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## Raising young learners' ELF-awareness: An intercultural telecollaboration between Italian and Kyrgyz students

### Abstract

This article provides an overview of the strategies aimed at raising young learners' awareness of English as a lingua franca (ELF), in order to reflect, in language pedagogy, on the profound transformation that English has undergone in recent decades. The main purpose of our research is to explore the efficiency of innovative intercultural activities like telecollaboration in developing young learners' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and ELF-awareness. For the purposes of this research, a project entitled *Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan* was conducted by the authors during the school year 2022-2023. This study involved the design and implementation of web-mediated collaborative tasks for an international community of practice (CoP) of young learners, which comprised twenty-six Italian and fourteen Kyrgyz same age pupils (10-11 years old). We concluded that a blended approach that combines ELF and sociocultural theory (SCT) should be integrated into young learners' English syllabus and should become an integral part of teacher education programmes.

### 1. Introduction

In recent decades, English has undergone a profound transformation at phonological, lexicogrammar and discoursal level, mainly due to its leading position as the language of globalization. A growing body of research (e.g., Gradol 2006; Grazzi 2018; Sifakis et al. 2018; Sifakis and Bayyurt 2017; Pennycook 2009; Tsantila et al. 2016) has emphasized the necessity to take these changes into account as long as language pedagogy is concerned, in order to make

teachers of English, teacher educators and, more in general, second-language practitioners realize the importance of raising students' awareness of the reality of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and its plurilithic dimension (Pennycook 2009) in today's globalized world. ELF researchers (e.g., Grazzi 2013, 2015, 2017; Kohn 2016) believe that the path for raising such awareness lies through the implementation of innovative intercultural activities (e.g., telecollaboration) that may allow language learners from other languacultural settings to cooperate via the Internet.

The present study is particularly focused on young learners of English. Its main objective is to answer the following research questions: how efficient is the experience of intercultural telecollaboration in developing young learners' intercultural competence and ELF-awareness?

The research project presented in this article is entitled *Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan*. It comprised Italian and Kyrgyz same age pupils who had just started Grade 6 (the last grade of elementary school in Kyrgyzstan and the first grade of middle school in Italy). In particular, participants included twenty-six Italian students from St. Philip School (Rome, Italy) and fourteen Kyrgyz students from United World International School (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan). The pupils were 10-11 years old. Moreover, the project involved the active participation of one Italian middle-school teacher (Tatiana Kozlova) and one Kyrgyz primary school teacher (Lukas Zawadzki).

Before and after the project took place, pupils were asked to fill in a paper and pencil questionnaire. This survey, following Dörnyei's (2010) indications, was intended to collect three types of data, namely: factual (about who the respondents were), behavioral (on how the respondents use or had used English in the past), and attitudinal (on what the respondents think about today's global use of English). Qualitative data collection had to be appropriate for young learners, that is why most questions had multiple-choice items to choose from. The remaining items were open questions that contained certain guidance, especially as regards the respondents' reflection on the global use of English and the communicative strategies they normally use when using English as a contact language.

The first part of the project was aimed at exploring learners' experience with ELF and identify the learners' perceptions of the concepts of normativity, appropriateness, comprehensibility, and ownership of English. The second part of the project consisted in an exploratory session in which the pupils introduced themselves and explored each other's cultures. Moreover, it included a collaborative

task, whereby the members of the international community of practice (CoP) had to create a song on the topic of intercultural friendship. The final stage of the project consisted in a post-survey and in a focus group, which also provided us with relevant qualitative data about the participants' feedback on their experience of intercultural telecollaboration. However, each teacher administered and analyzed the data collected through the pre-survey, the post-survey, and the focus group separately, for privacy reasons. Therefore, the data analysis and the conclusions about the overall project efficiency that are presented in this article are based on the answers of the Italian respondents only.

In the Conclusions the authors suggest ways in which an ELF-aware perspective in English language teaching (ELT) may be introduced as part of teacher education programs, in order to enhance what seem to be necessary and undeferrable changes within the mainstream ELT paradigm, based on native-speakerism (see, for instance, Holliday, 2005; Houghton and Hashimoto, 2018).

This study is organized as follows. The first three sections are intended to establish the theoretical framework that supports our on-field research, with plenty of references to ELF studies that have so far paved the way for a reconceptualization of the English of the subject in ELT. Moreover, we believe that these first three sections may be particularly appreciated by readers who are not familiar with some fundamental notions regarding ELF research and its pedagogical implications (e.g., the historical background of the global spread of English; the concept of ELF-aware pedagogy as a way to raise ELF-awareness and intercultural communicative competence in the English classroom; the convergence of English as a foreign language (EFL) and ELF through learners' performance).

Section n. 4 presents the project called *Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan*, and the data analysis of the pre- and post-treatment surveys that were conducted at the beginning and at the end of the project, respectively. It also takes into consideration the Italian participants' feedback that was provided during the final focus group.

In section n. 5, we discuss the findings of the project presented in the previous section and confirm that distantly located classes from heterogeneous contexts tend to appropriate English as a mediational tool to carry out their communicative tasks successfully.

Finally, section n. 6 contains our concluding remarks about the pedagogical value of innovative ELF-based learning activities, like intercultural telecollaboration, which may enhance young learners' ELF-awareness.

## *2. English as a lingua franca*

In recent decades, mainly due to its leading position as the language of globalization, English has undergone a profound transformation, as Graddol (2006) showed in his seminal study for the British Council. Until then, it was spoken in most cases as a mother tongue in English-speaking countries, and as a nativized language in post-colonial countries. In addition, it was learned as a foreign language, that is for communication between native and non-native speakers in many other parts of the world. Nowadays, however, it is used most extensively as a lingua franca between speakers of different first languages and cultural backgrounds, who are mainly non-native English speakers (NNESs) from countries with no British colonial history. Grazzi (2018, 21) emphasizes that the “reasons for the pervasiveness of English are not intrinsically linguistic, but largely depend on external circumstances.” For example, English first spread as the language of the British empire, and then, in the 20th century, as the language of the United States of America, i.e., the world’s main superpower and the leading force of globalization.

In this article the definition of ELF encompasses all uses of English where communication takes place between speakers of different first languages, including non-native speakers of English, as well as between non-native and native speakers of English.

The future of ELF is intrinsically connected with globalization and depends on what scenario this process will ensue. So far, as Jenkins et al. (2011, 284) have claimed, a major result of the globalization of English is its relatively “fluid, flexible, contingent, and often non-native-influenced” nature. Hence, in the following section we will consider: a) how the global diffusion of English has inevitably led to its localization to serve local purposes; and b) the consequences of such appropriation and adjustment.

