

AN ETHICAL RATIONALE FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA IN PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION COURSES

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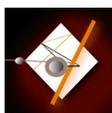
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In response to the exigence for a reconceptualization of English in inclusive and ethical terms, a strand of research in applied linguistics focuses on English as a lingua franca (ELF). In this paper, I argue that efforts at developing research methodologies and pedagogies for IPC should take into consideration findings of ELF research. Rather than having students focus on how cultures, understood as national cultures, influence behaviors, we should invite them to assess how people negotiate action through linguistic accommodation. While scholars in professional communication have shown interest in Plain Language, interest on ELF is scarce. Workshops on ELF can help speakers of English to see communication in multilingual work environments as a two-way process of negotiation. By switching from English as a native language to ELF, speakers relinquish some of the power that comes with asymmetrical linguistic competence to establish a more egalitarian relationship with nonnative speakers of English.

Keywords. English as a lingua franca, International professional communication, Intercultural communication, Pedagogy, Cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitan ethics and international professional communication

This article argues that research into the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF)—understood as “any use of English among speakers of different languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only



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option” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7)—should inform modules on spoken communication in diverse organizational settings. ELF is the quintessential language of contact, a deterritorialized language constructed bottom-up by its diverse users. In the sections that follow, I will first illustrate the main features of ELF as identified by researchers in the fields of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. Next, I will address competing calls for a world Englishes approach to the study of international professional communication. Following that, I will lay out arguments supporting the integration of Plain Language (PL) and ELF instruction in curricula that seek to offer an ample range of strategies for ethical communication. I will conclude by briefly explaining how international projects can stimulate students’ interest in ELF.

Our new communication technologies have facilitated contact between peoples and groups from diverse cultural backgrounds. Besides virtual or digital proximity, the constant rise in immigration flows and, more in general, the increased mobility of both skilled and unskilled workers is bringing people into, what some may consider to be, a troubling physical proximity. Nationalism can be seen as a latent force that feeds on social anxiety to conjure up an idea of division that is strategically tied to linguistic difference and essentialist ideas of cultural identity as monolithic and static. Under attack, in many countries of the world, is the cosmopolitan imagination that Delanty (2006) describes “as a cultural medium of societal transformation based on the principle of world openness” (p. 27). If cosmopolitanism concerns the ways in which the local and the national are transformed and reconstructed as a result of the interaction with the global, nationalistic movements express a resistance to change and the refashioning of identities and cultural products.

Intoxicated by propaganda aimed at stirring egoistic interests at the expense of the values of solidarity and cooperation, people tend to overlook the fact that communities that seem to be natural are in fact artificial. The nation, a product of our own ‘imagination’ (Anderson, 1983), is still reified into a walled community that demands our exclusive and undivided loyalty. Similarly, national languages, artificially constructed through institutional fiat, are seen as static systems that must be defended against the encroachment of hybrid languages that

reflect the polyvocal, multilayered, and decentered structure of our societies (Benhabib, 2002). It is true that standardization facilitates collaboration and the exchange of technical information, but it is also true that linguistic standardization can be invoked as an instrument to preserve a single, reified social identity. By placing the burden of conforming to standards on foreign professionals alone, on the grounds that it is their job to 'rise' to some idealized level of linguistic and discursive competence, it is clear that these professionals are sent a precise message. Specifically, that accommodation proceeds along a one-way road that requires these professionals to imitate the native-speaker levels of usage in order to exchange ideas and information. In contrast, openness and genuine interest in diversity, a degree of linguistic sensitivity, and a willingness to bend linguistic conventions to accommodate others can go a long way toward establishing nonhierarchical and long-lasting professional relations. When the 'stranger' becomes a member of a social group or professional community, an instrumental concept of language as a shared resource for communication has to replace notions of language and technical jargon as constitutive of specific organizational cultures. In particular, global languages such as English and Arabic need to be redefined as flexible codes that are collectively owned and maintained across translocal networks, codes that allow users to mediate between the competing needs of projecting specific identities and establishing a conversation with others characterized by an attitude of openness and a desire to exercise world citizenship (Appiah, 2006).

My point is that it is an ethical duty of educators to invite students to seek out conversations with individuals from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Thus, I agree with Palmer's (2013) call to use the theory of cosmopolitanism to better describe transcultural and transnational phenomena that affect intercultural communication in general, and the process and products of technical communication, in particular. Because the paradigms of particularism make collaboration between professionals extremely difficult, curricula should include modules and activities aimed to prepare students for their encounters with a wide range of 'strangers' both in the social and the professional sphere.

