fanfiction (Oliver & McCarthy, 2019).

Rather than adhering to native speaker norms, ELF speakers instead exhibit creativity and flexibility (Larsen-Freeman, 2018; Mauranen, 2017). As common cultural frames of reference cannot be assumed, cultural and linguistic information are negotiated in situ, with outcomes varying depending on the mix of individuals and the situational context (Hua, 2016). Rather than relying on a pre-determined set of social rules, speakers work those out mutually, requiring compromise as well as a recognition of difference (Baker, 2015). ELF in that way can provide a model of transculturality — the seamless integration of multiple cultural and linguistic perspectives (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019). That model contrasts with the binarity and reductionism often seen in the field of IC (Piller, 2017).

Research in ELF has shown that the linguistic and intercultural negotiation typical of exchanges requires a high degree of flexibility and a willingness to accommodate partners' perspectives (Hua, 2015). Successful online exchanges may necessitate an even higher cooperative spirit in that the nonverbal signals of encouragement/agreement (back channeling, nods) may be absent (Kern, 2014). ELF exchanges demonstrate ways to find common ground and, despite cultural differences, to develop effective and sometimes innovative means to communicate and to relate (Baumgarten, & House, 2010). Studies have shown as

well that this process of negotiation and adaptation can lead to a sense of solidarity (Cogo & House, 2017). Canagarajah (2013) comments that there is a "strong ethic of cooperation" (p. 95) in such exchanges. Successful personal exchanges through the medium of ELF can foster a desire for further contact, with the "dynamic, self-reinforcing consequences of positive contact, fueling individuals' further contact seeking" (Paolini, Harwood, Hewstone, & Neumann, 2018, p. 7). That positive and affirmative model of communication will not cure the world's ills, but it does represent an opportunity to foster acceptance of diversity and respect for difference, attitudes greatly needed in today's world:

> We live in a time where the voices advocating for group segregation appear to be growing louder. If we are to make any progress, researchers interested in encouraging intergroup contact must consider how to generate persuasive and engaging messages that counter the voices of segregation in politics, traditional media, and social media (Paolini, Harwood, Hewstone, & Neumann, 2018, p. 12)

While not all ELF exchanges will lead to positive intergroup contact, research shows that is often the case, thus representing the kind of "persuasive and engaging" model the researchers here advocate. This aligns with a "human ecological approach" (Levine, 2020) to language learning, based on the tenets of complexity theory, which "sees implementable change at the micro level as a means of ultimately affecting change at the meso and macro levels of context" (Levine, 2020, p. 45). This idea that instruction in foreign languages and experience in intercultural communication can possibly enable social change through incremental, individual dynamics is appealing at a time when larger, institutional and governmental solutions to social fragmentation and group animosity have proven to be ineffective.

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