ELF and Sociocultural Theory: An Integrated Approach

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Abstract

The main focus of this article is on the controversial issue of integrating English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) into English Language Teaching (ELT). Particularly, the plurilithic nature of English as an international language in the age of Globalization challenges the long sedimented native-speakerism in the English classroom. Nevertheless, in spite of the extensive academic literature in the area of ELF research, it seems that a balanced pedagogical approach has not yet been developed by applied ELF scholars. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to show how Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) and Gal'perin's *Systemic Theoretical Instruction* (STI) (which informed the L2 teaching approach called *Concept-based Language Instruction,* C-BLI) may provide the appropriate scientific framework to bridge the gap between the mainstream English as a Foreign Language (EFL) syllabus, that is based on the native-speaker Standard English model, and the emergent use of non-native-speaker ELF, which results from the contact of learners' L1 and English. In conclusion, this research intends to propose an integrated approach to teaching English that combines ELF, SCT, and C-BLI. This is expected to give language teachers a conceptual framework and theoretical orientation to carry out the paradigm shift in ELT that most ELF scholars advocate.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca, Sociocultural Theory, systemic theoretical instruction, Concept-Based Language Instruction, dynamic assessment

Introduction

The scope of this paper is to reflect on the phenomenon of language change and variability that has characterised the use of English as an international language in the age of Globalization, in the attempt to propose a theoretical and practical framework for English language teaching (ELT) based on Vygotsky's (1986) sociocultural theory (SCT). This, I believe, may indeed help applied linguists and L2 practitioners to cope with the pedagogical challenge posed by the pluricentric emergence of English as a *Multilingua* Franca (ELF) [1] (Jenkins, 2015a; my italics) in authentic cross-cultural communicative contexts (e.g., on the Internet).

In light of the controversy surrounding the supposed monolithic model of native speaker / prestige varieties in ELT (see for example Seidlhofer, 2003, pp. 7-33, where the author reports on Quirk's and Kachru's opposite stances toward teaching Standard English), I will suggest tentative answers to some of the most pressing questions that teachers of English, as well as pedagogists, teacher educators, and even students normally ask when they become aware of the impact that ELF might have on the English of the subject. Accordingly, I will adopt Lantolf & Poehner's (2014) pedagogical perspective which is informed not only by SCT which includes the criterion of Dynamic Assessment (DA) (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014), but also by Gal'perin's (Gal'perin, 1967, 1970, 1979; Engeness, 2021; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014) theory of Systemic Theoretical Instruction (STI), which "has been particularly influential in establishing the procedures used in [*Concept-based Language Instruction*] C-BLI" (Lantolf, Xi & Minakova, 2020: 1)[2]. What distinguishes their approach to L2 development is that it is based on a psycholinguistic process whereby theory and practice are not conceived of as dichotomous, but rather as "two sides of the same coin" (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014, p. 5).

Finally, I will show how the traditional dualistic distinction between English as a Foreign Language (EFL, i.e., the idealized form of standard English, which belongs to its native speakers and that normally constitutes the English of the subject) and English as a Lingua Franca (i.e., the multilingual variable way of using English in languaculturally diverse contexts) may indeed converge by way of the learner's communicative performance (Grazzi, 2013). This is intended as the authentic use of ELF as a mediational artifact that learners naturally develop to carry out joint communicative activities within intercultural and multilingual educational settings (e.g., Internet-mediated telecollaboration projects (Grazzi, 2015).

Hence, the guiding research question addressed in this paper may be formulated as follows: how can SCT and C-BLI be implemented in ELT to fill the gap between EFL and ELF and provide a theoretical / practical framework to carry out the paradigm shift that most ELF scholars advocate? (see, Newbold, 2017).

The EFL-ELF Gap

Research (see Jenkins, 2007; Grazzi, 2018b), as a matter of fact, has shown that although ELT practitioners generally approach ELF with an open mind, their attitude tends to become more conservative when the teaching of the English of the subject is at stake. In other words, there seems to be a general understanding and agreement about the causes behind today's variability of English internationally, which is essentially a "consequence and a prerequisite" (Mauranen, 2012, p. 17) of the tremendous growth of multicultural contacts brought about by Globalization and web-mediated communication. Nevertheless, the fact that ELF is not an encoded variety of English, but rather a process that typically emerges and can be observed in variable multilingual contexts, makes it appear to be unfit for the English classroom.