To address this pedagogical need, the most recent editions of several professional communication textbooks have made room for sections that illustrate strategies for communicating across cultures. For instance, Chapter 2 of Johnson-Sheehan's *Technical Communication Today* (2015) hosts a section entitled "Global and Transcultural Communication" that provides instruction on differences in content, organization, style, and design. Other information on transcultural symbols, transcultural editing, and working with translators is strategically distributed throughout the subsequent chapters. Chapter 4 of Markel's *Technical Communication* (2015) includes a section entitled "Communicating across Cultures" that focuses on cultural variables on the surface and beneath the surface. In *Strategies for Technical Communication in the Workplace*, Lannon and Gurak (2016) place special emphasis on the global and collaborative nature of technical communication. Activities that invite students to apply strategies in global contexts are consistently included in the exercises proposed in the end-of-section "Applications". Finally, Anderson (2013) goes beyond a basic coverage of intercultural communication by including sections entitled "Global guidelines" in several chapters of *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach*.

What is missing from these textbooks is a chapter on how English is used in encounters between speakers of different languages. A chapter on ELF could illustrate the subtle adjustments and coordinations that allow individuals to understand each other by manipulating the resources offered by the English language. While reflections on cultural differences—that all too often become reflections on *national* differences—receive ample treatment in a variety of textbooks, examples of how individuals transcend these real or perceived differences through accommodation and linguistic negotiation are particularly hard to find. Matsuda and Matsuda (2011) found much the same problem in their study on how, and to what extent, a global perspective is included into technical communication textbooks published between 2005 and 2007. They observed, among other things, that the discussion of global perspectives tends to be reduced to stereotypical representations of cultural differences, and that descriptions of functional varieties of English are not incorporated into the textbooks they analyzed. In the ten years that have passed since their study, there has been

insufficient effort to bring applied-linguistics research into professional communication pedagogy. Some of the most popular technical communication textbooks published from 2013 to 2016 still overlook the role of English as a lingua franca while also relying heavily on notions of cultures as static essences. Thus, national characters, for example, are presented as free of class, gender, ethnicity, and regional background biases, and entire populations tend to be described as homogenous groups bearing similar value orientations, mentalities, and behaviors.

To be fair, it must be underlined that authors of technical communication textbooks draw from influential and widely respected research in the field of intercultural communication; research that often aims at quantifying differences between cultures, understood as *national* cultures. Much of the academic justification for treating the nation as the basis for culture, or for generalizations about the value orientations of heterogeneous populations, rests on the work of Geert Hofstede (1980, 2001). In their review of quantitative studies of intercultural communication, Taras, Rowney, and Steel (2009) argued that it was not until the publication of Hofstede's *Culture's Consequences* in 1980 that the field of intercultural communication experienced an upsurge of interest in culture measurement. Likewise, Kirkman, Lowe and Gibson (2006) showed that, between 1980 and 2002, nearly 200 studies that used Hofstede's construct of dimensions of culture were published in 40 journals and book series. Nonetheless, what remains controversial about Hofstede's research framework is his understanding of culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" (1980, p. 25). In his approach, our behaviors are determined by our culture, understood as *national* culture, and defined as the software of the mind.

Hofstede's approach to the study of intercultural communication has been criticized on both conceptual and methodological grounds. The idea of the nation state as the locus of culture, the reduction of culture to a short list of dimensions or value orientations, and the idea that these dimensions can be quantified have been questioned by, among others, McSweeney (2002) and Piller (2011). Piller, in particular, points out that Hofstede's understanding of culture is theoretically and

practically inadequate in that it is based on essentialist views of the nation as the foundation of culture (2011). In the wake of research conducted by Gumperz (1982), a community of scholars (e.g., Blommaert, 2010; Holliday, 1999; Piller, 2011; Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2001) have advocated for the study of multilingual interactions as developed in interactional sociolinguistics and related ethnographic approaches. Following this alternative tradition in intercultural communication studies, I believe that both teachers and researchers have an ethical obligation to move away from the study of how our national cultures determine our behaviors to explore how we use a wide repertoire of communicative resources in our situated interactions with others. To achieve this goal, one can either integrate etic and emic approaches, as Thatcher (2010) suggests, or adopt quantitative approaches only at the first stage of research projects or teaching modules to identify questions that can be addressed through qualitative studies of interactions in context and a stronger focus on language as the most important aspect of human communication.

What is ELF?

The construct of ELF as a function of English that can be effectively ‘isolated’ and studied is controversial. In an influential paper, Canagarajah (2007) argued that ELF is intersubjectively constructed in specific contexts of interaction; therefore, he concludes, it is difficult to describe this language a priori. In a similar vein, Matsuda and Friedrich (2011) described ELF as a context-dependent function of English whose variability cannot be captured by linguists. And yet, just like Labov (1972) showed that variation in the speech of New Yorkers was not random but, rather, that it correlated with age, attitude and social situation, ELF scholars have provided ample evidence that ELF exhibits regularities and self-regulating strategies of accommodation that can be identified and usefully classified into several kinds.

