The Development of Intercultural Mediation Skills in English Language Teaching

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This article focuses on the rise of English as an international language and explores its function as a global lingua franca used for enabling communication among speakers of different linguistic and cultural origins. It discusses research concerned with investigating the pedagogical implications of the use of English as a lingua franca and presents calls on the part of scholars for encouraging students to become intercultural mediators and acquire pragmatic competence for negotiating differences in language use/sociocultural standpoint and achieving intelligibility in intercultural communication. It also reviews research engaged in offering practical advice on devising pedagogical activities for developing intercultural mediation skills necessary for functioning well in lingua franca interactions. Drawing upon this body of literature, the present study argues for the need to incorporate the teaching of intercultural mediation skills into traditional English pedagogy. It proposes two categories of pedagogical activities, awareness-raising and analytic, which can make space for the development of intercultural mediation competence in the English language classroom. The current study also gives an example of how these activities can be incorporated into tertiary education English classes by presenting pedagogical tasks from a course offered in the Department of English and American Studies at Sofia University.
Keywords: English as a lingua franca, implications for teaching practices, intercultural mediation skills.

English as a Lingua Franca and Implications for Teaching Practices

The development of English into an international language is an indisputable fact of present-day reality. Apart from being dominant in its traditional native speaking contexts, English is playing an increasingly important role in various non-native speaking situations across the world. Speakers with a variety of mother tongues and sociocultural identities tend to use it as a default language to establish a common conversational ground and overcome linguistic and cultural differences. As a result, its role as a communicative tool for facilitating communication in the international arena is becoming more and more salient.

Indeed, the worldwide spread of English is largely the reason why it has come to serve the function of a lingua franca in international communicative encounters, enabling speakers of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to communicate with each other. Such encounters tend to display great variability in terms of the participants who take part in the communicative exchange, the cultural worldviews they embrace, as well as the linguistic codes they employ. Indeed, lingua franca interaction usually brings

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together speakers of diverse Englishes, who need to act as intercultural mediators, applying negotiation strategies in order to cope with any cultural or linguistic differences they may have and collectively building a shared communicative code (Matsuda, "Teaching English" 7).

Early research into the use of English as a lingua franca (hereafter referred to as ELF) focused on exploring its formal characteristics, primarily at the levels of pronunciation, grammar, and lexis, with the goal of identifying some typical patterns and regularities (see Jenkins, *Phonology*; Jenkins, "Pronunciation Syllabus"; Seidlhofer). However, recent research into ELF has shown that the diversity of lingua franca communication renders such descriptive attempts questionable, which has led to a shift of scholarly focus away from studying the features of ELF towards analysing the pragmatic/contextual reasons for their use, as well as the way in which they are used to negotiate meaning (see Cogo and House; Hall and Wicaksono; Jenkins et al., "Review"). The process of meaning negotiation involves the application of strategies for achieving intelligibility such as repetition, paraphrasing, signalling non-understanding, providing clarification, offering alternatives, checking comprehension, and so on. More often than not, such strategies provide conversationalists with the opportunity to get their message across and discover their interlocutor's underlying communicative intentions, thus achieving understanding. Research into the pragmatics of ELF has provided unequivocal evidence highlighting the importance of applying negotiation strategies for sorting out communication problems and achieving intelligibility in lingua franca communication in English (see Cogo; Cogo and Dewey; Mauranen).

As a result, some scholars interested in studying the pedagogical implications of the use of English as a lingua franca have suggested that the act of teaching the linguistic code of English should be supplemented by laying greater emphasis on helping students gain pragmatic competence for speech accommodation, negotiation of differences in form/meaning/sociocultural standpoint, and establishing intelligibility in intercultural communicative contexts (see Canagarajah; Friedrich). As Friedrich points out, the diversity and fluidity of lingua franca communication in English makes it necessary to raise students' intercultural awareness and equip them with communication strategies for achieving understanding (45). Similarly, Canagarajah argues for the need to redefine proficiency in English by adding as a pedagogical goal the development of negotiation strategies for "shuttling between English varieties and speech communities" (6). Such suggestions are in line with calls in the broader field of language teaching for encouraging students to acquire intercultural communicative competence and become intercultural speakers or mediators (see Byram; Byram et al.). According to Byram et al., the intercultural mediator possesses knowledge about the way in which intercultural communication works, skills of finding similarities between different cultural entities or practices, and positive attitudes towards otherness (11–13). These knowledge, skills, and attitudes enable him/her to perform well in lingua franca communicative encounters, which, as previously said, tend to involve conversationalists from different sociocultural communities.