### *2.1 The glocal dimension of English*

The global diffusion of English inevitably led to its appropriation by non-native speakers (i.e., its adjustment for their own purposes), and consequently to the emergence of a wide range of varieties. In this perspective, English emerges as a “glocal, polycentric lingua franca [...] that represents an additional re-

source that increases the L2-users' communicative power" (Grazzi 2018, 29). The word *glocal*, coined by Robertson (1995), is a blend of the words *global* and *local*, and refers to the process in which English is adopted by a local culture to be used for global communication. Because a language normally reflects its speakers' linguistic background, but also their culture and society, we may affirm that ELF, in turn, reflects the variable international social practices and identities of its speakers. This represents a linguacultural shift whereby English should not be considered a threat to the sociocultural identity of NNEs, but rather an additional affordance to mediate worldwide communication.

## 2.2 *The transcultural dimension of English*

Intercultural communication through English has become a central element in investigating into the global uses of English, and particularly into ELF (Lopriore and Grazzi 2016). The fact that nowadays NNEs significantly outnumber English native-speakers (NEs) has major implications for the way we view English as a language and a medium for intercultural communication.

Larsen-Freeman (2016, 15) suggests to conceive of language, its use and learning as a "complex adaptive system" (CAS), inspired by Complexity Theory. She (Larsen-Freeman 2016, 29) remarks that the typical features of ELF, like fluidity, variability, creativity, and local negotiation are also qualities that are consistent with a vision of language as a complex adaptive system, which is "open, adaptive/feedback sensitive, dynamic, unfinalizable, inseparable from context and variable." CASs are continuously transformed by use, consequently, Larsen-Freeman extends the CAS view to culture, considering language and culture as two interacting CASs that constantly influence and adapt to each other. In line with Larsen-Freeman, ELF research contributes to the development of our understanding of the relationships between language, culture and identity. As Baker (2018, 13) argues, "ELF research underscores the move away from the essentialist confluences of cultural identity with national cultures and languages – at the forefront of decentering the Anglophone native speaker as the model for intercultural communication through English." The author (Baker 2020, 13) links intercultural communication and ELF research in adopting a similar post-structuralist perspective on language, identity, community, and culture, which are seen as constructed and negotiated:

successful intercultural/transcultural communication involves the ability to make use of and negotiate multilingual/plurilingual linguistic resources, a variety of communicative practices and strategies, and movement between global, national, local, and emergent frames of reference. This is a very different conception of competence to that typically utilised in English language teaching (ELT) with its pre-determined 'code' consisting of a restricted range of grammatical, lexical, and phonological forms and minimal concern with the socio-cultural dimension of communication. The reconceptualization of English language that scholars are calling for needs to be accompanied by a focus on the wider intercultural and transcultural communicative practices in which language is embedded and enmeshed. This entails recognition of the central place of intercultural competence and the awareness that it is necessary to manage such complexity, variation, and fluidity in communication.

Increasingly complex multilingual and multicultural settings in which ELF communication takes place led Jenkins (2015, 73) to view them as creating a complex communication terrain of "English as a multilingua franca [...] in which English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen." Empirical studies of ELF communication have revealed that interlocutors use English to create and manipulate multiple cultural identities. Baker (2018, 14) calls these identities "third-place identities", with participants being in-between and mediating between cultures or other groupings. These findings, together with the conceptualization of English as a multilingua franca and the notion of translanguaging – i.e., a learning strategy that includes the use of the entire linguistic repertoire of each learner, through teaching practices in a multilingual key – (García and Wei 2014) have led to a recent call to refer to ELF communication practices not as intercultural, but rather as *transcultural communication* (Baker and Sangiamchit 2019; Baker and Ishikawa 2021; Ishikawa 2022). In this view, ELF users take advantage of their multilingual and multicultural resources while engaging in translanguaging and transcultural practices, transgressing and transforming the borders between languages, communities, and cultures. This transformationalist approach challenges the homogenization hypothesis, that is the vision of ELF as a monolithic variety. Therefore, Jenkins et al. (2011, 3) conclude that the purpose of ELF research is not to identify the core features of a new, independent, and self-contained variety of English. In this perspective, the empirical research into intercultural collaboration through ELF (Baker 2015; Grazzi 2015, 2018) highlights the importance of enhancing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Byram 2008) in ELT. The issue of intercultural awareness, and especially raising learners' intercultural awareness in ELT settings, will be further examined

in the next section. Moreover, an example of its implementation is provided by the research project presented in section n. 4.

It should not go unnoticed that while World Englishes studies are mainly focused on bounded varieties of English, including non-native varieties like post-colonial Englishes, ELF research is mainly concerned with the process of globalization and how it has led to the emergence of a fluid, flexible, contingent, hybrid and deeply intercultural use of English (Dewey 2007). Following Grazzi (2020, 287), ELF is considered “a variable social construct that emerges in authentic communicative contexts where international speakers with diverse sociolinguistic identities and cultural backgrounds communicate.”

As we have seen, ELF communication takes place between speakers from a wide variety of linguacultural backgrounds, whose appropriation of English has led to what Pennycook (2009, 205) has defined: “plurilithic Englishes”. As Jenkins (2015, 51) argues, ELF is not only a “highly complex phenomena but also one whose diversity is currently constantly increasing as more people from different language backgrounds engage in intercultural communication using English as one of their mediums.” The borders between English and other languages with which it comes in contact become blurred as more recent notions of translingual practice shed light on how non-native speakers appropriate English for their own purposes. The phenomena deriving from language contact are not new, though. In fact, the increased use of English on a global level gave them more visibility. This process results in innovations, as English is appropriated by speakers from diverse linguacultural backgrounds and assumes distinct functions and forms in different contexts.

The current transformations that English is undergoing, and which in ELF contexts are accelerated, are part of wider global trends. The increased cultural flows of our digitized world have given rise to an intensification of innovative language practices, which are especially prominent in ELF interactional settings. Such considerations, along with the concept of the NNEs’ ownership of English, have a number of implications for ELT that will be discussed in the next section.