Starting with phonetic/phonological aspects of ELF, we owe to Jenkins (2000, 2002) the Lingua Franca Core paradigm, a pronunciation syllabus for ELF based on empirical research findings. The Lingua Franca Core offers a list of

pronunciation features that must be pronounced accurately to avoid communication breakdowns. For example, the repertoire of consonant sounds is a core feature of spoken English; speakers need to realize the consonant inventory with accuracy to ensure mutual intelligibility. As for vowel sounds, features that are crucial as safeguards of mutual intelligibility include maintaining a contrast between long and short vowels, and the appropriate use of contrastive stress, or nuclear stress, to signal meaning (e.g. *She came by TRAIN* vs. *She CAME by train*). But Jenkins also identified phonological features which are outside of this core, and which are not essential for intelligibility in a wide range of interactions between speakers of different languages. Examples of these noncore features of English include the pronunciation of vowel sounds where length is not involved (the word *bus* can be pronounced either /bʌs/ or /bʊs/ without causing intelligibility problems); substitutions of /ð/ and /θ/ with /d/ and /t/; and the use of the weak form schwa instead of the full vowel sound in unstressed syllables. To clarify: The use of full vowel sounds in unstressed syllables tends to help rather than hinder intelligibility in exchanges between nonnative speakers of English. Importantly, word stress is also noncore because it varies considerably across different varieties of English and even within varieties. Because this type of departures from native-like pronunciation rarely threaten intelligibility, there is no reason to invite nonnative speakers and English learners to steer away from them. I agree with Jenkins when she observed that it is native speakers who need to make “receptive adjustments” rather than expecting nonnative speakers to modify their pronunciation habits (2002, p. 98). But in order to make these adjustments, native speakers should be exposed to conversations in ELF so that they can become familiar with patterns of variation in the pronunciation of English.

As concerns ELF lexicogrammar, Barbara Seidlhofer (2004) listed, among others, the following features:

- Zero morpheme for third person singular verbs (e.g. *She always drink coffee in the morning*)
- Interchangeable use of the relative pronouns *who* and *which*

- Omission of the definite and indefinite articles where they are obligatory in native-speaker English and insertion when they do not occur in native-speaker English
- Use of all-purpose question tags (e.g. *This film was interesting. No?*)
- Increasing of redundancy by adding prepositions (e.g. *We have to study about American history*) or by increasing explicitness (e.g. *how long time* vs. *how long*)
- Use of regularization processes to improve explicitness. A typical case is the pluralization of nouns which are considered uncountable in native-speaker English (e.g. *informations, advices*).
- Regularization of word-formation through affixation (e.g. verb forms such as *examine* and *pronounce* are often regularized in *examine* and *pronounce* through the addition of the suffix *-ate*, typically used to form verbs)
- Novel use of morphemes (e.g. *boringdom, dictatorship*)
- Use of new words and nonconventional collocations (e.g. *to make research*)
- Lack of subject-auxiliary inversion in interrogative constructions

Finally, among the most important pragmatic features of ELF are the following: paraphrase; reformulation; reduction of the diversity of vocabulary; simplification of syntax; adjustment of pitch, loudness, and tempo; use of clarification checks and explicit boundary devices; and code-switching, that Cogo (2009) presented as a key accommodation strategy. Meierkord (2002; 2006) also identified and described a strategy that she calls *topicalization*—the strategy of moving focused information to the front of the utterance (e.g. *This guy, he is alone*)—, while House (2002) illustrated a conversational move that she calls the Represent: the repetition of what an interlocutor has just said to signal uptake and aid working memory.

Importantly, these findings show that both native and nonnative speakers of English need ELF practice to understand how to adjust their listening and speaking habits in response to the needs of diverse users of English. More often than not, what determines miscommunication, rather than presumed cultural differences, is a lack of ELF competence. I will offer here an example of what Seidlhofer (2002, 2009) calls *unilateral idiomaticity*, which occurs when one speaker uses a culturally-bounded idiomatic expression that the interlocutor does not know, to explain how failure to adjust language use might cause communication breakdowns. What follows is the transcription of an interaction between a native speaker of English (E) and a native speaker of Spanish (S) during a videoconference that concluded a collaborative class project between an American and a Spanish group of students all majoring in different areas of engineering:

E: Your presentation was good, but I could not pick up what you said about the project challenges.

S: Can you repeat please?

E: I could not pick up what your point was on the challenges of the project.

S: Pick up?

