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A Small-scale Study of Students' Attitudes and Perceptions towards English as a Lingua Franca

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Abstract:

Due to the widespread advancement of English in the domain of academia (Crystal, 1997; Seidlhofer 2011), scholars from the field of applied linguistics have approached a new phenomenon in communication, the development of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). The present study aims to contribute to an understanding of students' attitudes towards ELF and their ensuing perceptions towards the teaching of ELF or EFL (English as a Foreign Language), the latter being the traditional way of teaching English in countries of the Expanding Circle. To this aim, qualitative tools were designed in order to compare the students' attitudes, perceptions and experiences regarding ELF communication. Overall, results showed that the students were aware of some ELF features yet they relied on the native model when it comes to learning English. But that said, the students primed communication over grammatical correctness. The study suggests that although these students are aware of ELF communication features, they do not want this variety of English to be introduced in the teaching system because they identify and prefer to be taught a standard native model.

Resumen:

A resultas del impacto que tiene el inglés en el entorno académico, investigadores en el campo de la lingüística aplicada están estudiando un nuevo fenómeno en la comunicación: el desarrollo del inglés como lengua franca (English as a Lingua Franca – ELF). El presente estudio tiene como objetivo analizar las actitudes de los estudiantes y las percepciones resultantes hacia la enseñanza del inglés como lengua franca o como idioma extranjero (English as a Foreign Language – EFL), método de enseñanza tradicional en los países del llamado “expanding circle”. Con este objetivo se diseñaron dos instrumentos de recogida de datos que permitieran comparar las actitudes y percepciones de los estudiantes, así como su experiencia en el uso del inglés como lengua franca. Los resultados del estudio sugieren que estos estudiantes están concienciados con este fenómeno y sus características, pero, a pesar de afirmar que la inteligibilidad, y no la corrección gramatical, es prioritaria en la interacción en ELF, no quieren introducirlo en el sistema educativo, prefiriendo el modelo nativo para el aprendizaje del inglés.

Keywords: ELF, attitudes, perceptions, students, communication, teaching, native model.

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Introduction

The recent trend of English as a global language can be attributed, as David Crystal explains, to a simple reason: the power of the people who speak it. Besides, several historical factors as the power of the British Empire or the great impact of American culture and the Internet have contributed to the international status of English. Scholars wonder what the future of the English language will be like, because roughly one out of every four users of English in the world is a ‘native speaker’ of the language (Crystal, 1997).

In recent years, there has been lively debate on the use of English as a Lingua Franca (hereafter ELF). For Seidlhofer (2011), the term ELF refers to “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (p. 7). This new linguistic phenomenon has attracted scholarly interest and many definitions of ELF can be found nowadays. The most relevant feature of ELF is its detachment from ENL, as ELF is a functional variety spoken among NNSs of English (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). Mauranen (2010) explains that “[t]he area where ELF is in sharpest contrast with Standard English is in lexis and grammar” (p. 18), such as the non-use or misuse of articles and prepositions or plural/3rd person endings. Irregular verbs following the regular patterns or uncountable nouns turned into countables are also reported features of ELF interactions. As mentioned above, the international status of English and its extended use among NNSs has led ELF to be considered “a unifying means of communication” on a global scale (Seidlhofer, 2012, p. 373).

It is important to note that ELF researchers focus on “language users” and not on “language learners”, hence making the distinction between ELF and EFL (English as a Foreign Language). As “[English] language users in their own right” (Seidlhofer 2004, p.

214), ELF speakers do not follow a native model because the main aim is to achieve communication between the interlocutors. This is the reason why choosing a native model problematises communication: the speakers do not expect to find a NNS using English as a native speaker but as they themselves use it, i.e. influenced by their background knowledge and their mother tongue. Then, these two factors become features of this type of communication instead of being problems.

Perceptions towards 'degree of nativeness'

The status ascribed to the English language is not unanimous. Some scholars claim that it is a language for identification, while others have argued that ELF is a “language for communication” (e.g. Firth, 1996; House 1999; Samarin 1987) and not “language for identification”, as e.g. national languages are. ELF is a tool that speakers use in order to communicate internationally with other speakers whose L1s are not English. As they negotiate meaning, they cannot identify with the language as they would do with their mother tongues, since they would feel part of the community (House, 2003, p. 560). Nevertheless, in making the distinction between languages for communication and languages for identification, “ELF need not be a threat” (House, 2003, p. 562) but a support for those speakers of other languages.

Today's social context is increasingly multicultural and multilingual. The perspectives on global communication are changing and English is used all around the world in a wide range of domains (business, commerce, etc.), which draw on the use of ELF as a shared language for communication. Gilner's recent study (2016) emphasizes the idea of adapting the language in order to communicate, especially in academic contexts, where communication occurs at international levels. As speakers do not share

the same knowledge and background, they aim at reaching agreement while speaking no matter their mother tongue.

In another study on ELF in academia, Lorés-Sanz (2016) notes that “it is undeniable, then, that the academic community speaks English, but not necessarily as native speakers. [...] all writing in international English-medium journals is, by definition, for an international rather than an ENL (English as a native language) audience” (pp. 54-55). Although the characterization of ELF has mainly addressed its spoken nature, this author also emphasizes the idea of studying the written papers of those non-native users of the language who publish in English. As an example, the ELFA corpus has recently started the development of WrELFA, a corpus devoted to the study of written ELF as a functional variety that departs from the native norms.