### *2.3 Going beyond native-speakerism and the Standard English ideology*

As regards ELT and the assessment of learners’ competences, ELF poses a double problem. Firstly, the expected global growth in ELF usage calls into

question the prioritizing of native English standard grammatical and pragmatic norms when evaluating the competencies of non-native students. Indeed, these norms belong to a foreign target language that they will hardly ever fully acquire (see also section n. 3.1, in this article). Secondly, the inherent variability of ELF does not just entail that assessment criteria should be updated, but also that an alternative notion of second language assessment is necessary in order to be able to measure whether the English of the L2-users is well suited for its pragmatic purposes. Jenkins and Leung (2014, 5), for instance, contend that “the (teaching and) testing of English [...] needs to reflect this reality if it is to be relevant to the ways in which the majority of non-native English learners will use the language in their future lives”. In teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), often for professional or academic purposes, it is normally assumed that students' ideal interlocutors are NESs. Consequently, a standard native variety of the target language is considered the ultimate goal of learning, and learners are evaluated in terms of the proximity of their English skills to those of NESs. Any forms that differ from the standard English variety are therefore to be considered errors. On the contrary, from an ELF-perspective, variations from native English forms are not necessarily rejected, as they may be considered viable options, as long as they do not affect the interlocutors' mutual comprehensibility. We should observe, however, that there are also other criteria for assessing learners' proficiency, which represent an alternative model to the dominant native-speaker-oriented paradigm. In a nutshell, what really matters in authentic communication is effective and pragmatically successful communication through users' use of English. This may well include emerging and innovative forms of ELF.

Despite empirical evidence, making teachers and examination boards take account of the reality of ELF in the English classroom remains a major challenge. Essentially, it is advisable that teachers and examination boards consider ELF a socially appropriate linguistic repertoire and resource in real intercultural communication. Reflecting on the appropriateness of a native-speaker model for ELT, Larsen-Freeman (2016, 24) suggests that the difficulty and resistance of English language teachers to adopt an ELF-aware approach is connected with their inability to “reconcile the normative conception of language that they have inherited [...] with an acceptance of the fluidity of language.” Adopting an ELF perspective on teaching does not mean neglecting norms and standards, but rather exposing students to language variation to foster



their understanding that such norms and standards are flexible. The following section will consider the pedagogical implications of ELF research findings in more details, and the concept of raising ELF-awareness in the English classroom as a pivotal point in a new paradigm for ELT.

### *3. Raising ELF-awareness in the English classroom*

Over the last twenty years, ELF research has challenged the primacy of the native speaker model in ELT, promoting the alternative notion of ELF-aware pedagogy that will be explored in the current section.

#### *3.1 The convergence of EFL and ELF through learners' performance*

Current studies on ELF are quite vast and varied, but an area that deserves further investigation is “the interplay between foreign language education and ELF, in ELT” (Grazzi 2020, 281). The author (Grazzi 2020) recommends to consider the interaction between the formal learning context and the opportunities that learners have to communicate in authentic intercultural settings. Normally, English is taught as a foreign language, according to a structured syllabus based on native-speaker standards. Meanwhile, ever younger L2-users/learners are gaining access to the Internet and become exposed to English in extra-scholastic contexts (e.g., through videogaming, YouTube videos, fan groups, etc.). Therefore, there seems to be a direct relationship between the process of learning English in an institutional environment, the extra-scholastic sources of English input, and the emergence of ELF as a medium of communication in real intercultural communicative events. Indeed, EFL learners are at the same time ELF users once they step outside the scholastic context and are involved in authentic situations where ELF mediates communication, especially online. This ambivalent dimension of the English speaker as an EFL student and an ELF user generates a process of learning and acquisition whereby EFL and ELF converge in the speaker/learner's performance (Grazzi 2013). The convergence of EFL and ELF entails that a critical stance should be taken as regards the Interlanguage Hypothesis (Selinker 1972) that so far has held a significant place in second-language acquisition and ELT. Selinker claims that learning a second language consists in a progres-

sion between two opposite poles: the student's native tongue (also called *source language*, SL) and the target language (TL), that conforms to an abstract native speaker's model. The intermediate stages between these two extremes constitute the so-called "interlanguage continuum" (Corder 1981, 90), which, if successful, eventually coincides with the prototypical native speaker's language.

According to Grazi (2013), instead, the process of learning a second language does not require a progressive distancing from the student's LI. In fact, from a cognitive point of view the learner's first language plays a fundamental role in the way a student appropriates English and reshapes it according to their linguacultural identity. In this sense, EFL and ELF are considered two adjacent orientations that serve the student/user as mediational tools both in the school environment and in the world of global communication. Kohn (2018) defines the process that leads learners to construct their own English the *My English* concept. He (Kohn 2011, 80) describes the process whereby learners develop their personal way of using English from a social constructivist perspective:

people acquire English, or any other language, by creatively constructing their own version of it in their minds, hearts and behaviour. [...] Acquiring a language is the very opposite of copying or cloning -it is a cognitive and emotional process of sociocultural and communicative construction. [...] Regardless of how powerful the communicative and communal pull towards a 'common core' might be, the English that people develop is inevitably different from any target language model they choose or were forced to adopt.

In the same vein, through the lens of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory (SCT), Lantolf and Thorne (2006) see the process of second-language development as depending on the educational macro-system in which learning occurs, i.e., on the interaction between the individual learner, the teacher, and the class. While the Interlanguage Hypothesis presupposes that second language learning is essentially an idiosyncratic learning process activated by the single student, SCT presupposes that the improvement of the individual language learner may depend on appropriate and timely peer support and companions' corrective feedback in a zone of proximal development (ZPD<sup>1</sup>).

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1 Vygotsky (1978, 86) sees the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers".

In conclusion, it seems reasonable to affirm that there is a dynamic interplay between EFL, the English of the subject, and ELF, the language that learners appropriate and construct cooperatively through the communicative activities they carry out. Especially when English students/users are involved in authentic international settings (e.g., through web-mediated communicative tasks), they interact with companions from diverse linguacultural backgrounds and use ELF as a contact language. This requires a paradigm shift in ELT, which is supposed to integrate the notion of ELF within the English curriculum, in order to raise teachers' and learners' ELF awareness.

### 3.2 *Raising ELF-awareness in ELT*

Sifakis (2017, 1; our emphasis) has defined ELF-awareness a concept that refers to “the knowledge, attitudes and skillset of ELT stakeholders and ELT products *with regard to issues and concerns raised in [...] ELF [...] research literature*, and the extent to which they have relevance for local ELT contexts.” The author specifies that ELF-awareness does not replace other L2 approaches, because ELF is not teachable, but rather complements them. ELF-aware teachers might find more effective ways of teaching and testing English to empower their students as successful users of English. Sifakis (2017, 1) views ELF-awareness as a “continuum that depicts the gradual transformation of stakeholders' attitudes, to the extent that local contexts, and stakeholders' needs and wants allow.” This continuum comprises different degrees of awareness, ranging from no awareness to full awareness, which is useful because it can help to perceive (and begin to research into) the degree of engagement with ELF in the language classroom. The continuum, which is strictly notional, has two components, A and B (Fig. 1). Part A concerns how much and what teachers know about ELF, i.e., their awareness of ELF discourse and of the strategies used in ELF interactions. It also concerns their awareness of the local teaching-learning context. Part B concerns the ELF-aware orientation of ELT. The continuum relates also to the decisions teachers make regarding instruction, corrective feedback, etc., to render their lessons ELF-aware.