In this interaction, the use of the phrasal verb “pick up” undermines comprehension in a situation in which the nonnative speaker of English is already challenged by the mediated nature of the exchange. The verb *pick up* could seem to be a good candidate for a vocabulary of simple words that can be used in plain English, and yet it caused miscommunication in this exchange. This example shows that clarity is not only related to the selection of apparently simple words (a relative concept) and conventional syntax, but rather, as research on ELF shows, it is connected to the ability to disambiguate meaning through definition, paraphrase, repetition, and reformulation.

This episode also shows how accommodation and adaptation cannot be seen as a one-way road with nonnative speakers required to make all the effort to

meet native speakers in their linguistic comfort zones. Working with a tendency of presenting English as a static, monolithic language, this approach to intercultural communication as a one-way road damages not only nonnative speakers, but also native speakers enrolled in professional communication courses, who often graduate from college unprepared to interact with speakers of other languages. In contrast, when English is conceptualized as an international lingua franca, both native and nonnative speakers may see themselves as mediators in the global exchange of beliefs, ideas, and knowledge, with very important trickle down effects as far as the quality of communication and the propensity toward reciprocity are concerned. By switching from English as a native language to ELF, speakers signal their willingness to relinquish some of the power that comes with asymmetrical linguistic competence with the goal of establishing a more egalitarian relationship with interlocutors who speak English as a second or third language. One last point before moving on to reflect on how teachers can combine Plain Language and ELF pedagogy. When compared to the ELF paradigm, the world Englishes paradigm has gained more traction in English composition (Matsuda and Friedrich, 2011) and technical communication pedagogy (Bokor, 2011). In the section that follows, I will briefly explain why I believe that we need to move past this more traditional approach to the study of English as a global language.

The ELF paradigm vs. the world Englishes paradigm

Following Schneider (2003), we can trace the emergence of the study of global varieties of English back to the early 1980s, with the publication of some groundbreaking books (Bailey & Görlach 1982, Kachru 1986, 1992, Pride 1982, Platt et al. 1984, Trudgill & Hannah 1982) and the establishment of scholarly journals like *English World-Wide* and *World Englishes*. World Englishes scholarship told the story of the emergence of new dialects as a consequence of increased contact between settlers and indigenous populations, contact that stimulated “forces of accommodation” (Schneider, 2007) that were effective in both directions. These new dialects were legitimized through research and

scholarship that described how variations in usage developed endonormatively in the former British colonies, and represented a key stage in the creation of independent communal identity. Scholars also proposed two main classifications to categorize the varieties of worldwide English into broader types. One model distinguishes English as a Native Language (ENL) countries like Britain and the US, where English is the native language of a significant majority of the population; English as a Second Language (ESL) countries, which include multilingual societies where English assumes official functions (e.g. Nigeria, India, Singapore, etc.); and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) countries, in which English is widely studied at several school levels and used in several domains of communication, but does not have official functions. The second model, similarly based on a three level system, has been proposed by Kachru (1985, 1992) who relies on notions of geographically defined speech communities that share social and cultural history. Kachru proposes a one-to-one mapping of nations and varieties of English in a classification that distinguishes 'Inner Circle' countries, where speakers of English constitute the majority of the population; 'Outer Circle' countries, where English was introduced during colonial times, and now is firmly established as a second language with its own varieties; and 'Expanding Circle' countries, where English performs no official internal function but is still widely used in some domains and recognized as an international medium of communication. While laudably asserting the right of the speakers in ex-colonial territories (included in Kachru's Outer Circle) to their own endonormative Englishes, Kachru's paradigm is not adequate to describe the new realities of English usage across the world for two main reasons that I will illustrate below.

First, even if Kachru rejects the idea that norms and standards are determined by Inner Circle contexts, as a discursive construction the term 'Inner Circle' has acquired considerable ideological baggage. While Inner Circle varieties and 'native speakers' of these varieties are often associated to authority and prestige, the use of English in Expanding Circle countries and in a wealth of encounters between speakers of different languages is often understood as lacking in precision and authenticity. The very term generally used both by linguists and

laypersons to designate speakers of languages other than English, i.e. ‘nonnative speakers,’ suggests some sort of deficit, a gap that cannot be closed. Just like the term ‘Expanding circle,’ ‘nonnative-speakers’ appears to activate evaluative associations that downplay the contribution of speakers of other languages to the development of English. Paradoxically, what is unquestionably the largest group of users of English—there is widespread consensus among linguists that nonnative speakers of English vastly outnumber native speakers (see e.g. Crystal 2003; Graddol 2006)—has come to be perceived as uninfluential when it comes to the evolution of English. This perception contradicts the widely acknowledged assumption that language spread always involves transfer of ownership and that as rapidly as hegemonic cultural products are brought into new contexts of communication, they tend to become hybridized in one way or another (Appadurai, 1996; Pennycook, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011).