Jenkins (2009) maintains that “those who criticise ELF tend to orient to one of two (curiously opposing) perspectives on English” (p. 202). The first perspective in a sense recalls Kachru’s sociolinguistic theory of the Inner Circle, taking British and American varieties and their respective accents (Received Pronunciation ‘RP’ and General American ‘GA’) as the normative models. Rubdy and Saraceni define ELF as “monolithic and monocentric, a ‘monomodel’ in which ‘intercultural communication and cultural identity are to be made a necessary casualty” (in Jenkins, 2009, p. 202). The second opposing perspective establishes that ELF has nothing to do with the standard varieties (British and American English) and “exhibits errors wherever it departs from certain Inner Circle Englishes” (p. 202). Seidlhofer (2011) makes it clear that because “[ELF speakers] are not primarily concerned with emulating the way native speakers use their mother tongue” (p. 22), as users, they aim at “intelligibility, communication in a NNS or mixed NNS-NS interaction” (p. 18). In contrast, EFL learners “strive to do ‘as the natives do’” (p. 17), as they do not negotiate but follow the pre-established native

norms. ELF-related concepts such as *difference* (i.e. from ENL) and *deficiency* (i.e. interlanguage or “learner language”) (p. 202) are foregrounded.

Perceptions towards ELF communication

Mauranen (2009) explains that EFL students tend to prefer native norms as they identify with them and regard them as the most widespread variety of English. She further explains that native accents, especially RP, are still considered the norm and its speakers the owners of the language. However, her study shows how some features from GA and RP are not necessary to ensure intelligibility in ELF communication because it occurs mainly among NNS. In this environment, the speakers have their own features and strategies when communicating and hence, as language users in their own right, should be free, e.g. to use their own first language accent when using English.

Soler-Carbonell (2014) reports that students from different L1 backgrounds in the same country perceive the need to use ELF to communicate, especially among young speakers. His study was conducted in a multilingual class of Spanish as a foreign language thus, ELF turns to be a tool to communicate as it facilitates comprehension when communication in their L1s or L3 (Spanish) is impossible. Tsou and Chen (2014) evaluate EFL and EFL students’ perceptions towards Standard English and ELF. Both groups acknowledged the existence of varieties of English and the importance of intelligibility over grammatical correctness. However, the EFL group showed greater awareness towards the need for a standard model in teaching English as the way to provide the norm, follow the rules and prevent miscommunication. Instead, the ELF group used accommodation strategies when interacting with other ELF users, such as “repeating what is said to ensure understanding [...], using body language such as gestures and facial expressions [...] using key words [...] and speaking slowly and clearly” (Tsou & Chen,

2014, p. 22) although some other aspects such as pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary were less likely to be changed.

In Cogo's study (2010), the students surveyed perceived ELF use as positive, highlighting the importance of achieving communication instead of being grammatically correct. Some comments on the accents of the speakers were also positive; however, other comments such as "ELF speakers' English is not completely 'perfect' because of their foreign accents" (p. 307) suggest judgement towards non-native accents because of the influence of native accents. This study also supports the view that ELF participants rely on communication strategies such as negotiation of meaning to solve some problems that arise due to their different linguistic backgrounds (p. 301).

Attitudes towards teaching and ELF

Regarding the teaching of English, Swan (2012) postulates the idea that "EFL leads to ELF" (p. 388) in the sense that what students learn may be used in an ELF context afterwards. This author also stresses the idea that in EFL teaching there is a clear tendency towards a native model while ELF admits more variation, by arguing that the difference lies in "two different contexts: learning and use" (Swan, 2012, p. 384) as EFL reality is associated with teaching and learning, and ELF with communication. In addition, this author points out that native speakers are expected to adopt ELF norms in order to be able to use English in communicative contexts, instead of self-imposing the role of norm providers (Jenkins, 2010). This author argues that ENL pronunciation is, in fact, "more likely to cause communication problems in ELF settings" (Jenkins, 2010, p. 929). Seidlhofer (2005) also emphasises the idea that native speakers tend to establish what is acceptable and what is not according to their native norms. Nonetheless, these two researchers maintain that there are certain aspects regarding pronunciation and

lexicogrammar, such as the distinction between /θ/ and /ð/ or ‘dark /l/’ (also written as [ɫ]), and the non-use of the 3rd person singular or misuse of relative pronouns ‘who’ and ‘which’, respectively, without which “successful communication is obviously possible” (<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2001/apr/19/languages.highereducation1>, para. 14). Along similar lines, Mauranen (2009) contends that “RP has a place that it does not merit in the psyche of English speakers” (p. 11) and encourages English speakers to “be free to pronounce English with their own first language regional accent influence instead of the NS way” (Mauranen, 2009, p. 13).

Sifakis (2014) and Dewey (2012) analyse teachers’ perspectives towards ELF, its inclusion in English Language Teaching (ELT) and the implications that ensue from it. These authors explain that ELF research must be clear and accessible to teachers so that they may know what they have to teach, how and why. Both researchers advocate that it is “the responsibility of teachers to teach students the ‘accepted’ and ‘recognized’ variety” (Dewey, 2012, p. 161). This author notes that some teachers are prone to incorporating some features of ELF mainly by making students aware of the importance of cross-cultural communication between NNS and the global status of English today. Both studies conclude that, in spite of the difficulty of introducing ELF in TESOL education, at least, it is able “to ‘open up’ our conception of language” (p. 166).

Jenkins coins the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) to refer to certain pronunciation features that are necessary to maintain intelligibility but that should be regarded as a point of departure rather than a ‘norm’ when communicating. This researcher stated that students would rather identify themselves with a standard accent because of the “deep-seated attitudes towards issues such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ English, and especially English accents, a belief that NNS English accents are innately inferior” (in Mauranen and Ranta, 2009, p. 15). In another study on ELF perceptions and attitudes, Jenkins (2007) analyses

how students perceive accents of English from native and non-native speaking countries (p. 192) and concludes that the majority of the students ranked UK English and US English as the preferred ones, mainly British English. Comments of students on Spanish English accent reveal that, generally, students perceive this accent as “intelligible” and “easy to understand” but also sometimes as “harsh” and “fast”, and “not clear pronunciation”. These comments reveal that the very distinctive features of these speakers were their intonation and sound (Spanish-like) and the fact that they mispronounced certain sounds or words (p. 169).