In a nutshell, we could argue that the debate around the integration of ELF into the English syllabus has foregrounded two opposite attitudes:

a) on the one hand, ELF researchers believe that because English has become a global contact language (Mauranen, 2012)[3] and the world's primary lingua franca, the task of school education is to catch up with the variable ways of using it, in order to make learners ready to cope with the contemporary plurilithic dimension of this language. ELF scholars make this claim by virtue of the fact that today the great majority of English users are non-native speakers and that cross-cultural communication takes place in settings where mostly international speakers are involved. Hence, even though ELF cannot be taught as such, because it is a context-bound process rather than an encoded variety of English (Jenkins, 2015a), it cannot be left out of the English curriculum. The most immediate consequence of this position is that learners' deviations from standard norms should no more be automatically considered errors, but rather legitimate alternative forms that are authenticated by interlocutors the minute they can communicate successfully (Widdowson, 2013). Therefore, non-compliance with native-speaker norms is acceptable whenever deviations from Standard English models do not hinder communication and allow learners / L2-users to carry out communicative tasks in real multilingual and multicultural contexts (e.g., online telecollaboration projects like eTwinning, sponsored by the European Commission)[4]. In turn, this pragmatic approach to learners' performance and their timely use of communication strategies (e.g., accommodation, codeswitching, cross-linguistic transfer, etc.) entails that new criteria are needed to reconceptualize language testing, as well as the assessment of students' competencies. Last but not least, language input and teaching materials should go beyond the typical, and often stereotypical, representation of native speakers' languacultures, and provide a wider outlook at the thriving reality of English as an international language.

b) On the other hand, those who resist an ELF-informed reform of the English curriculum are not necessarily critical of what ELF research has so far discovered about the connection between the historical, economic, social, and cultural consequences of globalization and the process of language variability that English is undergoing on a world scale. In fact, they have usually expressed concerns about the acceptability of deviations from codified language norms, as this

principle would inevitably be conflicting with dominant reference models of learners' proficiency at different levels (e.g., the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>). Indeed, ELF scholars like Jenkins (2000) and Widdowson (2003) recognize the importance of Standard English models in L2 education and do not suggest that they should be neglected in ELT. However, they claim that the use of ELF should become a viable option for students. In spite of that, if we look at the other side of the coin, the student's freedom of choice, although desirable and although we could agree to it in principle, may prove to be rather disorienting, both for learners and teachers. First of all, it is not true that all deviations from the norms follow from the learner's freewill. In fact, they may also be part of the natural psycholinguistic process of L2 learning and acquisition. Therefore, it would be quite problematic for language teachers to distinguish between deviations that should be accepted as the expression of the learner's cultural identity, autonomy, and creativity, and deviations that are instead developmental errors (Corder, 1981), i.e., systematic goofs that reveal the learner's attempt to infer the L2 norms through practice (e.g. cases of overgeneralization of grammar norms, like the regularization of the past form of irregular verbs). What is more, a distinction between ELF deviations and developmental errors may not be sharp, for learners normally tend to cope with what they identify as shortcomings in their L2 competence (either at phonological, lexicogrammar, or discoursal level) by implementing all communication strategies available to them, in order to complete the assigned tasks. This strategic behaviour usually includes the use of the mother tongue or other languages that are part of the student's repertoire, as part of a natural process that is referred to as *translanguaging* (Garcìa & Wei, 2015).

Secondly, the unintended result of accepting learners' deviations from codified norms is that the teacher may not know what to do: should they provide corrective feedback or simply let go of the infelicities in the student's output? And as for the learner: how could they progress to higher proficiency levels if the teacher or their peers do not provide them with appropriate scaffolding to support their continued language development?

As it seems, positions a) and b) are hard to reconcile, essentially because they presuppose two opposite conceptions of the English of the subject. The former implies that ELF is a multilingual code that emerges naturally in international verbal communication. Therefore, its incorporation into the English curriculum entails a complete reform of the educational system as regards ELT, whereby the English of the subject is intended as a multilingual code that is developed by learners instead of being taught by teachers (Widdowson, 2013). In this case, the Standard English model would be used to provide learners with an "orientation" (Kohn, 2011) rather than with a prescriptive system.