Second, and more importantly, the main problem with Kachru’s paradigm is that it rests on the contested assumption that varieties of English can be defined as stable, internally uniform, discrete entities. This assumption is rooted in 18th and 19th century descriptions of the language practices of a community as an essential aspect of its cultural and political identity. As nations were discursively constructed around standard languages and shared traditions, the modern discipline of linguistics embraced the view of languages as bounded and territorialized entities. The main problem with what Blommaert (2010) calls a “sociolinguistics of distribution” is that it cannot account for communication practices in a globalized world. If print capitalism helped to strengthen ties between groups who had never been in face-to-face contact, thus contributing to expand allegiances from local communities to the ‘imagined community’ of the nation (Anderson 1983), recent innovations in the domains of transportation and information has brought about a loosening of the holds between people, languages, and territories. The relative ease of transportation across long distances, the ever increasing migration flows, and the rapid development of telecommunications have joined forces to create forms of social organization based on transience and instability. In response to these dramatic changes in social life, scholars in anthropology (see e.g. Hannerz 1989; Appadurai 1996) and sociology

(see e.g. Benhabib 2002; Appiah, 2006) have worked to replace the idea of culture as essence by describing culture as an ongoing process of construction and by describing new forms of social organization as increasingly hybrid, polyvocal, multilayered, decentered, and shifting. Many of these scholars have invoked the concept of cosmopolitanism to explain how individuals are more and more inclined to become part of transnational communities and global networks that have burst across territorial borders. Vertovec and Cohen (2002) explain that, in contrast to multiculturalism, whose paradigms tend to rest upon rigid notions of cultural identity and group belonging, methodological cosmopolitanism has shifted attention from the study of communities of descent to the investigation of the ways in which many individuals articulate multiple affiliations and become involved in conversations, interactions, and forms of collaboration that transcend local and national boundaries.

Recent work in the field of sociolinguistics—not only ELF research, but also Canagarajah's (2013) work on translingual practice, Pennycook's (2007) studies on the global spread of English, or Piller's approach to the study of intercultural communication (2011), just to cite a few examples—has been clearly influenced by postmodern/poststructuralist reconfigurations of the concepts of culture and identity as well as the resurgence of cosmopolitanism as a philosophy that invites a new approach to the study of human interaction. While traditional sociolinguistics is premised on a static conception of society in which people mechanically follow the norms of their speech community, a sociolinguistics of mobility (Blommaert, 2010) offers interpretive tools that enable both grappling with increased contact and connectivity and the speeding up of global interactions and processes. From this perspective, the main limitation of Kachru's approach has to do with its focus on what is culturally and linguistically distinct about each variety of English. As Seidlhofer argued, Kachru's classification can be seen as a "declaration of independence" (2011, p. 79) in which the description of each separate variety overlaps with the account of how speakers in ex-colonial territories forged a new identity through a process of appropriation that transformed a vehicular language into a local dialect. In contrast, ELF scholarship deconstructs the association between language, culture, and identity

to shed light on how ELF functions as a means for conducting transactions outside people's primary social spheres. ELF is rarely used to reinforce affiliation in a circumscribed speech community; rather, it is used to transcend real or perceived lingua-cultural differences through the strategic use of forms (phonological, lexicogrammatical, etc.) that are widely intelligible across groups of English speakers from different first language backgrounds (Jenkins, 2006). If we want to capture the complexity of contemporary language usage in translocal, hybrid contexts, we need to move towards a sociolinguistics that focuses on global English as a flexible, constantly negotiated lingua franca for communication, a language with no owners. The rhetoric of cultural preservation, with its focus on discrete, geographically-bound cultures and languages, should be replaced by a cosmopolitan orientation that investigates how emergent languages and cultural forms make space for 'contamination,' a counterideal to romantic notions of cultural purity and talk of authenticity that tells people what they should value in their own traditions (Appiah, 2006).

ELF and Plain Language

While findings on ELF have yet to percolate in technical communication discourse, a renewed interest in Plain Language (PL) has spawned a series of studies that include Greer's 2012 article on how to introduce PL principles to Business Communication students, Ross's (2015) recent study of the subversive text *Ecodefense* as an artifact of PL, and Willerton's comprehensive monograph entitled *Plain Language and Ethical Action* (2015). Significantly, a special issue of the journal *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* devoted to PL (edited by Russell Willerton, Natalia Matveeva, and Michelle Moosally) is scheduled to be published in 2017.