Methods

Context of the study and rationale

This study was carried out with a sample of student population at the University of Zaragoza. In the previous week to Easter’s holidays in March, 34 students of the degree of English Studies (18 freshmen and 16 junior undergraduates) were asked to complete a questionnaire on perceptions towards ELF and write a composition on an experience with a NNS of English they had had. I chose these groups for the following reasons: both groups of students could have had some international experience but the freshmen students had not received instruction in ELF; however, the junior students had, so I thought results would be worth establishing a comparison.

Description of research instrument

The questions for the questionnaire were selected from several readings and were organized thematically. The questionnaire comprised two preliminary sections requesting background information and the questionnaire itself. The questionnaire sought to provide the students with information about the research and the aim of my study (Section 1, see

Appendix 1). The second section asked the students to provide personal details such as gender, age, nationality, mother tongue, whether English was an L1 or an L2, other languages they know and whether they had done a study abroad. They were also asked to self-assess themselves, indicating their competence in the skills of reading, writing, listening, monologic speech and interaction. The following information was compiled, and provided a broad picture of the whole group.

Background information of the students

Most of the freshmen students were female (94.5%). As for age, cumulative percent of 94.5% represented those students who were 18-19 years old. The same percentage spoke Spanish and 88.9% of them claimed that English was their second language. Other languages they knew were French (77.8%) and German (44.4%). 61.1% of them had not done a study abroad. Most of them claimed to have a B2 level of English in writing, listening, speaking, monologic speech and interaction although some of them also claimed to have a C1 level in reading, writing and listening skills.

In the junior group, 75% of the students were female and almost 81.25% aged 20-21. All of them were Spanish and for all of them English was their second language. Again, apart from English, the students spoke other foreign languages such as French (62.5%) and German (43.75%). More than half (62.5%) had not studied abroad. As for their level of English almost all the students self-assessed themselves as having a C1 level in reading skills and B2 to C1 levels in writing, listening, speaking, monologic speech and interaction.

The third Section, the questionnaire itself, included a total of 21 questions of different nature: 16 Yes/No/It depends/Don't know questions, 3 multiple choice questions, 1 for them to give a definition and 1 Yes/No question and 'why'. Some of these questions requested giving reasons so that students could give arguments supporting their

answers. The questions were grouped into 4 subsections depending on the nature of the questions and on the scope of the literature that inspired them: “General questions” (based on previous work by Jenkins), “Perceptions towards degree of nativeness” (based on previous studies that had examined students’ perceptions towards issues of nativeness, for example, House, 2003; Jenkins, 2013; and Mauranen, 2009, “Perceptions towards ELF communication” (based on House, 2003; Jenkins, 2013; Mauranen, 2010, and Seidlhofer, 2009 and 2011, and “Attitudes towards teaching and ELF” (a set of questions inspired by previous work claiming a role for ELF in the EFL classroom, for example, Seidlhofer, 2004, and Ur, 2010).

Perceptions towards “degree of nativeness”

These questions sought to retrieve the students’ perceptions of the variety of English they preferred, the accent they wanted to imitate and whether these choices influenced the classroom teaching/learning context. I made the distinction between “content classes/teachers” and “language classes/teachers” to further explore whether students thought they were expected to use the language in the same way in those classes or not.

Perceptions towards ELF communication

Drawing on Mauranen’s theoretical work on ELF features (2010), I designed this set of questions to explore the extent to which the students were aware of the way they themselves or their interlocutors behaved in a conversation with other NNSs of English. Another important aspect I decided to include in this section was students’ perceptions towards key aspects in ELF communication, i.e. asking students about “adopting” or “adapting” their language or their views on English as a language for identification, communication or both (drawing on e.g. Firth, 1996; House 1999; Samarin 1987).

Attitudes towards teaching ELF

These questions were very much related to the ones of the first subsection “ELF and degree of nativeness”, as both referred to accents and behaviours in the classroom. Yet, my aim was examining whether the students felt there should be a change in the way English is taught in countries from the Expanding Circle, based on how they have experienced their own process of learning, particularly at a university level. Following Jenkins (2007), this section included a question about their accent (this could be a problem when wanting to speak in English) and how they felt in class when speaking.

The questionnaire data was complemented with a composition (see Appendix 2), which was handed in along with the questionnaire so that answers could be compared and contrasted. The composition enabled me to go in depth with the results obtained from the questionnaire: it was a guided composition made up by several questions students had to answer about an encounter they had with a NNS of English in a university context.

Data collection procedures

The questionnaire was administered in paper format because this was believed to be a way of guaranteeing a high percentage of responses – i.e. administering the questionnaire at the beginning of the classes (all the students attending the class filled in the questionnaire). Doing it online was discarded for the following reasons: it would not ensure as many responses as in paper format because students could have been surfing the Internet instead, problems with Internet connection were likely to occur and, as the questionnaire was complemented with a composition, paper format allowed me to pair the answers in the questionnaire with their counterpart in the composition.

Before administering the questionnaire and the composition sheet, I borrowed 10 minutes of the class to introduce myself, present the aim of my undergraduate dissertation and explain the student the procedures they needed to follow. Afterwards, the students

were given half an hour to complete the questionnaire and fifteen minutes for the composition.

Data analysis procedures

The data gathered with the questionnaire was compiled using a spreadsheet. I also analysed the data quantitatively (e.g., percentages) using Excel tables. I used close reading of the texts to identify the emerging themes, as proposed by (Creswell, 1994, p. 18). I also searched for common threads or contradictions (i.e. mixed responses). This facilitated the identification of the most significant findings.

It should be acknowledged here that this dissertation may have a low degree of external validity (Nunan, 1992, p. 15). The accessible sample of students that filled in the questionnaire and wrote the composition is not representative of the whole population of students. Yet, I believe their responses proved to be informative enough to identify common trends in the students' perceptions and compare the findings of the study with the findings of similar studies reported earlier.