Taking as a starting point for their analyses the calls for reconsidering proficiency in English by paying additional attention to the acquisition of pragmatic competence for intercultural communication, other scholars have offered practical suggestions for developing teaching materials and activities aimed at building in students intercultural mediation skills for functioning effectively in lingua franca interaction in English (see Guerra and Cavalheiro; House; Kordia; Lopriore and Vettorel; McKay). For instance, McKay argues that the teaching of pragmatics in the English language classroom deserves more attention. She suggests that students should be familiarized with various conversational practices, such as turn-taking, topic initiation and control, and providing backchannel feedback. Additionally, she recommends teaching repair and negotiation strategies, such as repetition, paraphrasing, pausing to allow for thinking time, and providing alternative explanations. McKay proposes that exposing students to real ELF interactions and analysing the discourse strategies used by speakers to achieve their communicative goals and handle communication breakdowns and cross-cultural misunderstandings can effectively encourage the development of these conversational skills (239). Likewise, House argues for the need to raise students' awareness of ELF communication by exposing them to authentic ELF communicative exchanges and urging them to increase their expertise in such types of interaction (198).

The discussion so far clearly shows that the new sociolinguistic reality of English as an international language, especially its use as a lingua franca among speakers of different linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds, brings to the fore the need to reconsider traditional English as a foreign language (EFL) pedagogy to make learners better prepared for functioning well in international interaction in English. As already mentioned, global communicative encounters usually bring together speakers with diverse Englishes and sociocultural origins, who tend to adopt different cultural standpoints and follow diverging conventions of correct and appropriate language use. As a result, they often have to pursue context-sensitive strategies for negotiating and overcoming linguacultural differences and constructing a shared communicative code with the other participants in the interaction exchange. Therefore, the main argument of this article is that in order to satisfy learners' changing linguistic needs in the era of global English, the teaching of intercultural mediation skills (i.e., pragmatic competence for the negotiation of sociocultural differences in worldview and language use, as well as achieving intelligibility in intercultural interaction) should be incorporated into traditional EFL instruction. The article contributes to the existing literature by providing guidance on creating teaching materials and practices that help students develop pragmatic competence for intercultural communication. It proposes two categories of pedagogical activities, namely awareness-raising activities and analytic activities, which can aid the acquisition of intercultural mediation skills in the English language classroom. Drawing upon insights from a course entitled "English as an International Language," which is offered in the Department of English and American Studies at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in Bulgaria, this investigation also demonstrates the way in which the proposed pedagogical activities for developing intercultural mediation skills can be generally applied in English classes at tertiary education level.

What follows is a presentation of the two types of activities, analytic and awareness-raising, with examples of each type provided through specific subtasks. Then their application in the "English as an International Language" course is shown by discussing a project which students complete. It should be noted that throughout the discussion the usage of the term "intercultural mediation" comes close to the descriptive scheme specified in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe). This framework approaches mediation as one of four communicative modes: reception (gathering knowledge/information), production (expressing oneself during communication), interaction (constructing meaning together with one or more interlocutors), and mediation (acting as a social agent to facilitate communication). The most common purpose of mediation is "to facilitate understanding and shape successful communication between users/learners who may have individual, sociocultural, sociolinguistic or intellectual differences in standpoint" (Council of Europe 91). Indeed, the process of mediation can be linguistic (which is the result of differences in the linguistic code used) and sociocultural (which is the result of differences in worldview and cultural standpoint). Successful mediation is to a large extent contingent upon a person's ability to use mediation strategies such as relating new information to prior knowledge, illustrating points by giving examples, restating content through paraphrasing, breaking an item into its component parts, and summarizing or elaborating on a text (Council of Europe 117–122). Building on the CEFR descriptive framework, this article views the intercultural speaker or mediator as a social agent capable of mediating concepts or texts by employing specific negotiation strategies in communicative exchanges with speakers of various linguacultural origins, thereby establishing understanding between himself/herself and his/her conversational partners or among the other conversationalists.