We owe to Redish (1985) a detailed review of the early history of the plain English movement in the US. Redish singled out the 1970s as the decade in which the movement acquired legitimacy through federal laws and regulations that addressed consumers' preoccupations concerning the readability of technical documents. The 1977 *Final Summary Report* produced by the Paperwork

Commission clearly invited the government to rewrite its documents into plain, understandable language. Many recommendations offered by this Commission later informed President Carter's initiatives to improve the quality and readability of federal documents. These initiatives culminated in the Executive Order 12044, issued in 1978 to recommend the use of plain English for federal regulations, and the *Paperwork Reduction Act*, that Carter signed in 1980. In her account, Shriver (1997) shed light on the role played by 1960s and 1970s consumer movements and the pioneering role that Stuart Chase, author of the *Power of words* (1953), played in questioning the use of gobbledygook in bureaucracy, in the law, and in universities. In more recent times, support for PL in the US has come from both the government and grassroots organizations. The Department of Health and Human Services launched the National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy (2010) to "develop and disseminate health and safety information that is accurate, accessible, and actionable." In the same year, the Plain Writing Act required all publicly distributed documents from the federal government to be written in a clear and well-organized manner. In turn, grassroots organizations such as the Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN), created by federal employees in the mid 1990s, and the Center for Plain Language (CPL), founded in 2003 to support and train people who use plain language, have played an important role in exposing unethical communication practices, raising awareness of the needs of users, and promoting the dissemination of ideas on the benefits of using plain language.

In brief, the backbone of PL consists of a set of guidelines that help content creators to communicate effectively. Because current PL guidelines are connected to research in the fields of design, technical communication, and human-computer interaction, teachers can easily integrate PL instruction with a focus on a wealth of rhetorical strategies that can be harnessed to create clear and usable content. And yet, the broad support enjoyed by PL did not protect this movement from different strands of criticism. While it is easy to see the value of guides that invite writers to carefully assess the rhetorical situation—Osborne's (2010) quick guide, for example, mindfully starts with an invitation to do research on the reading audience "in terms of their education, literacy, language, culture,

age, disability, and interest in or familiarity with the subject” (p. 169)—, PL enthusiasts have also produced lists of admonitions and one-size-fits-all solutions that fail to consider contextual factors in communication. An early manifesto of the PL movement, the chapter entitled “Gobbledygook” in Chase’s *Power of Words* (1953) is a case in point. As long as Chase urges speakers and writers to carefully consider the needs of listeners and readers, his advice appears logically sound and practically viable. But when he starts offering solutions to ‘reduce the gobble’ —to stay away from polysyllabic words that are typical of ‘Mediterranean English’ (as opposed to Anglo-Saxon English); to cut words to eliminate prolixity, and to avoid the passive voice—he appears to embrace a reductionist approach to the complexity of communication. First of all, Chase never explained why, when it comes to technical communication, words with Germanic roots should be clearer than words with Latin roots. If it is true that short Anglo-Saxon words can be very effective in describing concrete actions, the more abstract content of policies and regulations can only be conveyed by drawing expressive resources from the French and Latin layers of the English language. Second, in many types of spoken and written interactions, pragmatic strategies such as repetition and reformulation do call for the use of extra words to disambiguate meaning. Finally, there is nothing inherently wrong with using the passive voice when the communicative goal is to shift attention from the doers of an action to the action itself. Of course the passive voice can be used to confuse and deceive, to hide blame and avoid responsibility, but simple syntax and vocabulary can also be misleading. As leaders of populist movements across the world know all too well, outrageous lies can be presented as truths and outlandish statements can be dressed up as commonsensical ideas when they are encoded in plain language to achieve effects of catchy simplicity. Finally, Chase repeatedly fails to follow his own advice to use Anglo-Saxon English when he uses Latin derivatives such as *prolix* and *obscurity* (p. 256) to define unclear language, or the verb *evaporate*, a direct borrowing from Latin according to the OED, in the clause “Gobbledygook of this kind would largely evaporate if we...” (p. 258).

Two other limitations of PL literature have to do with its almost exclusive focus on written communication and the covert assumption that technical content