Results and discussion

All freshmen students unanimously viewed English as an important language nowadays, and provided comments such as “it is the most spoken language of the world”, “it’s used worldwide” or “it is international”. Not unexpectedly, because to my knowledge, they had not received instruction on ELF, when asked about what they knew regarding ELF, some stated they did not know about it and others provided rather general comments (e.g. “it’s used worldwide”). The junior students also unanimously viewed English as an important language and provided far more specific comments, mentioning issues of

international communication among NNSs, English used in education, business, politics, technology, and economic and scientific issues. They also acknowledged the importance of migratory movements and globalisation. Some of them showed awareness of what English as a Lingua Franca is. Compared to the views of the freshmen, the more mature views of the juniors might be linked to the fact that they had more international experiences, a broader background of the role of English and/or that had received instruction on ELF.

Perceptions towards “degree of nativeness”

As for their perceptions towards “degree of nativeness”, almost half of the freshmen answered that their preferred accents were RP and GA, as was also the case of the junior students, as summarized in Table 1:

	Freshmen students		Junior students	
1 st	RP	100%	RP	81.25%
2 nd	GA	55.56%	GA	25%
3 rd	Australian	11.11%	Australian	6.25%
4 th	Others	11.11%	Others	12.50%

Table 1. Students’ accent preference

Additionally, they were asked whether that was the accent they always used and whether they wanted to imitate it or not. Around 50% of the freshmen students observed that the accent they had chosen was the accent they used and almost 80% of them answered that it was the one they wanted to imitate. Some students gave reasons for this choice, like the influence of American TV series, while others stated that they simply liked that particular accent.

For the junior students, percentages for “yes” and “it depends” answers were identical: 37.5%, which meant that, to some extent, they were aware of the accent they use and whether or not they may change it depending on the context of the interaction. While some students explained that RP was the accent they had been taught, others noted that it was widely understood by almost everyone and some other students simply observed that it was “the standard”. These results partially contradict Mauranen (2009) and Jenkins’ (2007) studies on students’ accent preference which reported that a native accent could be a source of misunderstanding in ELF communication because NNSs do not usually follow a native norm while speaking. A likely reason is that while Mauranen and Jenkins studies were based on a sample of students from multilingual backgrounds, this was not the case of the sample of students surveyed in this dissertation, plus the impact that EFL instruction has on their learning process. GA was the second accent ranked, which might be attributed to the influence of US films and TV series. This result is similar to that reported by Jenkins (2007), where the students’ perceptions towards native and non-native accents showed UK and US accents as ranking higher than other native and non-native accents considered inferior.

Those junior students who answered “no” or “don’t know” (12.5% each) stated that RP was not the most spoken accent in the UK, or that “it is not the kind of British English I am used to listen” or that it conveyed certain ideology and it was no good to be associated with it, i.e. RP is related to “posh” and “superior” people and these labels imply judgement towards both its speakers and its non-speakers. When the junior students were asked whether they wanted to imitate RP accent, almost 25% answered “yes”, suggesting that they might be influenced by EFL instruction supporting on RP and GA as the target language models. These perceptions of both freshmen and junior students can be related to their being EFL learners rather than ELF users.

When asked if they themselves wanted to perform as native speakers in relation to oral skills, both the freshmen and the junior students' response was unanimously positive, as shown in Table 2:

	Freshmen students	Junior students
Interaction	94.44%	68.5%
Speaking and monologue	88.89%	87.5%

Table 2. Students who wanted to perform as native speakers.

It is worth noting that the percentage scored by the junior students as regards interaction was slightly lower than that scored by the freshmen. It is likely that the freshmen students are more concerned with performing as natives all the time, at the same time that the junior students may have experienced conversations in which not being totally native-like was not a problem to achieve understanding, because they had a higher competence level. Neither the freshmen nor the junior students answered "no". A possible reason for their response can be that they have been taught the native model in their EFL classes since they started to study English at primary school.

For those whose previous answers were affirmative, they were asked if their preference to perform as native speakers did somehow influence the way they participated in language classes and in content classes. The students' responses to both questions were far from being unanimous, as can be seen in Tables 3 (language classes) and 4 (content classes).

	Freshmen students	Junior students
Yes	38.89%	37.5%
No	27.78%	12.5%
It depends	16.67%	37.5%
Don't know	16.67%	6.25%
No answer	--	6.25%

Table 3. Students' perceptions regarding language classes.

	Freshmen students	Junior students
Yes	33.33%	18.75%
No	22.22%	12.5%
It depends	27.78%	43.5%
Don't know	16.67%	6.25%
No answer	--	18.75%

Table 4. Students' perceptions regarding content classes.

Among the reasons provided, many freshmen students commented that they liked speaking in English, that they felt comfortable with the teacher and that they were learning the language and how to use it in those classes. On the other hand, the junior students paid more attention to the attitudes of both teacher and classmates and to how confident the students were so that they did not feel afraid of participating in class, possibly because they had higher competence in English and were confident language users, that is, not afraid of using the language. In the case of content classes, for the freshmen students speaking in English was “something new” for them and they argued that they were getting used to it. However, the junior students' explanations were based on the fact that, in their view these teachers did not pay as much attention to language as language teachers did, or that the students did not participate because they were afraid of doing so as they may make mistakes.

The issue of accent and type of accent preferred in the English language classroom and in content classes showed mixed perceptions in both groups, as can be seen in Tables 5 (language classes) and 6 (content classes).

	Freshmen students		Junior students	
Speaking	Yes	27.78%	Yes	56.25%
	No	11.11%	No	12.5%
	It depends	61.11%	It depends	18.75%
	Don't know	--	Don't know	12.5%
Monologue	Yes	50%	Yes	68.75%

	No	16.67%	No	12.5%
	It depends	33.33%	It depends	12.5%
	Don't know	--	Don't know	6.25%
Interaction	Yes	55.56%	Yes	50%
	No	5.56%	No	25%
	It depends	38.89%	It depends	18.75%
	Don't know	--	Don't know	6.25%

Table 5. Preferred accent in language classes.