The latter instead, represents a more traditional pedagogical approach, whereby languages are considered independent systems. Hence, the English of the subject corresponds to Standard English, that is to one of the British or American native-speaker language models that have gained official status worldwide, usually

Received Pronunciation or General American. The logical entailments of this approach are that a) English is seen as a foreign language (EFL) that belongs to its native speakers; b) Standard English is the only legitimate reference model in ELT; and c) the learner's L1 and the other languages that are available to them may interfere negatively with the process of learning and acquisition of the L2, therefore they should be progressively excluded from the teaching / learning process. In line with the interlanguage hypothesis (Selinker, 1972), monolingualism tends to prevail, even though this does not automatically lead to monoculturalism. In fact, the English syllabus might also include a social, historical, political, and artistic outlook on non-native speakers' cultures, provided Standard English is the main mediational tool to speak about these topics. This intercultural approach is, once again, based on the assumption that languacultural systems are clearly separated and self-consistent, rather than in a state of transcultural flow (Pennycook, 2007; Baker, 2015). Consequently, from this point of view English as a global language is rather intended as the primacy of the Standard English model internationally, rather than the wide gamut of existing Global Englishes (Jenkins, 2015b).

These polar attitudes regarding ELF, EFL, and ELT are well illustrated in two academic papers, by Swan (2012) and Widdowson (2013) respectively, where the authors discuss their different views on the English of the subject. In a nutshell, Swan recognizes the performative effectiveness of ELF; nevertheless, he considers its unsystematic deviations from Standard English norms of little consequence regarding English language teaching. Widdowson (2013, p. 192), on the other hand, shifts the focus from learners' conformity to standard English norms to students' "strategic ability to make communicative use of linguistic resources, including those of the learners' own language." Therefore, the international and multilingual dimension of ELF challenges the more conventional and conservative notion of EFL.

All considered, however, we might say that neither of these two articles seem to offer language teachers exhaustive answers to some of the basic questions they usually ask when they are introduced to ELF studies (e.g., in conferences and teacher education courses): a) What are language teachers supposed to do when learners deviate from the norms?; b) How can we distinguish between learners' creative forms of ELF and errors?; and c) How should we assess ELF abilities in the English classroom?

While Swan's paper endorses an uncompromising approach to EFL, whereby ELF is considered an incorrect form of English, Widdowson's insightful rejoinder proposes a radical change in ELT, which seems to be too far-fetched and unfeasible for the time being. We ought to consider that notwithstanding ELF research has by now become a well-established area of applied linguistics studies, it is still very distant from the world of ELT, where a native-speaker orientation is dominant. Presumably, one of the principal reasons of this disconnection between ELF academic research and school education is that the role of the USA as the major world's superpower in the age of Globalization has turned English (particularly General American) into the primary reference model in ELT. Consequently, while the spread of English as the world's primary lingua franca entails a high degree of language variability that is plain to see whenever we observe communication in

international settings, the official English curricula at institutional levels (i.e., the University and school systems) tend to conform to the native-speaker model. Therefore, we should also take into consideration the fact that teachers' and learners' orientations and choices are not entirely free, for they are usually partly or even completely pre-determined by prescriptive national curricula.

A Paradigm Shift in ELT: A Controversial Issue

Given the situation described above, it seems quite obvious that a thorough ELF-informed shift in the language teaching paradigm is not really perceived as a priority by educational authorities, first and foremost because of the prevailing sociopolitical views concerning each country's linguistic policy in the area of English. Thus, we may conclude that it would be quite an unrealistic expectation that teachers of English should commit themselves to a change of direction in schooling and take responsibility for a sort of pedagogic *revolution* in ELT. Today, although the international spread of English is characterized by phenomena of second-order language contact (see note n. 2), the socio-political and financial motivations that have led to the choice of Standard English as the model for schooling seem to be connected to the idea that developing native-speaker proficiency may lead to professional success and better working opportunities. In brief, there seems to be inconsistencies between what is normally taking place in terms of language variability and the global spread of English, and the conservative, albeit pragmatic, choice of educational institutions regarding the English language policy.