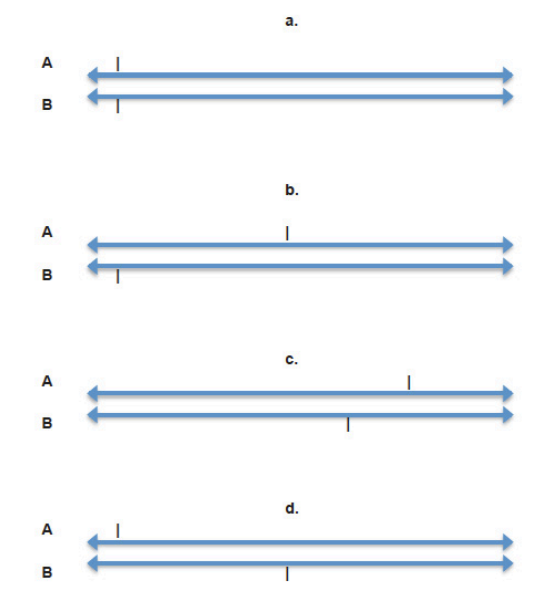


Fig. 1. The ELF awareness continuum (Sifakis 2017, 14)

As ELF-awareness is a question of degree, case (b) and case (d) above are considered by Sifakis (2017) to be legitimate attitudes regarding ELF-awareness. The continuum can help to appreciate the complexity and challenges of integrating ELF into ELT. This should help teachers grasp the meaning of the term ELF-awareness, and also its complexity when thinking about it in practical, context-specific terms. Sifakis (2017) contends that knowing about ELF is not enough. In order to be ELF-aware, teachers must also be fully cognizant of their context. As a notion, ELF-awareness offers valuable insights into various pedagogical contexts. It may influence the evaluation of established instructional practices, textbooks, school curricula, L2 policies in testing, and generate innovative teaching and testing practices that are informed by ELF research.

When it comes to learners of English, integrating the findings of ELF research into the English classroom enables them to be considered competent users of English in their own right and not a deficient version of an ideal native speaker. Learners benefit greatly from such recognition, which values the way they exploit their multilingual communicative resources (Jenkins 2015; García 2009; García and Wei 2014). Findings from the extensive studies of what ELF users know and how they interact should inform lesson plans, teacher education curricula, textbooks, policies, and assessment procedures in ways that

will render the ELT experience richer, and closer to a realistic experience of what has come to be global communication via English. According to Vettorel (2017, 239), “raising awareness of the multifaceted sociolinguistic realities of Englishes and ELF in teacher education constitutes a first and fundamental step towards a more ‘inclusive’ and ‘realistic’ approach in ELT.”

As a recent survey has shown (Grazzi and Lopriore 2020), standard English is still considered the uncontested reference model in ELT by a large majority of respondents, thus revealing that language education is essentially centered on a monolithic vision of EFL. Nevertheless, data also indicate that, in terms of teaching practice, the notion of English as a closed system is actually changing. As the authors (Grazzi and Lopriore 2020, 16) conclude, “respondents’ tendency to stick to native-speakerism is gradually giving way to a more open-minded approach to language variability, which is inherent to the process of language acquisition.” In the next section we will discuss some of the main controversial issues related to ELF-aware pedagogy.

### *3.3 A new paradigm in ELT: bringing ELF to the English classroom*

#### *3.3.1 ELF-aware pedagogy and Sociocultural Theory*

The new role of English as a global language has led Rose et al. (2021, 157) “to call for a paradigm shift in the field of English language teaching (ELT), to match the new sociolinguistic landscape of the twenty-first century.” Over the last few years, numerous publications appeared exploring this proposal in practice. Classroom-based research, and research in teacher education (e.g., Bowles and Cogo 2015; Gagliardi and Maley 2010; Grazzi 2013, 2017, 2018; Vettorel 2015) have outlined some key proposals for change in ELT from the related fields of ELF and Global Englishes. However, this paradigm shift poses a few burning issues concerning the implementation of ELF-aware pedagogy, for the transition from native-speakerism towards a more open approach in ELT is still in progress. Grazzi’s (2017) approach to ELF-aware second language teaching is based on a theoretical framework which combines Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (SCT), its implementation in second language development (Lantolf 2000; Lantolf and Thorne 2006), and van Lier’s (2004) ecological approach to second language learning. One of the most controversial points regarding ELT

concerns the role of a native-speaker language model in language education. Grazzi (2017, 210) notices that “ELF research has never advocated the apriori elimination of a NES model in ELT, nor its replacement with ELF, which, as we have seen, is not an encoded variety of English that could be taught as such, but rather a variable way of using it by NNES.” From a social constructivist perspective, the NSE model provides an ‘orientation’ (Kohn 2011) for learners’ acquisition and performance, but it gains a new existence in the speakers’ appropriation of the L2. As Sifakis (2017, 16) contends,

ELF-aware pedagogy should focus on prioritising what structures and functions of English need to be taught, showcasing successful interactions involving non-native users, updating corrective feedback strategies, and reflecting on the role of the teacher as a custodian of standard English and as a role model (be they native or non-native users) for their learners.

Consequently, in a global context it seems more appropriate to focus on the “super-diversity” of ELF (Cogo 2012, 289) that offers a more realistic view of English and design a new curriculum where a gamut of language models (including World Englishes) and examples of successful NNES language usage are made available to students. A language teacher should present native as well as non-native varieties of English, while conformity to NS-models should not be enforced in the English classroom. As for the assessment of learners’ competences, it should be based on their communicative capability (Widdowson 2003).