	Freshmen students		Junior students	
Speaking	Yes	38.89%	Yes	37.5%
	No	11.11%	No	50%
	It depends	50%	It depends	6.25%
	Don't know	--	Don't know	6.25%
Monologue	Yes	44.44%	Yes	37.5%
	No	11.11%	No	37.5%
	It depends	44.44%	It depends	18.75%
	Don't know	--	Don't know	6.25%
Interaction	Yes	50%	Yes	25%
	No	5.56%	No	56.25%
	It depends	44.44%	It depends	6.25%
	Don't know	--	Don't know	6.25%

Table 6. Preferred accent in content classes

Students' views on language and content teachers were not that different again: the students thought their language teachers preferred the native model in almost each skill but especially those of speaking, while content teachers were seen as less focused on oral production. Nevertheless, the fact that to some extent students perceived that their teachers wanted them to perform as native speakers in their classes had a different effect on students: while the freshmen students did not feel uncomfortable or pressed, the junior students showed mixed feelings, for instance: "The only way to improve your English in

class is when you perform it and thus, the teacher can give you some feedback” but “I am not a self-confident person and I think that I am going to do it in a non-correct way”.

Perceptions towards ELF communication

In response to questions 7 and 8, seeking to find the students’ perceptions of features of ELF, a high percentage of the freshmen and the junior students thought that the omission of the 3rd person singular did not impede communication with NSs and with NNSs, as seen in Table 7.

	Freshmen students		Junior students	
	Native speakers	Non-native speakers	Native speakers	Non-native speakers
Yes	5.56%	--	--	--
No	88.89%	72.22%	93.75%	87.5%
It depends	5.56%	27.78%	6.25%	12.5%

Table 7. Students’ perceptions of omitting 3rd person singular as a cause of miscommunication.

However, results were more different when asking students whether changing “do/does” or saying “I am write” instead of “I am writing” impede communication (question 9), as shown in Table 8:

	Freshmen students	Junior students
Yes	66.67%	25%
No	11.11%	31.25%
It depends	22.22%	37.5%
Don’t know	--	6.25%

Table 8. Perceptions of changes that may cause miscommunication.

For the freshmen students, these examples were causes of miscommunication, suggesting that they were concerned about the importance of language accuracy. The junior students showed mixed perceptions, which might indicate that accuracy in the use of the language

is not what they sought (or expected) when they communicated with other non-native English speakers.

When asked whether these previous ELF features were considered “bad” English (Question 10), their responses were mixed, as seen in Table 9:

	Freshmen students	Junior students
Yes	44.44%	37.5%
No	5.56%	12.5%
It depends	50%	43.75%
Don't know	--	6.25%

Table 9. Perceptions of previous ELF features as “bad” English.

These results might indicate that the freshmen students’ awareness of ELF communication had not yet been raised yet because they were stuck to the native English rules and similarly, despite junior students’ openness when answering the previous answer, they were still conditioned by the native model they had been taught. These results may correlate with their self-assessed level of English. The junior students claimed to have a C1 level in almost all skills, and they have probably been exposed to conversations in which they could have seen the above examples. This would explain why the percentage of junior students considering those examples bad English was lower. Those who regarded these instances as “bad” English provided comments such as: “they are grammatically incorrect” or “it depends on the context”. Many of them claimed that these could be considered good English in informal contexts and that they were natural features in the speech of native speakers, and that depending on the context they might be understood but that they were taught ‘grammatically correct’ English.

Regarding examples of language use involving left-dislocation and doubling of the subject “one of my friends she ...” (Question 11), a typical feature of ELF spoken interactions (Mauranen, 2010), almost 75% of the freshmen students and 87.5% of the

junior students stated that they identified these features as typically used in spoken interaction. Besides, the majority of the freshmen students perceived this feature as understandable (61.11% of them having answered before that it was not correct), suggesting that although they seemed to attach importance to grammatical correctness, they perceived that intelligibility was more important when communicating in English. They further noted that “the meaning can be deduced” or “the double subject ‘clarifies’ or ‘adds meaning’ although it is a mistake”. Precisely, this repetition of the subject was likely to make 81.25% of junior students considered it grammatically incorrect due to the great influence that the native norm had had on their EFL learning process; however, it was also this use of two subjects that facilitated understanding, as “‘she’ specifies ‘one of my friends’”. This perception might indicate that the students seem to rely on grammatical correctness when analysing the sentence but not when communicating.

In Question 12, examples of metadiscourse expressions such as “what I would like to ask you” or “I will give you the introduction”, which are also described as ELF features (Mauranen 2010) were not as recognized by the freshmen students as by the junior students, as shown in Table 10:

	Freshmen students		Junior students	
	Their speech	Their interlocutors'	Their speech	Their interlocutors'
Yes	5.56%	33.33%	18.75%	68.75%
No	66.67%	38.89%	31.25%	6.25%
It depends	27.78%	22.22%	37.5%	18.75%
Don't know	--	5.56%	12.5%	--

Table 10. Perceptions of metadiscourse expressions in ELF use.

This might be an indicator that junior students had been more exposed to communication with NNSs in which they paid attention to those expressions because they needed them to understand what was going to be said afterwards.

Rephrasing (Question 13) was perceived both in their speech and in the speech of their interlocutors, as seen in Table 11. The difference between both groups could be related to the fact that the meanings conveyed in the conversations carried out by junior students were more complex and thus, they relied on rephrasing as a communicative strategy.

	Freshmen students		Junior students	
	Their speech	Their interlocutors'	Their speech	Their interlocutors'
Yes	27.78%	44.44%	68.75%	81.25%
No	16.67%	27.78%	--	6.25%
It depends	38.89%	11.11%	25%	12.5%
Don't know	16.67%	16.67%	6.25%	--

Table 11. Perceptions of rephrasing.

In Question 14, the students were also asked whether they used their mother tongue when interacting with other NNSs and whether they noticed they used it in their speech, summarized in Table 12. These responses were, overall, positive, suggesting that they did not feel completely sure speaking in English and that is the reason why they relied on their mother tongue, but these data also revealed that students perceived that their interlocutors used their mother tongue more than they themselves, maybe because these students were studying English and they had a great knowledge of English and strategies to ensure communication.