We can still make a further consideration to account for changes in second-language teaching methodology and schooling. Pedagogical innovations have usually followed from academic linguistic research. Therefore, new theories about language have informed new methods and approaches in ELT. A case in point is given for example by the turning point represented by the advent of Chomsky's (1957; 1959) transformational-generative grammar theory, which marked the quick decline of behaviourism (Skinner, 1957) and of Fries's (1985) audio-lingual method in L2 teaching. The new methodological approach that followed, the communicative approach (Widdowson, 1978), is also known as the *communicative revolution*, and was bound to become the dominant approach in second-language education to date. Nevertheless, what is important to note is that this revolution was not ignited from the bottom, by language teachers. Instead, it was the result of a tremendous joint effort in teacher education, made by universities, ministerial institutions, American and British Cultural Offices, textbook publishers, and second-language teacher associations (e.g., TESOL International Association <https://www.tesol.org/>), which invested considerable financial resources in it, for decades. Nowadays, even if we agreed that ELF may represent the final frontier in ELT, the situation is completely different, for the truth is that a) there are no unanimous academic opinions on ELF as regards schooling; and b) investments in ELF-based teacher education are comparably much smaller, at least in the Western world, than in the '70s, '80s, and '90s.

Indeed, teachers of English are not against the principle that the development of learners' communicative competence and fluency has priority over linguistic competence and accuracy. They have been used to be selective as regards a) which errors need corrective feedback; b) when corrective feedback is appropriate; and c) how should learners' performance be assessed and evaluated. Moreover, especially non-native teachers of English normally understand the importance of students' languacultural identity that is signalled by deviations from the norms at all language levels, which they are ready to accept as legitimate. Therefore, it is not surprising that on the one hand language teachers usually show appreciation and interest in the topic of ELF, but on the other hand may feel lost and confused if little practical indications are provided by ELF applied linguists, especially as regards the assessment and evaluation of learners' proficiency. Indeed, it seems that although Applied Linguistics has always been a typical area of investigation for several ELF scholars[5], all too often teachers of English have only been provided either with a) an academic descriptive framework to account for ELF lexicogrammar features[6]; b) examples of individual projects, whereby innovative albeit experimental ELF-based classroom activities were incorporated into the language syllabus (see for example Bowles & Cogo, 2015; Grazzi, 2018a; Llurda & Cots, 2020; Vettorel, 2015); and c) teacher education courses, the aim of which was primarily to raise teachers' and learners' ELF awareness (see Cavalheiro, 2018; Grazzi 2018b; Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2018). Indeed, it should be observed that, so far, a comprehensive ELF-informed paradigm shift in ELT has not yet been fully developed by applied linguists, even though it has been strongly recommended (see Pennycook, 2001; Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 2018) to cope with the reality of English as a plurilithic global language (Pennycook, 2009). Jenkins's attitude is quite emblematic of ELF scholars' non-prescriptive attitude, which however may leave language teachers quite disoriented. Let us consider for example the following extract from an interview she gave Grazzi (2018b) a few years ago. When asked about what should the language teacher do when variations from standard English norms occur (e.g. correct the students? Select between acceptable and unacceptable variations according to the principle of mutual comprehensibility? Do nothing?) Jenkins answered:

> Not being a language teacher, I don't feel I have the authority to answer this question. It depends very much on the local situation. My only comment is that if the aim is for students to pass a particular exam, they can't really do anything other than point out what is 'correct' in standard native English, however much they may object (as I do too) to the exam's premise that native English is the version of English that has to be tested. (p. 17)

It seems quite reasonable to think that without any practical indications based on a sound theoretical framework, most language teachers may not take responsibility for what they would consider quite risky and unprepared pedagogical choices. Therefore, they would easily opt for a more conventional and routine behaviour. After all, we should also consider that school teachers' institutional role requires compliance with the national curriculum, so their individual freedom of

choice is somewhat conditioned by the circumstances under which they have to carry out their duties. In this situation, thinking that a radical shift in ELT may be carried out by teachers looks like an absolute pipedream, even because, normally, educational systems and civil servants act as the transmission belt of dominant ideologies.