### *3.3.2 Reconceptualization of learners’ errors and dynamic assessment*

This section is focused on an ELF-aware alternative assessment paradigm and the reconceptualization of learners’ errors. In mainstream EFL teaching, deviations from SE codified norms are considered developmental errors that mark the steps of the “interlanguage continuum” (Corder 1981, 90), that is the linear learning process that evolves between two opposite ends: the learner’s L1 and the target language. Therefore, the student’s L1 is considered a hindrance to the acquisition of the target language and becomes the main cause of ‘interference’ (e.g., errors caused by the occurrence of negative interlinguistic transfer). Instead, from a SCT point of view the student’s L1 is a valuable resource for the acquisition of English, which, as we have seen, takes place through the

dynamic intra- and inter-personal contact between these two languages (e.g., non-standard ELF lexicogrammar forms resulting from the strategic use of cross-linguistic transfer). According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006, 294-295),

adults, in particular, have a well-developed first-language system, which [...] is their primary symbolic artifact for regulating their own cognitive activity. It is therefore natural that they should rely on this artifact to mediate their learning of anything, including additional languages. [...] Thus, pedagogies that seek to avoid reliance on learners' first language are, in our view, misguided.

Therefore, if ELF deviant language features meet the criteria of systematicity and communicative effectiveness, they must be considered ELF variants, not errors, when contrasted with equivalent standard ENL forms. The immediate implications of this changing attitude towards learners' deviations from standard norms is that also the assessment criteria of students' proficiency should be consistent with an ELF-aware approach to ELT. As Newbold (in Grazzi and Lopriore 2020, 78) suggests,

the time seems to have come to abandon native speaker standards in order to provide valid and meaningful assessment of the use of English in an international ambit, in which the language and strategies of native speakers may actually hinder communication. [...] Teachers and testers (and ultimately international examining boards) will need to develop 'ELF aware tests'.

Alsaadi (2021, 73) claims that "assessment is one of the most demanding aspects in education." The author (Alsaadi 2021) suggests that 'dynamic assessment' (DA), that is formative assessment, should be adopted to reinforce learning and motivate students in second language development, as well as enhance language teaching. DA, being rooted in Vygotskian SCT and the ZPD, enhances learning through students' interaction and mediation. It is concerned with measuring language learners' performance through their interaction with the teacher and more experienced peers. DA tends to elicit the skills and abilities of individual learners, as well as their learning potential. Being highly beneficial for assessing learners from different linguacultural backgrounds, it can be seen as a valuable tool in ELF-aware pedagogy. Additionally, Poehner and Lantolf (2005) have described DA as an approach that integrates assessment with teaching to build up learner's development through appropriate forms

of mediation. It requires the interaction between teachers and students, and it is closer to instruction rather than examination.

In the next section we will present a research project that was carried out at primary school level, the aim of which was to create a multilingual and intercultural CoP with Italian and Kyrgyz young learners. The aim of this project was: a) to raise pupils' ELF-awareness and ICC through a web-mediated telecollaboration task; and b) enhance the implementation of DA within the English classroom.

#### *4. Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan*

This section reports an on-field experience regarding the implementation of ELF-aware pedagogy for young learners. It follows Grazzi's (2018, 169) call to develop "new practices from the earliest stages of language teaching/learning, which can promote forms of partnerships with teachers from other countries to create opportunities for their students to cooperate and improve their lingual capability [...] and intercultural citizenship." The intent of this study was to implement innovative communicative activities for the English classroom based on a blended approach that combines sociocultural theory and Network-Based Language Teaching (NBLT) (Warschauer and Kern 2000). In particular, the learning activities that participants carried out were based on intercultural telecollaboration, which O'Dowd and Ritter (2006 1) have defined as follows: "the use of online communication tools to bring together language learners in different countries for the development of collaborative project work and intercultural exchange." The goal of this project, which was called *Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan*, was to improve young pupils' ELF-awareness and ICC through the use of ELF within a virtual CoP, i.e., a web-mediated community of learners of English from different linguistic backgrounds.

The collaborative task assigned to the CoP by their teachers (i.e., Tatiana Kozlova and Lukas Zawadzki) began with connecting students online during their English lessons. In the first phase, they used an interactive white board in class; in the second phase, each student was provided with a laptop. The task that the two teachers assigned to the CoP was to work collaboratively to create a song about international friendship. The main pedagogic purpose un-



derpinning this task was to foster the development of learners' intercultural awareness by reflecting on: a) what international friendship entails; and b) the differences/similarities between participants' cultures. The aspects of culture that students had to reflect on were determined by a list of topics proposed by the teachers: a) their school, b) their cuisine, c) their music, d) their fashion, e) their festivities, f) their traditions. The importance of developing cultural awareness and cultural literacy skills for success in 21<sup>st</sup> century is highlighted in the report World Economic Forum "New Vision for Education" (2015, 3).

Working as a group was supposed to give learners the opportunity to be involved in authentic intercultural communication via the Internet, so that the socio-cognitive process of second language development could be activated in a ZPD. Working as a CoP and writing the song about international friendship cooperatively was also expected to help this group of students not only raise their ELF-awareness but also improve their communicative and sociocultural competencies through their reciprocal advice and feedback. In this way, practicing creative writing was turned into a social event that could foster language development as well. The creation of a ZPD was favored by pupils sharing their posts, so that they could help each other in reflecting on their language output and improve it both linguistically and with more creative ideas. This particular kind of language check, which was appropriately guided by the teachers, was able to help learners focus on their use of English. This, in turn, promoted students' reflective attitude. This social networking was also intended to reinforce learners' media literacy, as they were expected to realize that they were able to carry out collaborative work with companions from another country, using ELF as a mediational tool. This in turn was expected to raise pupils' ELF-awareness.

#### 4.1 *Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan*

The project *Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan* was carried out in the 2022-2023 school year. For the purposes of this project, a CoP was created comprising Italian and Kyrgyz learners who had just started Grade 6. The pupils interacted online through ELF to improve their ICC. They communicated once a week, for one hour, from November 2022 to February 2023. There were 40 pupils altogether: 26 Italian students from St. Philip School (Rome,

Italy), and 14 Kyrgyz students from United World International School (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan). The pupils were 10-11 years old. The group was coordinated by two teachers, namely Tatiana Kozlova, at St. Philip School, and Lukas Zawadzki, at United World International School. They organized web-mediated communication, provided language support, advice, and corrective feedback to the members of the CoP.

The project was created out of the partnership of these schools with Cambridge Primary Combined Course. Both schools are accredited by Cambridge International and follow the Cambridge curriculum in teaching English as a Second Language, as well as other subjects. It should be noted that the Cambridge Curriculum is firmly rooted in the Standard English model, with a native-speaker assessment framework. Moreover, the Cambridge assessment system includes mostly form-focused activities and evaluates learners' compliance with native-speaker norms (both British and American models are accepted). Nevertheless, for both schools the current project was the first step in the integration of ELF-based activities into the English syllabus, despite the dominant British English pedagogical model. This, we may say, is in line with the latest indications provided by the Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2018) of the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR), where descriptors of competence are provided for building on plurilingual/pluricultural repertoires.