Pedagogical Activities for Developing Intercultural Mediation Skills in English Language Teaching

The preceding discussion clearly illustrated that effective intercultural communication in English requires the skill to navigate differences and variations in cultural perspectives and language usage in order to achieve understanding and establish a common basis for communication. It has been shown that the strategic exploitation of one's linguistic repertoire, and more specifically, the application of intercultural

mediation strategies is part and parcel of effective ELF communication. Therefore, it has been suggested that students should develop intercultural mediation competence in English.

In relation to this, the present article argues that in order to obtain a comprehensive and complete picture of ELF communication and prepare themselves for participation in this type of interaction, students should engage in both awareness-raising and analytic activities for developing intercultural mediation competence in English. The awareness-raising activities help learners understand the nature of intercultural lingua franca communication in English, whereas the analytic tasks encourage students to experience and discuss ELF-related issues in order to develop intercultural mediation skills for coping with ELF communication and functioning well in such interaction. Both sorts of activities are designed to encourage students to adopt favourable attitudes towards this type of communication, which is required for successful involvement in future lingua franca communicative encounters in English. All of this demonstrates that the current article's main strategy is based on the premise that the successful development of intercultural mediation abilities requires the acquisition of ELF-related knowledge and attitudes. Indeed, the need to stimulate students to acquire all three elements, i.e., knowledge, attitudes, and skills, is a recurrent thread in the emerging body of literature concerned with the reworking of the traditional pedagogy of English in relation to its new status as an international language (Marlina 8).

Beginning with the awareness-raising stage of developing intercultural mediation competence, students should be exposed to information about the use of English as a lingua franca among speakers from various linguistic backgrounds, the characteristics of ELF communication, and what success in this type of interaction typically depends on. Priority should also be given to familiarizing students with the idea of lingua franca users functioning as intercultural mediators (Byram et al.) to negotiate and overcome their linguacultural differences. In connection to this, the notion of mediation should be introduced as it interacts with the other three typical communicative modes in lingua franca communication: reception, production, and interaction (Council of Europe). With respect to reception, students should be made aware of the fact that successful ELF communication requires the ability to deal with and understand different varieties of English, not just native, but also non-native. In addition, students should learn that the element of production in lingua franca contexts usually involves communicative flexibility through speech accommodation, i.e., the ability to adjust one's speech behaviour to salient aspects of the communicative exchange (setting, topic, goal of communication, interlocutor, and his/her linguistic code, norms of correct and appropriate language use, etc.). When it comes to interaction, students should get familiar with effective conversational management techniques such as turn-taking, openings and closings, topic initiation and maintenance, politeness/impoliteness issues, interruptions, overlaps, back-channelling, and so on. Finally, students should be exposed to the process of mediation, which involves lingua franca speakers using negotiation strategies to overcome linguacultural boundaries and facilitate understanding. Examples of such strategies are repetition, paraphrase, summary, approximation (i.e., using alternatives), circumlocution (i.e., describing properties, aspects, qualities), and so on. Suitable tasks for raising students' awareness of all the above-mentioned issues are reading academic or non-fiction texts and watching videos with lectures, interviews, and informal discussions that explore various aspects of lingua franca communication in English, as well as the process of intercultural mediation as it is inextricably intertwined with the communicative modes of reception, production, and interaction. Additional activities include examining excerpts from sociolinguistics and pragmatics textbooks, which introduce key terminology describing linguistic variability and speech performance in specific communicative contexts.

The subsequent analytic stage of developing intercultural mediation competence in English should engage students in carrying out tasks that involve putting into practice the knowledge about lingua franca use they have acquired during the awareness-raising stage. Activities, which students can perform at this stage, include analysis of authentic lingua franca interactions in English. Suitable examples of such discourse can be found online in social networking sites or archives containing corpuses of ELF communication. Students should be asked to explore such examples by paying special attention to their characteristic features and organization. The focus of analysis can be on the manner in which lingua franca users function in ELF communication, employing different world Englishes and going through

processes such as transfer of mother tongue elements, code-switching and code-mixing, translanguaging, i.e., using all languages in their communicative repertoire to achieve their goals, and so on. For a discussion of these features of ELF interaction, see House, as well as Cogo and House. The analysis could also deal with issues related to how ELF users interact with one another and organize the flow of conversation. Furthermore, students' attention should be focused on identifying characteristics in the examined ELF speech that indicate intercultural differences in language use and worldview. Learners can be encouraged to explore variation in language use at the levels of pronunciation, grammar, lexis, and pragmatics. They can also be encouraged to identify problematic points in the communicative exchanges, which are due to the participants' linguacultural differences and constitute cases of misunderstanding or communication breakdown. Most importantly, students should focus on discussing the negotiation strategies that the conversationalists use to deal with the identified communicative problems. Learners can then draw conclusions as to what leads to successful interaction in lingua franca communicative encounters.