In the remainder of this article, my intent is to provide tentative answers to language teachers' most urgent queries regarding the impact of ELF on the English curriculum, and what changes are necessary to bridge the gap between the English of the subject and the reality of ELF. As will be shown in the following section, as an ELF scholar I would like to make a methodological proposal to cope with the growing demand for appropriate teacher-education courses. Essentially, I would like to promote the convergence of studies in the areas of ELF and SCT, to develop a sound theoretical framework in the changing scenario of ELT. In particular, I would like to propose an educational approach to ELF and L2 development that combines Vygotsky's SCT, the approach to L2 teaching / learning called C-BLI, DA, and ELF applied research. This, I believe, could indeed become a promising area of investigation for ELT studies, which indicates a possible path for enhancing English teachers' professional development.

In concluding this section, I wish to touch briefly upon the underpinnings of my proposal, which will be explored in more detail in section n. 4. What still appears to be a daunting challenge in the area of ELF-informed applied linguistics is to develop a coherent approach to ELT that may combine today's plurilithic and multilingual dimension of the English language with the requirements of mainstream educational syllabuses. Hence, at the heart of my argument is the belief that SCT, C-BLI, and DA may really provide L2 practitioners and teachers with a reliable and promising methodological framework that is grounded on the following components: a) an insightful theory of mind and an evolutionary understanding of verbal languages as human artefacts that mediate social practice; b) a conceptualisation of L2 development that recognizes the fundamental role of the student's L1 and languacultural background in the process of learning / acquisition of an L2; c) a cognitive teaching / learning model based on praxis and on the learner's conceptual understanding of the L2 lexicogrammar system that goes beyond the study of the so-called rules of thumb; d) the social dimension of L2 teaching / learning dialectic process, *obuchenie*, which is located within a Vygotskyan Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014); e) the dynamic assessment of learners' L2 performance, the purpose of which is "to promote learner development, not merely to describe what occurs during a single interaction" (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014, p. 203).

The Convergence of EFL and ELF via SCT and C-BLI

The phenomena of diachronic and synchronic language change (that is, the development of a language in the course of time, versus the variability of a language at a particular time) are intertwined with the social and historical events that characterize the development of human civilization. The variability of natural languages is therefore situated within the broader context of concrete reciprocal

interactions, whereby societal relationships, either peaceful or conflictual, among diverse languacultural communities and social classes are mediated via language itself. Hence, from the viewpoint of dialectical materialism natural verbal languages are not conceived of as abstract systems that are independent of the context of use (Heine & Kuteva, 2005; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Moura da Costa & Calvo Tuleski, 2017; Tomasello, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986;), nor are they believed to share, as Chomsky (1975) does, an innate universal grammar. Rather, they are considered performative human affordances that users co-construct, appropriate, and reshape in different settings, in order to cope with their communicative needs. Lantolf (2000) explains that:

> The most fundamental concept of Sociocultural Theory is that human mind is *mediated*. (…) Vygotsky argued that just as humans do not act directly on the physical world but relied, instead, on tools and labor activity, which allows us to change the world, and with it, the circumstances under which we live in the world, we also use symbolic tools, or signs, to mediate and regulate our relationships with others and with ourselves and thus to change the nature of these relationships. (p. 2)

Therefore, we may argue that because human relationships and cultures normally tend to evolve at micro- and macro-structural levels, so language systems tend to vary substantially across individuals and groups, as well as across time and space, as part of a wider dialectic process. Together with Pennycook (2007), we may then assume that language variability is ingrained in transcultural flows, as shown by the emergence of variable uses of ELF, in the era of Globalization.

Considering verbal languages from a Vygotskyan sociocultural point of view, Lantolf (2000, p. 2) links language variability to its historical dimension: "Whether physical or symbolic, artifacts are generally modified as they are passed on from one generation to the next. Each generation reworks its cultural inheritance to meet the needs of its communities and individuals." This idea challenges the myth of monolithic language standards, which are supposedly independent entities, immune to change. On the contrary, Vygotsky's conceptualization, which is rooted in Marx's historical materialism (Ratner & Silva, 2017), reinforces a more realistic view of language that is dynamic and evolutionary. Consequently, we might argue that while a more traditional concept of standard language entails a sort of fetishization of language itself, as if it were an autonomous, self-contained object, SCT allows a deeper understanding of verbal languages and their reciprocal interactions, of their interconnections with other semiotic systems, and last but not least of the dynamic patterns of brain activity associated with cognition (Skehan, 1998).