The literature analysis conducted by the authors revealed that telecollaboration is most effective when it is "set up in an institutional context with the aim of developing both language skills and intercultural competence through structured tasks." (Guth and Helm 2010, 14). A pre-treatment survey was carried out among Italian pupils aimed at exploring learners' experience with ELF and identifying the starting point and learners' perceptions about normativity, appropriateness, comprehensibility and ownership of English.

The implementation of the intercultural telecollaboration project consisted of two stages:

Stage 1. Exploratory session, in which the pupils introduced themselves and explored each other's cultures through question and answer (Q&A) activities, via two video-calls.

Stage 2. Collaborative session, which consisted in the CoP creating a song about intercultural friendship.

Before and after treatment, pupils were asked to fill in two questionnaires, respectively. The first one was intended to collect information about the pu-

pils' use of English outside the classroom and their knowledge about the use of ELF; the second one encouraged respondents to: a) reflect on the experience of intercultural collaboration; and b) assess the communicative strategies they used in completing their cooperative task.

Each teacher administered these questionnaires separately, because for privacy reasons the results could not be shared between the teachers. Therefore, the data analysis and the conclusions about the overall project efficiency are based on the answers of the Italian respondents only.

#### *4.2 Pre-treatment survey*

During the pre-treatment stage, pupils were asked to fill in a questionnaire that consisted of twenty questions, divided into two parts, which covered three types of data: factual, behavioral, and attitudinal (Dörnyei 2010). The structure of the questionnaire had to be user-friendly for young learners, that is why most questions consisted in multiple-choice items, while the open questions contained certain guidance.

##### *4.2.1 The pre-treatment data analysis*

Here is a synopsis of relevant data collected through the pre-treatment survey, which consisted of 20 items, altogether. Most of the pupils were eleven-years old, while some of them were still ten. All surveyed pupils could speak two languages, their L1 and English, and the majority of them (65%) could speak three languages. The data analysis showed that within this multilingual and intercultural CoP several different L1s were spoken, namely Chinese, Japanese, Bangla, Russian, Spanish, German, and Arabic. The vast majority of pupils' families (77%) could speak English as well.

The majority of respondents had been studying English since they attended nursery school and had occasionally used this language for authentic communication. Moreover, all pupils were encouraged to speak English during the English lessons, at lunch time, and during the breaks. English is also the language students normally used at school to carry out plenty of group activities. This contributed to their perception of being successful users of English as an

additional contact language. Indeed, apart from their teachers and classmates, their interlocutors would include family members, other friends, people on the Internet, and even strangers.

88% of students reported that they could understand everything their interlocutors said. Further investigation into this communicative success shed light on the pupils' perception of their performance. Indeed, they showed an overall comprehension (i.e., extensive) of their interlocutors' messages, rather than an intensive understanding of every utterance.

77% of pupils were able to perceive different accents in spoken English by comparing their previous experience with native and non-native speakers with the English of their counterparts. This datum is particularly important as long as raising learners' ELF-awareness is concerned, for it allowed their teachers to focus on the notion of English variability in international contexts. Notably, children could also perceive of the difference in the lexicogrammar between the English spoken by their adult interlocutors and their teacher.

96% of respondents used English to communicate with other people online. Therefore, the Internet was also exploited by their English teachers to enhance learners' ICC.

The pre-treatment survey revealed that the use of ELF in videogaming (73% of respondents) and social networks (46% of respondents) has become a reality even among young learners. Pupils also used English to communicate with other people via WhatsApp videocalls.

The survey showed that misunderstanding in online communication was handled differently than in face-to-face communication, with learners' preferences distributed almost equally between asking interlocutors for more help (e.g., asking for clarification, asking for repetition, etc.) and looking up the meaning of unfamiliar words on the Internet.

As for the open question of the survey regarding the areas where English is spoken today, respondents indicated the following countries: the USA/America, the UK/England/Great Britain, Canada, Australia, India, China, Argentina, all countries/every country/the whole world. This shows learners' awareness both of the English-speaking countries, and of the global spread of English as an international language.

100% of respondents were interested in talking to people of their age from other countries. This was a good pre-requisite for the project, as it showed learners' motivation to engage in intercultural communication. The pupils

were provided with the following list of topics: a) their school, b) their cuisine, c) their music, d) their fashion, e) their festivities, f) their traditions, g) other (please specify). The topics that seemed to be of major interest were ‘traditions’ (77%), ‘festivities’ (42%) and ‘school’ (50%).

The majority of respondents (88%) showed their positive attitude towards cultural diversity, which constituted another important pre-requisite for working collaboratively as a CoP in the upcoming intercultural project of telecollaboration.

When asked about their favorite communicative strategies in using ELF, 50% indicated repetition, and 58% paraphrasing. These were their most commonly used forms of accommodation.

### 4.3 *Treatment*

The project lasted from November 2022 to February 2023, and was divided into two stages: 1) introductory; and 2) collaborative.

#### 4.3.1 *The first stage*

The first phase included two introductory online meetings with all the pupils involved in the project of intercultural telecollaboration. These meetings were carried out using videocalls on Google Meet. During the first meeting, Italian and Kyrgyz pupils took turns to introduce themselves briefly. During the second meeting the students interacted through a Q&A session about their traditions, festivities, cuisine, and music. When they could not hear each other due to technical problems, pupils used visuals, i.e., drawing pictures and writing words on flashcards that they showed in front of the camera. In this way, participants experienced that communication is multimodal and transcends all boundaries with interlocutors, who used every available means to interact and negotiate meaning.

#### 4.3.2 *The second stage*

The researchers’ original intention was to make participants discuss different topics through live videocalls. However, due to the five-hour time difference

between Rome and Bishkek, they opted for asynchronous writing to carry out their collaborative task. In this way the pupils could interact using written ELF when it was convenient for them.

The second part of the research project was carried out on PBworks platform (<http://stphilip.pbworks.com>, former PBwiki), which is a real-time collaborative editing system. A free basic wiki workspace was created for this project, as well as accounts for all Italian and Kyrgyz pupils. Students had to click on the link they received, and log in using their accounts. Then they had to carry out the assigned collaborative task, i.e., create a song about international friendship.