Apart from exploring examples of ELF communication between other conversationalists, students should also be stimulated to analyse and reflect on their own lingua franca performance in real-life situations. Learners can collect examples both online (in the social networking sites they use) and offline (by making recordings of face-to-face interactions in the various social groups or communities of practice to which they belong). The analysis of the examples can focus on the strengths and weaknesses of students' performance in these communicative exchanges, as well as the extent to which they function as successful intercultural mediators, applying negotiation strategies for dealing with linguacultural incongruities, clarifying meaning, facilitating and establishing understanding. As an additional task, students could be encouraged to create a list of the effective intercultural mediation strategies that they commonly use to achieve intelligibility such as elaborating on a point, paraphrasing it, condensing it, illustrating it through examples and details, and so on.

Incorporating Intercultural Mediation Skills Development into English Language Teaching: An Example

The preceding section of this article proposed awareness-raising and analytic pedagogical activities for developing intercultural mediation skills, which are at the heart of the "English as an International Language" course – an elective fourth-year course of the BA degree programme of English Philology in the Department of English and American Studies at Sofia University. The course lasts for one semester, which is equivalent to fifteen weeks or thirty teaching hours. It is designed for advanced learners of English, specifically those at the C1/C2 level according to the CEFR (Council of Europe). For a comprehensive description of the course, including its organization, objectives, and teaching activities, please refer to Dimova. The "English as an International Language" course has been inspired by a growing body of research focusing on the implications of the rise of English as a world language for teaching practices and arguing that traditional English pedagogy should be revised so as to prepare students to deal with the new sociolinguistic profile of English as a global lingua franca, its character as a diverse communicative tool, and the increasingly complex contexts in which it is used (see Alsagoff et al.; Bayyurt and Akcan; Bowles and Cogo; Marlina and Giri; Matsuda, *Principles*; Sifakis and Tsantila). Therefore, the aims of the course are to familiarize students with the growth of English into a global language and the features that it displays as a lingua franca communicative tool, as well as to help learners develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that they need to cope with the diversity, fluidity, and complexity of present-day English.

The syllabus of the "English as an International Language" course includes topics such as the present state of English as a worldwide language, its typical users, and the situations in which it is commonly employed. It also contains a discussion of how English spread across the world: to North America, Australia, New Zealand, but also to Asia and Africa. The historical perspective is followed by a presentation of various social, economic, and political causes of the spread of English. Other topics included in the syllabus are variation across the Englishes (English as a native, second, or foreign lan-

guage), standards for English as an international language, as well as the function of English as a global lingua franca. During the course, students work on a project that explores the usage of English as a lingua franca. The goal is to raise students' understanding of the nature of ELF communication and encourage them to develop intercultural mediation skills in order to perform effectively in ELF interaction. The completion of the project goes through two main stages: awareness-raising and analytic. These are followed by a wrap-up reflective stage.

The first stage of the project involves awareness-raising activities that are intended to familiarize students with the diversity of present-day English, and more specifically, its use as a global lingua franca. Students engage in various reading tasks in order to gain knowledge about lingua franca communication in English and the intricacies of this type of interaction. For instance, by reading chapters or sections from academic books or textbooks, such as *The Routledge Handbook of English as a Lingua Franca* (Jenkins et al.), *The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes* (Kirkpatrick), and *International English: A Guide to the Varieties of Standard English* (Trudgill and Hannah), learners acquire knowledge about possible conceptualizations and definitions of ELF, features and processes associated with ELF, as well as various domains of ELF use and its territorial spread. The reading tasks are organized around an exploration of key concepts connected with ELF: intercultural communication, variation in language use at the levels of pronunciation, lexis, grammar, and pragmatics, speech accommodation, conversational organization/interaction, strategic interaction, and negotiation of meaning. The concepts are carefully selected to cover the communicative mode of mediation as it interacts with reception, production, and interaction. When doing the reading tasks, students are encouraged to approach the materials they read in a critical way. First, they identify the main points of the texts, the evidence used in support of the main points, and the theoretical assumptions that are made. Then they discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the stances that the authors of the texts adopt, thus evaluating what they are reading. Finally, students express their own opinions regarding the issues that the texts raise, supporting their positions with examples from personal experience, world knowledge, or other materials that they have read. Learners also address the wrap-up question of how reading the texts has changed their view of the status of English as a global lingua franca. As a follow-up activity, students search online and find non-fiction texts and videos, which discuss topics like those of the excerpts from academic books and textbooks they have read and discussed in class.