Interestingly, the history of the English language, if considered diachronically, provides a good example of how historical events determined the overlapping of diverse languacultural strata. Today, this evolutionary process continues on a world scale through ELF, and we could say that, if considered synchronically, English is going through a complex dynamic phase, whereby several encoded varieties of native-speaker Englishes and postcolonial Englishes coexist and intertwine with emerging multilingual, *glocal* (Robertson, 1995; my italics) uses

of English as a contact language (e.g., Chinese English, Russian English, Italian English, etc.). We may argue, however, that until Standard English will be considered the primary high-prestige linguistic variety, the reality of ELF similects, i.e., the emerging variable forms of English spoken by L2-users who have a different first language (Mauranen, 2012), will be confined to the area of *informal*, *non-canonical*, *dialectal* uses of English. Therefore, the change of status of one or more ELF variable forms will depend both on their being encoded into novel varieties of English, and on the official recognition of these varieties as legitimate, in all communicative contexts. In any case, this authentication, which in many ways is similar to the process of creolization, does not exclusively depend on linguistic elements, but mainly on socio-political decisions regarding the strict relationship between language and power. Of course, at present it is impossible to predict the future of English in this transitional age. Nevertheless, it seems that the dominance of the myth of Standard English is bound to last. The proof of this lies in the fact that for instance English (meaning Standard English) has been adopted as the official contact language by China and the ASEAN countries (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations that includes Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam). This is a huge geographical area with a population of 1,412 billion Chinese (2021), plus over 600 million people from ASEAN countries (2021). It is It is a powerful commercial area that combines China's gross domestic product (GDP), US$17.73 trillion with ASEA, with ASEAN countries' GDP, (2021) US$10.2 trillion (2022)[7]. In view of the above considerations, it seems reasonable to conclude that the current debate on the pedagogical implications of ELF does not only concern methodological choices, but has to do with sociolinguistic considerations and conflicting ideologies regarding the nature of English as a global language and the English of the subject.

In this fluid situation, however, I suggest that we had better focus on the learner's performance, which is the real convergence point between the language input, the student's languacultural identity as an L2-user, and the teaching / learning process. This is particularly evident in network-based language activities like intercultural telecollaboration (Grazzi, 2018a), where learners from different languacultural backgrounds cooperate as members of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) to carry out a given task, using ELF as a mediational tool. For instance, in the case of fanfiction (Grazzi, 2013), which is based on cooperative creative writing, the analysis of the texts written by a community of practice made of Italian ad Finnish students showed that through ELF discourse participants were able to signal their different languacultural identities and at the same time negotiate meaning and carry out their assignment successfully. Syntactic calque is a case in point. In my study (Grazzi, 2013, p. 64) I observed that some of the Italian participants used the non-canonical expression "*I am agree*" to express agreement, which is a structural calque of the Italian lexical phrase "*Sono d'accordo.*"This locution is the pragmatic equivalent of the English canonical chunk "*I agree*", although their syntactic patterns are different: in the Italian-English construction the copular verb BE is followed by an adverb (*agree*), while in Standard English AGREE is a performative verb. This grammatical class shift can therefore be considered the result of cross-linguistic transfer that followed from a process of

syntactization (Tomasello, 1999, p. 42). The fact that on an empirical level the Italian-English expression did not affect the communication flow within the community of practice, but rather favoured it, shows how the convergence of ELF and EFL is an integral part of L2 development within the English classroom. It is advisable, therefore, that innovative web-mediated activities like fanfiction and intercultural telecollaboration, which allow learners to interact within an authentic international setting, are integrated into a wider pedagogical design that provides occasions for the pragmatic use of English to emerge.