For the purposes of the current research, hundreds of learners' comments that were posted on the platform were divided into phases. The off-topic comments were excluded, while the most relevant and representative comments from both groups of students, (i.e., those that contained stimulating ideas that influenced the course of the discussion), were later selected and analyzed by the researchers, in order to draw conclusions about the final outcome of the project. The majority of participants' comments were posted by the Italian students, because they outnumbered the Kyrgyz students. Moreover, the Italians seemed to be more highly motivated to get the work done, supposedly because they were already familiar with teamwork and had already shown their appreciation for group activities. In the following section, participants' names are abbreviated or replaced by pseudonyms, for privacy reasons.

#### *4.3.2.1 ELF features and intercultural telecollaboration*

The collaborative work on the composition of a song on intercultural friendship began with the opening message posted by the teachers on December 6, 2022. They invited learners to start discussing the topic of the song. This phase ended on February 2, 2023.

- Phase 1. Initiating. At the beginning of the discussion, pupils introduced themselves and expressed their hope to carry out a nice project and make new friends. In doing this, they signaled their cultural identity by deliberately adding Italian and Kyrgyz greetings to their comments in English. Learners saw this collaborative project as an opportunity to bridge the gap between their countries and teach each other some basic sentences in their respective languages.

- Phase 2. Planning. In this phase, the pupils discussed the tune and the style of the song they were going to compose. They eventually decided to proceed with the rap style and make the lines of the lyrics rhyme.
- Phase 3. Executing. In this phase the pupils posted their contributions to the composition of their song. The following are two examples of their online interaction (the original spelling is preserved).

F. G. wrote:

I think I have an idea for our song  
 A friend is a treasure  
 Friendship is a think that you can't measure  
 If you have a friend you have more than gold  
 Friendship is the best the best thing in the world...

Y. A. wrote:

its international friendship not friendship in general!

It should be noticed that Y.A.'s comment shows that this pupil is remarkably aware of the fact that international friendship entails something different than the friendship between people from the same linguacultural background. This was a turning point in the discussion that made other students aware of the intercultural dimension of the project they were working at. The following examples show how the pupils' intercultural awareness was slowly developing (the original spelling is preserved).

B. G. said:

I think that the song needs a peice of another language

C. B. said:

Maybe we can write it in kirgis (if its called like this) (heart emoji) I hope they will like it

B. G. said:

I think this song will help People from diffrent countries to become friends

It is also important to underline that whenever any of the participants tended to lose the intercultural focus of their work, the other members of the CoP reminded them about the true spirit of the project. Moreover, their emphasis was primarily on the intelligibility of the lyrics of the song they were writing collaboratively.

When the Kyrgyz pupils joined the discussion, the Italian students asked for their partners' support and collaboration. As soon as the first contributions

to the song began to arrive from the Kyrgyz group, the Italian learners were faced with cases of “reverse unilateral idiomaticity” (Grazzi 2018, 148), a typical feature of ELF communication, whereby the use of L1 idiomatic expressions in English could make meaning exceptionally opaque and affect the conversation flow. In our case, the Italian students could not understand the meaning of a few idiomatic expressions that the Kyrgyz partners had turned into ELF (see the underlined example below).

E. B. *said*:

Hi guys i have some ideas for our song

Maybe we can start it like this:

WE ARE GOOD FRIENDS

WE ARE TOGETHER

WE MAKE THE LIGHTBULB OF THE FRIEND GO AND FLY LIKE THE BIRDS  
IN THE SKY

As we can see, the use of reverse unilateral idiomaticity in the expression “lightbulb of the friend” might make the meaning quite opaque and affect the conversation flow in a multicultural and multilingual context. Since the idiom was not understood, clarification requests from the Italian students followed to mediate communication in a ZPD. It was a significant moment of the project, because it raised the students’ awareness that unilateral idiomaticity may lead to misunderstanding in intercultural contexts. The pupils were encouraged by the teacher to always put themselves in their interlocutors’ shoes and think whether their messages would be comprehensible for them or not. With the help of their teachers, the pupils tried to guess what their companion meant to say when they used the idiom: “the lightbulb of the friend”. They also reflected on the fact it could be a Kyrgyz idiom that their friend had just translated into English. The Italian students suggested that there might be some connection between ‘lightbulb’ and energy, and later the Kyrgyz students confirmed that ‘lightbulb’ was a metaphor for ‘enthusiasm’. Once the meaning of this idiom was clarified, the CoP decided to include this sentence into the song, as an example of the Kyrgyz linguacultural contribution to their work. However, they managed to make its meaning more explicit.

- Phase 4. Closing. Each part of the lyrics of the song that was composed by the CoP was considered precious. Hence, the Italian pupils combined the lines that had been written. The final result was an intercultural rap composition



about international friendship. Finally, this tune was performed by participants, who even added dancing to it.

*International friendship*

*Hello all! Hello all!*

*Despite our difference we can still make a song!  
Oh what a joy it is to have a friend like you,  
For giving strength to me the way that you can do.  
A friend is loyal, a friend is royal,  
If they help you in your saddest moments.*

*A friend is a treasure, a friend is a treasure,  
Friendship is a thing that you cannot measure.  
If you have a friend, you have more than gold,  
Friendship is the best, the best thing in the world.  
When you are with a friend, you feel you drank a potion,  
Because friendship is the best emotion.  
A friend, a friend is your prized possession,  
and friendship needs a lot of reflection.*

*Hola everybody! We are friends!  
Also at long distance we can be friends.  
It's all of us together,  
From different countries, different states.  
Friendship is amazing,  
And sometimes it is blazing!*

*Friends are always there,  
Friends are everywhere.  
WE ARE GOOD FRIENDS,  
WE ARE TOGETHER.*

*THE LIGHT OF YOUR FRIENDSHIP WILL ALWAYS SHINE  
IT WILL MAKE YOU FLY LIKE A BIRD IN THE SKY!*

*A friend is more than everything else,  
And if you don't have it, you must be sad.  
A good one's a person that's kind and generous,  
The Earth is big but friendships are everywhere.  
We don't care from where we come.  
Friends are good! We all have some!*

#### *4.4 Post-treatment survey*

When the phase of the project called Treatment was over, a post-survey was administered to the CoP, which included a questionnaire and a focus group. Our aim was to elicit further information about the participants' perceptions of the shared experience they had made, and of the communicative strategies they implemented to carry out their task.