is typically produced by native speakers of English for an audience of fellow native speakers of English with relatively low reading skills. This lack of attention for spoken communication is hardly surprising when we consider how English classes at both secondary school and university level focus almost exclusively on the development of a relatively high degree of literacy. As Milroy and Milroy (1999) observed, spoken communication is often taken for granted on the fallacious assumption that it is less complicated than written communication. But in our multicultural and multilingual societies, spoken interactions that take place in both professional and nonprofessional contexts can become rather challenging for individuals who have never practiced and fine-tuned their innate accommodation skills. As concerns the implicit clustering of diverse users of technical documents into a relatively homogenous category of native speakers of English, one might wonder whether it is this very simplification that allows PL advocates to integrate vague calls for concision and clarity with more actionable tips such as ‘use short everyday words’ or ‘avoid Latinate vocabulary.’ The problem with this type of advice is that words, constructions, and idiomatic expressions that are easily understandable by one group of people may not be by another. While choosing short words from the Anglo-Saxon layer of the English language might certainly simplify a text for an audience of native speakers of English, native speakers of Romance languages are often able to decode words with Latin roots with more accuracy. The way the phrasal verb *pick up* caused miscommunication in the video conference between Spanish and American students (see above) shows that what native speakers perceive as plain language can be difficult to decipher for speakers of other languages. Vice versa, what many native speakers of English usually label as ‘inflated style,’ most typically language that draws from Latinate expressions and word roots, makes for clear communication when interlocutors or readers are speakers of romance languages. Maylath (1997) made a similar point in a paper that invites students and teachers to fine-tune their communication skills by taking an interest in the etymology of words and the stories of transformation that made English a multilayered language.

By calling attention to the limitations of the PL paradigm, I do not seek to dismiss the important role that PL advocates have played in calling for more

attention to user needs. Rather, my goal is to sever all ties that connect PL discourse with a narrow prescriptive tradition that produced endless complaints about language. Milroy and Milroy (1999) use the term ‘complaint tradition’ to designate the always fashionable practice to deplore the state of a standard language or pine about language change. As an advocate of cosmopolitanism, what I find disturbing about proposals to ‘fix’ the English language is the fact that they have often been shaped by fears of the loss of purity of English as mirroring a parallel cultural decay due to contact and integration between people. For example, in the 16th century, Sir John Checke’s efforts to improve the clarity of English were informed by a desire to protect the Anglo-Saxon character of the national language. If England was to preserve its unique cultural identity, the English language had to be purged of words and expressions that bore the stigma of foreignness. Classical terms such as *lunatic*, *crucified*, and *resurrection* had to be replaced with the ‘more authentic’ synonyms *mooned*, *crossed* and *gainrising* to reverse the effects of dangerous linguistic and cultural contamination (Crystal, 2005, p. 293). This fear of hybridism and multilingualism informs many subsequent calls for a ‘purification’ of English, often defeating the purpose of well-meaning attacks on legalese or bureaucratese.

Surprisingly, even one of the most appreciated philippics against mystifying jargons, Orwell’s *Politics and the English language* (1968), often rests on the shaky foundations of fallacious theories concerning linguistic purism. Right from the exordium, in which Orwell complains that the “English language is in a bad way” (p. 127), to the claim that foreign words are responsible for pretentious diction (p. 131), Orwell conjures up a narrow version of language ideology. In particular, his praise for Saxon words and criticism of foreign expressions (pp. 131-132) taints his argument with a tinge of linguistic xenophobia. In an influential essay on the topic of reforming natural languages, Quirk (1985) criticizes Orwell for failing to notice the ideological implications of the call for purism and English “Saxonism,” a lack of awareness that is particularly surprising when one considers how the purity concept was being implemented contemporaneously in Nazi Germany. What is more, Orwell’s sweeping generalizations concerning the benefits of conciseness, which we also find in PL

and technical communication advice, contradict many practices that characterize negotiated communication in English as a lingua franca. For example, explicitation calls for the use of extra words to disambiguate meaning in spoken interactions between speakers of different languages or written interactions between writers, translators, and their readers, when translators are called to compensate for asymmetries between languages and rhetorical traditions by adding words to secure readability/usability in the target language.

The idea that the comprehensibility of a document can always be enhanced by reducing the number of words appears to contradict a key goal that Kohl (2008) sets for writers who intend to use global English, i.e. to make English sentence structure more explicit by using function words that are optional in some contexts. Kohl gives the example of the sentence “Ensure **that** the power switch is turned off” to invite writers to disambiguate meaning through the use of the ‘syntactic cue’ *that*. Kohl might follow PL advice in inviting technical writers to “always look for opportunities to be more concise” (p. 13), but he also warns them that cutting words does not necessarily make a document more understandable. Penman (1992) makes a similar point in a paper that offers counter evidence on the quality of documentation written in compliance with PL rules. Based on the findings of research conducted at the Communication Research Institute of Australia, Penman questions the validity and usefulness of PL admonitions to emphasize how the complex and ‘messy’ nature of communication makes it difficult to find simple solutions to the problems of understanding. If I read Penman correctly, his main claim is that there is no one style, approach or structure that will suit different contexts and rhetorical situations. This principle is especially true when information travels across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In many contexts of communication, factors related to cultural sensitivity might determine justifiable departures from the goals of clarity, directness, explicitness, and even simplicity, which is a very relative concept. For example, writers might disregard PL guidelines to mitigate the effect of a speech act through hedging or the use of a less direct communication style (Hagge & Kostelnick, 1989).