As Lantolf (2006) contends apropos of the concept of languaculture and L2 development,

> Conceptual understanding becomes paramount not only with regard to metaphors, schema, lexical networks and the like, but also with regard to the conceptual meaning imparted by the grammatical feature of a language. (…) Rich points between different languacultures become the focus of our pedagogical attention as we seek to help students recognize, cope with and use them as the means for developing new ways of understanding reality. (p. 88)

Hence, my assumption regarding the convergence of EFL and ELF via SCT and C-BLI is that, in a SCT-L2 perspective, priority should be accorded to the study of learners' output within the social environment of the English classroom in order to a) promote the development of each learner's personal use of the L2 (i.e., what Kohn (2018, p. 1) has defined the "MY English" concept); b) raise the teacher's and learner's awareness of the teaching / learning process through the reflection on and the appropriation of the conceptual content that orientates L2 use (e.g., see Esteve et al., 2021, where the authors showcase how to implement *Schemas of a Complete Orienting Basis of an Action,* SCOBAs (Gal'perin, 1989, 1992) in SCT-L2 teacher education programs; and see Fernández et al., 2021, where translinguistic SCOBAs are implemented as part of C-BLI, to foster L2 conceptual development); and c) support the learner's development through appropriate feedback within a Vygotskyan ZPD (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). As Lantolf and Poehner (2014) explain,

> Sociocultural theory is a cognitive theory of mind inspired by Marx's historical materialist philosophy. As such, it holds that consciousness arises from the dialectical interaction of the brain, endowed with biological specified mental capacities, and socially organized activity determined by micro cultural institutions, artifacts, and concepts. The interaction between two material substances (i.e., brain and culture) humanizes the brain's functions. (p. 36)

With a focus on L2 learning, Swain (2000) discusses the role of Vygotsky's SCT in education and points out that:

> [Collaborative dialogue] constructs linguistic knowledge. It is what allows performance to outstrip competence. It is where language use and language

learning can co-occur. It is language use mediating language learning. It is cognitive activity and it is social activity. (p. 97)

Moreover, Swain shows the fundamental role of verbal language as a mediational tool that enhances learners' reflection on the L2 and how this reflecting attitude may improve L2 acquisition. Swain (2006, p. 3223) calls this complex process *languaging*, which she defines "the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language." To sum up, Swain and Watanabe (2013, p. 6) claim that "languaging as collaborative dialogue is source of L2 learning." Thus, in a Vygotskyan perspective, "education is not merely a matter of acquiring new knowledge (i.e., learning); it is rather a new process of development that results in new ways of conceptualizing the world" (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014, p. 11). Later in their book, the authors expand on the relationship between theory and praxis, and offer a definition of Vygotsky's crucial concept of *obuchenie* in developmental education, which for them represents a pedagogical imperative:

> Education is the primary micro cultural environment where systematic development ought to occur through an intentional and well-organized instruction (i.e., *obuchenie* [teaching-learning]). The test of the theory therefore resides not in its capacity to generate a priori predictions but in its ability to fulfill the responsibility required of praxis-based theory of developmental education. (p. 55)

In this vein, teaching and learning are not separate, but are complementary and part of the same dynamic process. In addition, contextual variables play a fundamental role in education and make each learning environment a different ecosystem, where development cannot be standardized. Therefore, *obuchenie* is not an individual process but rather a situated social one. Gal'perin, who considered Vygotsky one of the founders of non-classical psychology, developed a spiral model of mental actions in situated learning, consisting in learners' "increasing internalization of an action while passing through the sequence of levels in mastering a given task" (Engeness, 2021, p. xxvi). Because of space constraints, it is impossible to provide an exhaustive synthesis of Gal'perin's complex theory on the development of human mental activity. Nevertheless, I will mention the fundamental concepts underpinning C-BLI that are relevant to L2 development. First of all, it should not go unnoticed that there is a strong connection between three elements: a) my focus on the learner's performance in the English classroom; b) Swain's concept of languaging; and c) Gal'perin's theory of the learner's action. What links them is the red thread of learner praxis. Quoting Engeness (2021), according to Gal'perin:

> Any human action has a binary structure comprised of *orienting* and *executive* parts. (…) The *orienting part* comprises two subsystems, *motivational* and *operating* the latter of which consists of four components: (i) constructing an image of the present situation; (ii) revealing the potential of the individual components of the present situation to the learners; (iii) planning the future action; (iv) facilitating the action in the course of its execution. (p. vi)

For Gal'perin, the execution of an action is guided by the orienting phase, whereby the learner reflects on "*images of the surrounding reality*" (Engeness, 2021, p. vi), and on "*images of ideal actions*" (Engeness, 2021, p. vi). The implementation of C-BLI is therefore expected to a) raise students' awareness of the process that leads to the "*desired learning outcome*" (Engeness, 2021, p. vii); b) show that "the qualities of the action can be used as criteria for the assessment of the action" (Engeness, 2021, p. vii); and c) make learners master actions, so that they may learn "how to complete other tasks" (Engeness, 2021, p. vii).