##### *4.4.1 The post-treatment survey data analysis and the focus group*

The post-survey provided relevant information about the learners' perceptions of the collaborative task they had carried out. The great majority of pupils (88%) were satisfied with the results of their work. In the focus group they said that “[i]t turned out very good”. They described it as “wonderful”, “amazing”, “sensational”, and having “beautiful meaning” and a “cool beat”. They were extremely proud that they “made it together”. 12% of participants said they were not happy with the song and explained that they didn't like the rap tune or disagreed with some of its lines.

As the data showed, the majority of students (65%) especially appreciated the social dimension of this activity and an opportunity to meet new friends from a different part of the world. The vast majority of learners (92%) said their task was interesting, while 4% found it boring and 4% found it challenging.

All pupils were ready to participate in a similar project in the future. When asked what they would change, their preferences distributed almost equally between three alternatives: a) working with companions from a different country (e.g., other European countries); b) trying a different mode of collaboration (e.g., face-to-face); c) designing a different activity (e.g., writing fanfiction). This means that further ELF-aware activities for the English classroom may explore all these options. Finally, 100% of pupils reported that, as a result of intercultural telecollaboration, they had learned to work together with people from a different country. Moreover, 85% of respondents reported that they had learned where Kyrgyzstan is, and that Kyrgyz people speak English too.

In the focus group, the Italian students specified that during the introductory stage of the project, when participants communicated orally (see section n. 4.3.1), the difficulties in understanding each other were mostly due to the

slow Internet connection available to them. Sometimes, this caused cuts in the communication flow. Data analysis revealed that students mostly dealt with non-understanding by asking their partners to repeat (35%), guess what they had said (27%), or ask for clarification (23%). We may infer that the communicative strategies participants had used were successful, since 100% of the pupils reported that they made communication work.

Moreover, during the focus group discussion, the teacher asked the Italian learners to clarify some of the answers given in the post-survey. For example, 70% of the Italian pupils reported that they had noticed that, during the Exploratory session (see section n. 4.1, Stage 1), the English pronunciation of their interlocutors was different from the English they had experienced before. Instead, the remaining 30% of participants said that they had already heard a similar accent before. Some of them called it “Slavic accent”, while others called it “Asian accent”. Indeed, Kyrgyzstan has two official languages: some Kyrgyz learners speak Russian as their first language (i.e., a Slavic language), while the others speak Kyrgyz (i.e., an Asian language) as their first language. Some students specified that the English spoken by Kyrgyz partners “was weird” and “was a lower level than our English”. However, thanks to a guided reflection on their experience of intercultural telecollaboration, they understood that in authentic situations it is important to ‘accommodate’ to one’s interlocutor and cooperate in order to achieve successful communication. Interestingly, two of the young learners’ final comments were: “this is exactly what we did”, and “the song we created is a proof”.

## 5. *Discussion*

The empirical results reported in the previous section should be considered in the light of some limitations. First of all, the data analysis and the conclusions about the overall project efficiency are only based on the Italian respondents’ answers, as was explained in section n. 4.1. This major drawback could be addressed in the future, if the authors of this study will be given access to Kyrgyz data. This would allow us to complete our research by comparing the results of the surveys conducted with both classes, in order to examine how the development of young learners’ intercultural competence and ELF-awareness varied within the CoP.

Secondly, the participants' contributions were disproportionate, as the majority of comments were posted by the Italian students. This was mainly due to the fact that Italian learners outnumbered the Kyrgyz.

Nonetheless, the project that has been presented in section n. 4 shows that a blended approach that combines ELF and SCT can be integrated successfully into the English syllabus, in order to give teachers and learners an opportunity to raise their awareness of the changing scenario of contemporary English on a global scale and be equipped to cope with it.

This experience was highly beneficial for the Italian young learners for several reasons. From the data analysis of the pre-treatment and post-treatment questionnaires, and from the focus group discussion we could see how the Italian young learners' attitude towards the use of English as a global language had gradually changed. Already in the pre-treatment stage, as the questionnaire has shown, some young learners knew that English is not only spoken in native-speaker and post-colonial countries. However, by the end of the telecollaboration project, participants' ELF-awareness reached 85% of pupils. As the results of the survey showed, working as an intercultural CoP, all participants (100%) had improved their ICC via the use of ELF. Moreover, participants showed their genuine appreciation for the differences and similarities between their cultures. As the data indicate, the majority of pupils especially appreciated the creative and social dimension of intercultural telecollaboration as an opportunity to meet new friends from a different part of the world.

As the analysis of the corpus compiled for this study has revealed, distantly located classes from heterogeneous contexts tend to appropriate English as a mediational tool to carry out their communicative tasks successfully, and in so doing allow ELF to emerge naturally. The implementation of adaptive communication strategies represents the observable phenomenon of this sociocognitive process through which ELF discourse reveals the interplay of the interlocutors' different L1s and English, in the process of signaling their linguacultural identities. This turns into a joint effort to negotiate meanings and work cooperatively.

The empirical evidence collected during this project confirmed the observation in Grazzi's (2013) study that learners tend to focus more on content rather than form in reviewing their cooperative work. For example, the members of the CoP would normally add new ideas or change just a few lines in the lyrics of the song they had written, rather than correct lexicogrammar deviations

from NS norms. This indicates that the use of ELF, as can be seen in the few examples provided above, could well serve the pragmatic needs of the pupils involved in CoP, i.e., it was used as an appropriate affordance to mediate communication in this pedagogical form of group work.

## *6. Conclusions*

This paper follows from the call of Cogo et al. (2022) that more classroom-based research is needed in the area of ELF-awareness. Intercultural projects like the one described in this paper can become fruitful opportunities to allow teachers to reflect on language pedagogy and the profound transformation that English has undergone due to its leading position as the language of globalization. We may then conclude that innovative ELF-based projects should be integrated into the English syllabus at young learners' level and become an integral part of teacher-education programs. This, we believe, would raise teachers' awareness of the "changing tides in ELT" (Sifakis 2017, 12) and consequently encourage them to implement the strategies proposed in the initial sections of this study. With Sifakis (2014), the ELF construct may indeed become a wonderful opportunity for ESOL teacher education as well.

In a nutshell, ELF-aware pedagogy should bridge the "gap between the dominance of native-speaker oriented institutional curricula and the emergence of variable, context-bound forms of English in multilingual and multicultural communicative settings" (Grazzi and Lopriore 2020, 69). Moreover, we may suggest that, apart from top-down or bottom-up approaches in teacher education, there is also a fundamental horizontal channel to exploit, that is sharing the experience of implementing novel activities like intercultural collaboration among fellow teachers, in order to foster ELF-aware pedagogy. We wish our project to represent a step further in that direction.

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