As soon as we include nonnative speakers of English in the group of users of bureaucratic forms and technical documentation, and as soon as we start considering the diversity of goals and contexts that underlie the production of written documents, we cannot fail to see how the needs of diverse audiences might often be met through strategies that go against the principles of PL. But this does not mean that we should scrap modules on PL in technical communication courses. Rather, PL instruction should be integrated with activities and workshops on practices of linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical mediation that cluster around the use of ELF in both spoken and written interactions. ELF is the quintessential product of linguistic and communicative negotiation. To do research into ELF is to investigate how individuals from different backgrounds adjust their communicative performances for the sake of establishing a relationship, finding common grounds, and exchanging technical information.

Conclusion: ELF in the classroom

I agree with Jenkins (2011) that it is a contradiction for universities that present and market themselves as ‘international’ to insist on national English language norms. Indeed, a genuinely international academic approach should entail an effort to introduce native speakers to English used by the diverse multilingual populations that inhabit English-medium universities, instead of expecting these populations to imitate inner-circle speech. If we agree that communication in a global language requires sophisticated negotiation skills, we should also agree that a skilled English user is no longer someone who is proficient in a particular native variety of English, but someone who has acquired the pragmatic skills needed to exchange ideas and information with multilingual speakers in a variety of professional domains. Teachers who conduct ELF workshops invite students to see English as a repertoire of shared resources that are constantly evolving due to the innovations introduced by a variety of English speaking populations. This theoretical scaffolding is a very effective way to prepare students for international

projects that offer opportunities for hands-on experience in cross-cultural and cross-functional teamwork.

One such project is the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP), launched in 1999 by Bruce Maylath and Sonia Vandepitte (see Humbley et al., 2005; Maylath, Vandepitte, & Moustén, 2008; Moustén et al., 2012), who paired a Technical Writing class at the University of Wisconsin-Stout with a Translation class taught at the Mercator College of Translation and Interpretation in Ghent, Belgium. Students of technical writing wrote a set of instructions and then prepared them for translation. The students in Belgium negotiated the translation with the authors and then sent the Dutch version of the original instructions back to their peers in the US. The project later expanded to include many other translation classes in a variety of European and African universities. Students who participate in TAPP projects collaborate using a variety of platforms and software, from electronic email to Google Docs, from instant messaging services to Skype. A videoconference, usually scheduled at end of the semester, allows students to meet virtually and exchange questions related to the projects they completed. This project also encourages students to cultivate an attitude of openness and sensitivity to the needs of speakers of languages other than English that is central for the development of effective communication practices. Our students need to learn how to communicate effectively with nonnative speakers of English using a variety of means and technologies; how to build trust and mutual respect by resorting to pragmatic face-negotiation techniques; how to manage complex collaborative projects; and, finally, how to build on the feedback received through usability tests to assess the readability, accessibility, and usability of the documents they crafted.

A recent study that I conducted with Mara (2015) on the way in which students involved in a TAPP project use language to establish rapport in computer-mediated communication offered a rich picture of the coordinations that occur between members of cross-cultural virtual teams. Through a discourse analytic study of students' email interactions we learned how the goal of completing a collaborative assignment helped them to pragmatically adapt their linguistic performance. For example, concern for mutual intelligibility was shown by the constant use of explanations and rephrasing. In an email to her project

partner, an Italian student that we renamed Desdemona wrote: “Who is the target audience? I mean is this translation going to be a website, a guidebook or something else?” Rather than cutting words, Desdemona, a student of translation theory, expanded her message to clarify what she meant by the technical term “target audience.” As concerns the American students, they appeared to be particularly eager to avoid the unclear antecedent problem by repeating the logical subject of their sentences instead of using pronouns. For example, Leontes wrote: “I hope you do not have any more problems with the files. If you have any more problems with the files, just let me know and I will try to help fix them.” In this case, redundancy was key in enhancing the clarity of the message. These examples show how different contexts of communication will call for different strategies for accommodation that cannot be reduced to lists of speaking or writing tips.

One of the most valuable takeaways from projects like the TAPP is that, in order to be effective, every act of communication must be accompanied by an attempt to transform language easily retrieved from memory into language created ad hoc to respond to specific rhetorical situations. By using ELF strategies to interact with speakers of other languages, students understand the importance of meeting individuals in a linguistic space where differences are transcended rather than emphasized. Even more importantly, they learn that a capacity to be hospitable communicators is a central ethical dimension of being literate in our times. ■

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