	Freshmen students		Junior students	
	Their speech	Their interlocutors'	Their speech	Their interlocutors'
Yes	61.11%	88.89%	50%	87.5%
No	27.78%	5.56%	12.5%	6.25%
It depends	11.11%	5.56%	37.5%	6.25%

Table 12. Perceptions regarding use of their mother tongue.

Regarding gesticulation (Question 15), almost 95% of freshmen students answered “yes” both for their speech and their interlocutors”, while 75% of junior

students acknowledged it in their speech and 87.5% in their interlocutors'. This high percentage in the freshmen students' speech could be related to the level of English they had: as the freshmen students reported to have a B2 level, while most of the junior students considered they had a C1 level in almost every skill. Any group gave negative or "don't know" answers due to the high recognition of a physical feature as gesticulation is.

The issue of intelligibility was also an important factor to take into account when dealing with ELF communication (even more important than grammatical correctness), that was the reason why students were asked whether incorrect use of English made communication difficult with NNSs (Question 16), as shown in Table 13. This again suggests that the junior students seem to be more aware than the freshmen students that communication strategies ensure communication.

	Freshmen students	Junior students
Yes	27.78%	6.25%
No	16.67%	37.5%
It depends	55.56%	56.25%

Table 13. Perceptions of incorrect use of English interfering in communication.

Although the students indicated that they identified with a native accent and thought their teachers expected that accent as well, they showed some tacit awareness of the typical features involved in ELF communication that the literature reports. Actually, they did not see as totally unacceptable some of the examples that Mauranen (2010) provides as features of ELF communication, such as the omission of the 3rd person singular ending, the repetition of the subject, the use of metadiscourse expressions or the use of rephrasing. In fact, the characteristics of the EFL group in Tsou and Chen's study (2014), such as repeating what is said, using body language, or speaking slowly and

clearly were features that students of my study claimed to use when interacting with NSs and NNSs. In contrast to Cogo’s study (2010), where students were more concerned about the importance of communicating over grammatical correctness, the students of the present study did not consider some of the typical instances of ELF use to be grammatically correct although they understood them, thus it was demonstrated that although one of the main students’ concern was being grammatically correct, intelligibility appeared in communication as well.

In Question 17, students were asked about one of the key features that defines ELF, namely, whether, as English language users they imitated/adopted or accommodated/adapted their language to that of the native English speakers, results can be shown in Table 14:

	Freshmen students	Junior students
Yes	16.67%	56.25%
No	--	6.25
It depends	27.78%	18.75%
Don’t know	50%	18.75%
No answer	5.56%	--

Table 14. Perceptions of imitating/adopting or accommodating/adapting their language.

From those who answered “it depends”, hardly any of the freshmen students provided explanations for their answers, and hence the reasons for their responses remained unclear. However, some of their comments provided in the composition were:

“I tried to adapt language to the situation: I started to speak louder and gesticulate with my hands.” (freshmen student n° 4)

“I do remember having to rephrase sentences or to pronounce some words twice so as she could understand me.” (freshmen student n° 6)

“Yes. I had to adapt my way of communicating because they (in the academy) don't understand me because of my vocabulary, so I tried to change the words to them.”

The junior students' responses also indicated that they changed their way of speaking by means of rephrasing or explaining what they say in order to make themselves understood when problems while communicating arose, some comments that appeared in the compositions are provided below by way of illustration:

“Nevertheless, there are some moments where I need and they need to adapt the language to be more understandable by rephrasing, changing the words or speaking slowly so the other could understand it” (junior student n° 6)

“What I really notices was that we paraphrased certain sentences in order to be understood” (junior student n° 7)

“We both adapted our way of talking, with gestures or rephrasing (if necessary) to make us understood” (junior student n° 14)

Finally, when asked whether they regarded English as a language for communication, a language for identification or both, none of the students (neither freshmen nor junior students) considered it a language for identification because they used English as a means to communicate, thus they could not identify with it (House, 2003). Interestingly, 61.11% of the freshmen students and 56.25% of junior students regarded it as both, while the rest (39% and 37.5% respectively) perceived it as a language for communication. This confirms House's statement (2003) that “ELF is not a national language, but a mere tool bereft of collective cultural capital” (p. 560). These perceptions were also reflected in the students' composition, as explained below. Although the questionnaire invited the students to provide explanations for their choice, only a few freshmen students responded. Those who reported that English was the most spoken language around the globe said that it was needed to communicate, thus pointing at the view of English as a language for communication.

The freshmen students' compositions supported their perceptions that English was a language for communication, some of their comments being:

"I see it more like a language of communication because it let us communicate from people from almost all over the world." (freshman student n° 8)

"From this experience, I see English as a language for communication as it allows you to communicate with people from all over the world, including native speakers of English." (freshman student n° 9)

But also some of them saw English as both language for identification and communication, as seen in the following comments:

"I consider English both a language of communication and identification, it depends on the empathy that I get with the other speaker. If I can know a bit about him or her, I will use English more as a language of identification than of communication." (freshman student n° 5)

"I definitely see English as language for communication and for identification because you have to learn a language just in case if you have a problem you must know how to get a solution." (freshman student n° 12)

In the junior students' group, those students who perceived it as a language for communication commented that:

"From this experience, I saw English as a language for communication as it served to us (different people with different mother tongue and cultural background). To communicate and reach an agreement." (junior student n°3)

"In general, from my experiences with natives and non-native speakers I take English as a means of communication. I don't intend to identify myself with a language." (junior student n° 8)

Those students who opted for "both" mainly argued:

“I think English is a very important language for communication, it is like a bridge between people or cultures which are different but it can also be a language for identification due to the fact that depending on who you are talking to, you perform the language in one way or another. In other words, you might be more careful or use different expressions in order to make yourself understood.” (junior student n° 9)

“In conclusion, I think is both, it is a language for achieve a purpose and also a language for identification because as this language is the one we are studying and using, it forms part of our identity.” (junior student n° 16)

The majority of the students who saw English as a language for “communication” or “both”, which suggests that they perceive the functionality of ELF as a “language for communication” (e.g. Firth, 1996; House 1999; Samarin 1987). They used it as a tool to communicate with people who belonged to linguacultural backgrounds different from their own. Then, their perceptions of ELF as a linguistic tool might explain why none of the students saw it as a “language for identification”.