The second stage of the project includes analytic activities that are aimed at helping learners develop intercultural mediation competence by exploring real-life lingua franca interaction in English. Students perform tasks that involve the analysis of authentic ELF interaction from various online social networking sites and archives such as VOICE: Vienna–Oxford International Corpus of English (https://voice.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/). The examples selected for analysis contain real-life lingua franca communicative exchanges in English between speakers with different mother tongues and sociocultural identities. They differ in terms of communicative setting, goal of interaction, configuration of participants, role of conversationalists, topic of discussion, and so on, so that students can be exposed to the diversity of lingua franca communication and gain a more comprehensive view of its characteristic features and typical organization. When approaching the examples of lingua franca discourse, learners are encouraged to identify elements that reveal the intercultural essence of ELF communication and bring to the fore its diversity in terms of the linguacultural origins of the participants, the Englishes they employ, and the norms of correct/appropriate language use they follow. Students are encouraged to pay special attention to differences in language use and cultural standpoint, as well as the way in which they shape the nature of the communicative exchange. The analysis is further directed towards students following the way in which conversationalists act as intercultural mediators, adjusting their speech behaviour to salient features of the interactional exchange, accommodating to the communicative style patterns of their interlocutor(s), and applying negotiation strategies to overcome linguacultural boundaries and construct shared meanings. Then learners produce a typology of the successful mediation strategies for dealing with linguacultural differences that they have identified in the analysed corpus of ELF interaction. As a follow-up task, students collect online and offline examples of their own lingua franca use in English. They evaluate these examples to determine how well they can deal with the complexities of ELF com-

munication. Students identify the intercultural mediation strategies that they tend to use for overcoming linguacultural boundaries and compare them to the typology of successful strategies that they have compiled. Learners also list the strengths and deficiencies of their intercultural mediation competence and discuss possible ways of improving their performance in real-life ELF interaction.

The wrap-up reflective stage of the project engages students in writing reflective accounts, summing up the knowledge about ELF interaction they have gained during the first awareness-raising stage and discussing the intercultural mediation skills they have acquired during the second analytic stage. Learners also comment on the extent to which the completion of the ELF project in the "English as an International Language" course has enhanced their expertise as ELF users and intercultural mediators.

Conclusion

The goal of the present article has been to explore the development of English into a global lingua franca and the implications of this process for English language pedagogy. It has highlighted the fact that lingua franca communication in English tends to be intercultural insofar as it brings together speakers of diverse Englishes and with different sociocultural expectations about correct/appropriate language use, who therefore need pragmatic competence for speech accommodation and negotiation of linguacultural divergences to arrive at shared understandings. As a result, the main argument of this paper has been that the development of intercultural mediation skills should become part of traditional EFL pedagogy. The current article proposes two types of pedagogical activities that can aid the development of intercultural mediation competence in EFL instruction (awareness-raising and analytic) and provides an example of their potential application in the English language classroom by discussing data from the "English as an International Language" course at Sofia University. What lies at the core of the awareness-raising activities is an attempt to provide students with information about the rise of English as a global lingua franca and the features of intercultural ELF communication. The awareness-raising tasks prepare the ground for engaging students in analytic activities, which involve exploring authentic ELF interaction. By experiencing and discussing real-life ELF-related issues, learners are stimulated to develop the intercultural mediation competence that they need to function effectively in lingua franca communicative encounters in English. All in all, the awareness-raising and analytic activities provide students with the opportunity to build up a detailed picture of ELF communication. The activities also equip learners with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to approach such interaction successfully and become intercultural mediators.

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