Attitudes towards teaching ELF

As explained in the methodology section, the last section of the questionnaire comprised questions related to teaching English. In Question 19, the students were asked whether their accent showed their nationality when they had to intervene in class. Similar responses were obtained in the two groups of students, as seen in Table 15.

	Freshmen students	Junior students
Yes	33.33%	37.5%
No	11.11%	--
It depends	27.78%	50%
Don't know	27.78%	12.5%

Table 15. Perceptions of accent showing nationality.

The second part of the question concerned their feeling embarrassed if their accent did show their nationality, results can be seen in Table 16:

	Freshmen students	Junior students
Yes	16.67%	37.5%
No	66.67%	62.5%
No answer	16.67%	--

Table 16. Perceptions of feeling embarrassed if their accent showed their nationality.

Some freshmen students provided comments such as “I am learning and it is natural to make mistakes”, “It is understandable that some aspects of my mother language remain when I speak English” or “the important thing is to achieve communication” while junior students’ comments were: “it is very difficult to sound native-like” or they feel proud of sounding Spanish because they are Spanish. Although Jenkins’ (2007) study on attitudes towards accents reported negative perspectives towards Spanish accent, i.e. considering it “harsh” and “fast”, and “not clear pronunciation” (p. 169), the students in the present study did not show any concern as regards using a Spanish accent when communicating in English. The next question focused on the three aspects that students thought as the reasons for being judged in class, as can be seen in Table 17.

	Freshmen students		Junior students	
1 st	Way of expressing ideas	77.78%	Mistakes	68.75%
2 nd	Mistakes	66.67%	Accent	50%
3 rd	Accent	55.56%	Way of expressing ideas	37.5%

Table 17. Perceptions of aspects that imply judgement when they intervene in their classes.

The junior students must have been more exposed to communicative situations than the freshmen students. This might be the reason why the elements that implied judgement were not the same as for freshmen students. The former seemed more aware of different ways of conveying messages and that could be the reason why mistakes

scored higher. The next element scoring high was accent, because, as Jenkins states students have “deep-seated attitudes towards issues such as “good” and “bad” English, and especially English accents, a belief that NNS English accents are innately inferior” (Mauranen & Ranta, 2009, p. 15). This again implied that junior students were more concerned about aspects such as accent or mistakes that interfered when expressing ideas rather than focusing on the very fact of expressing them.

The last question focused on whether or not the students preferred English language instruction focusing on the native English model, answers were like this, shown in Table 18.

	Freshmen students	Junior students
Yes	22.22%	--
No	50%	68.8%
It depends	22.22%	18.8%
Don't know	5.56%	12.5%

Table 18. Preference for the native model in teaching.

Although the students were allowed to write the reasons for their answers, not so many answered it. Most of the freshmen students' answers were from those who had answered “no”. The reasons they provided included that it was the best way to learn, that they needed a native model to achieve a high level of English. Some of the reasons provided for the affirmative answers elicited comments about the fact that there were more accents apart from RP and it was good to learn all of them, or at least to know some of them. This means that, as Swan (2012) also notes, these students chose a native model because they have been taught with an EFL orientation, which is aimed at following a native model. For the junior students, reasons to say “no” were that they thought the appropriate thing was to learn a native model, and even some of them claimed their aim was to communicate with native speakers. These results are similar to those reported by Tsou and Chen's study (2014), in which the EFL group also preferred a standard in

teaching English as the way to provide the norm and follow the rules. This confirms that their exposure to EFL instruction is based on a teaching approach that draws on a native model as the target language model. In fact, most of the students (both freshmen and junior) also stated that a native pronunciation ensured intelligibility, was clear and understandable. This somehow contradicts previous findings claiming that ENL pronunciation is “more likely to cause communication problems in ELF settings” (Jenkins, 2010, p. 929). However, in the previous section, the junior students stated they had a greater perception of ELF communication strategies than freshmen students did, and, if ELF were to be introduced in the teaching system, it would be useful, to borrow Dewey’s (2012) words, “to ‘open up’ our conception of language” (p. 166) because ELF focuses more on communication than on teaching correctness.

Limitations of the study: this study has been carried out at a very specific scale, thus, its small size does not enable to draw general conclusions and it cannot be taken as a model for further investigation. The study is also limited by the lack of information on students’ experiences abroad or with NNSs, which might have made it difficult for them to answer some questions. Concretely, when the students were asked about Mauranen’s features of ELF communication, some of them were not able to add any more features but only answered in relation to the ones provided by the researcher. This may have made the findings yield a partial view on communication strategies.

Conclusion

This dissertation has sought to explore the students’ perceptions of “degree of nativeness”, “ELF communication” and “the teaching of English”. From the findings reported above it can be concluded that this study does not yet fully provides substantive

evidence that the students perceive the existence of varieties of English yet it points in that direction.

Students do not seem to be completely aware of ELF and its communicative features. Yet it appears that when English has a functionality, e.g. a lingua franca for communicating among non-native English speakers, intelligibility is primed over grammatical correctness. Both the freshmen and the junior students tend to prime the native model not only when learning English but also when it comes to communicating with NSs or NNSs in ELF environments. However, some of the students – mainly, the junior students – show awareness of several of the features of ELF communication.

Their perceptions of English as a language for communication as an important language of the world and spoken in almost every corner of the world may lead to conclude that they take it for granted that ELF interactions occur as they need to communicate with NNSs.

From my experience as a student of languages and as a prospective teacher, I think that teachers' perceptions are as important as students'. As Sifakis and Dewey, my desire would be to introduce ELF (or at least other varieties) in the teaching syllabus. Having a standard as a model has its positive as well as negative connotations: it is a way in which teachers assure that students learn the same from a reliable source, but it is also a way to undermine other varieties which are being overshadowed. Introduction ELF would enrich students' process of learning because they would be able to see the two sides of the same coin, EFL learning and ELF use.

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Appendices

Appendix 1



Students' attitudes and perceptions towards ELF

Questionnaire

Part 1: Introduction

My name is Marina Torres and I am completing a research study for my TFG in the Degree of English Studies. My aim is to identify the students' attitudes and perceptions towards ELF.

Your responses will be confidential, so please do NOT write your name on this questionnaire.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to participate, please return the questionnaire to the researcher. You also do not have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable.

To complete the questionnaire, please **circle** the most appropriate option.

Part 2: Personal information

1. Gender: Male / Female

2. Please write your AGE: _____

3. Are you Spanish? Yes / No If not, write your nationality: _____

4. Which is your mother tongue? _____

5. Is English your second language? _____

6. What other languages do you know? _____

7. Have you ever done a study abroad? Yes No

8. Which is your level of English?

In reading	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
In writing	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
In listening	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
In monologic speech	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
In interaction	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2

Part 3. General questions

1. Is English important nowadays?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

Give reasons:

2. What do you know about English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)? Please write it down below.

Part 4. Perceptions towards degree of nativeness

3. Which accent do you prefer to identify with when you're interacting with other non-native English speakers? Choose up to 3:

- General American
- RP English
- Australian
- Others, please specify:
- Don't know

Is this/Are these the accent(s) that you always use?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Don't know

Is this/Are these the accent(s) that you want to imitate?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Don't know

Give reasons:

4. Do you feel that your English language teachers expect you to perform as a native speaker of English?

	In reading	In writing	In speaking	In monologue	In interaction
Yes					
No					
It depends					
Don't know					

And your content teachers?

	In reading	In writing	In speaking	In monologue	In interaction
Yes					
No					
It depends					
Don't know					

5. Do you feel you want to perform like a native speaker?

	In reading	In writing	In speaking	In monologue	In interaction
Yes					
No					
It depends					
Don't know					

6. If the answers to questions 4 and 5 were affirmative, does it affect you when you want to participate in the interaction in your English language classes?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

Give reasons:

And in your subject content classes?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

Give reasons:

Part 5. Perceptions of ELF communication

7. When you are interacting with native speakers of English, do you think certain omissions such as the –s of 3rd person singular, for instance, '*He do his homework*' or '*She play the piano*' impede communication?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

8. When you are interacting with other non-native speakers of English like you, do you think certain omissions such as the –s of 3rd person singular impede communication?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

9. Do you think some changes such as, for instance, do/does in a question or saying '*I am write*' instead of '*I am writing*' impede communication?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

10. Do you consider these previous examples "bad" English?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

Give reasons:

11. Imagine you are interacting with other non-native speakers of English, is this sentence grammatically correct?

“one of my friends she tried to enter to the university”

Why? Why not?

Is it understandable? Why? Why not?

12. Do you use expressions such as “*what I would like to ask you*” or “*I will give you the introduction*” before actually doing it?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

Have you noticed it in the speech of other people you have talked to?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

13. Have you noticed if when you're talking to another non-native English speaking person you rephrase in order to make the message clearer or more to the point? For instance: “cultural approach to the history of technology *will bring us new insight* will will *will enable us to understand* the developments...”

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

Have you noticed it in the speech of other people you have talked to?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

14. Have you noticed if you use your mother tongue when you don't know a word in English?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

Have you noticed it in the speech of other people you have talked to?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

15. Have you noticed if you gesticulate when you want to explain something?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Don't know

Have you noticed it in the speech of other people you have talked to?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Don't know

16. When you communicate with non-native English speakers, does incorrect use of English make communication difficult?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Don't know

17. Did you imitate/adopt or accommodate/adapt your language to native English speakers?

- Yes
 - No
 - It depends
 - Don't know
- Give reasons:

18. Do you see English as?

- a language for communication
 - a language for identification
 - both a language for communication and a language for identification
- Give reasons:

Part 6. Attitudes towards teaching and ELF

19. When you speak in English in class, does your accent reveal your nationality?

- Yes
- No
- It depends
- Don't know

If it does, do you feel embarrassed or ashamed of it?

- Yes
 - No
- Why? Why not?

20. Do you feel you are being judged when you talk in class regarding...? Choose as many as you need.

- ...your accent
- ...your mistakes
- ...your way of expressing ideas

...others, please specify:
...none of these
...don't know

21. Would you prefer that the teaching of English were not exclusively focused on the native English model?

Yes

No

It depends

Don't know

Give reasons:

Appendix 2

Composition

Now, use the following page to write a composition on an intercultural experience. Please use the following guiding questions to write the composition:

Paragraph 1: Write about an encounter that you have experienced with other non-native English speakers in which you used English in a university setting. What happened, where and when? What were you doing there? Do you remember it in a special way? Was it useful for you? Why/why not?

Paragraph 2: Were you able to communicate easily? And the people talking to you? If your answer was No, what were the problems you/they faced? Did mistakes interfere in the process of communicating? Do you remember whether you had to adapt the way you talked or wrote (gestures, explaining a word, rephrasing...)? Did they talk slowly, simplify what they were saying? Did you feel that there was miscommunication between you? What was the pronunciation they used? Did you imitate their pronunciation?

Paragraph 3: What did you learn from this experience? Did you have any previous experience that helped you to communicate? Did this experience influence the way you talk to native speakers afterwards? And to non-native speakers? From this experience, do you see English as a language for communication or a language for identification? Why?

Can I contact you if I needed clarification of your responses?

Yes

No

If your answer was YES, please choose the option that suits you best:

_Via e-mail. Write it down: _____

_Via interview.

THIS IS THE END OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE
THANK YOU FOR YOUR COLLABORATION