Essentially, Gal'perin suggests that, in order to fulfill communicative tasks, learners should identify the objective of their action and realize what the conditions are in order to carry them out successfully. This implies that learners are aware of the process guiding their actions. To this purpose, teachers should provide students with effective SCOBAs to help them materialize concepts (e.g., verbal tense, aspect, voice, mood, gender, genre, etc.). Usually, as Lantolf and Poehner (2014, p. 65) suggest, a SCOBA should be provided: "in the form of chart, diagram, or model, and if possible material objects that can be directly manipulated by students (e.g., a compass to generate circles)." As regards second-language development, the aim of a SCOBA is to make learners conceptualize linguistic notions scientifically, rather than intuitively. It is a mediational affordance that lets students have a deeper insight into language and develop a competence that goes beyond the superficial knowledge of rules of thumb. From this point of view, language awareness entails that students may also compare how linguistic concepts are verbalized in similar or different ways through the lexicogrammar structures of the L1 and of the L2. This contrastive approach, which includes a cross-cultural perspective, should reinforce the teaching / learning process, and at the same time should allow students to appropriate and adapt the L2 to their own languacultural identity (e.g., see Masuda & Otha, 2021, where the authors provide examples of SCOBAs and give indications on how to develop and implement them in the L2 classroom).

Finally, C-BLI prioritizes praxis, because, as Lantolf and Poehner (2014) observe,

> real understanding consists not merely in comprehending concepts as such, but in finding ways of using the concepts in practical activity. For this reason, STI integrates appropriate communicative activities into its framework. However, there is no sanctioned set of activities; rather, they are determined by the instructor and depend on the communicative needs and expectations of learners. (p. 80)

C-BLI and DA

A fundamental element that integrates C-BLI is the criterion of DA, which represents the guiding paradigm to evaluate and at the same time stimulate learners' L2 development as it unfolds in the ZPD. As part of the *obuchenie*, the teacher's formative assessment is aimed at orientating the students to make them progressively improve their communicative performance. Lantolf and Poehner (2014) explain that

> For Vygotsky development is provoked by the tension between what an individual is capable of and what that person is not yet capable of. If and how this tension is resolved is the key to understanding the activity that unfolds in the ZPD. The activity clearly is not unidirectional from more capable to less capable individuals but involves mutual cooperation, or what Fogel (1991) called *co-regulation*. It is through co-regulation that individuals appropriate and ultimately internalize the forms of mediation available in a social environment and in this way eventually attain self-regulation (i.e., agency). (p. 158)

Thanks to an integrated approach that combines SCT, C-BLI and DA, i.e., the pillars of the theoretical framework that in my perspective give scientific support to the way in which ELF could be included in ELT, we may finally put forward a tentative answer to the research question I formulated in the introductory section of this article. A first step to carry out the paradigm shift in L2 education that most ELF scholars advocate would be to provide L2 teachers with an appropriate criterion to better discern between a) learners' legitimate deviations from encoded norms (e.g., learners' language creativity that results in idiom variation and remetaphorization (Pitzl, 2012)); and b) errors that are part of the L2 learning process, which require corrective feedback (e.g. the overgeneralization of lexicogrammatical structures). My contention is that through C-BLT and DA both teachers and learners have the possibility to reflect on non-standard uses of English and realize how lexicogrammatical categories such as case, number, gender, tense, mood, and aspect are verbalized in the L1 and in the L2, respectively. However, from a C-BLI point of view, the learner's reflection should be carried out via symbolic mediation (i.e., through concepts as they were represented in SCOBAs) and should be guided by dialogic mediation that is intended to make students realize the value of concepts and how they may be employed to regulate their language use (Poehner & Infante, 2017). This entails that a comparative approach should be endorsed, which may elicit the nature of learners' deviations from L2 codified norms at a higher conceptual level, rather than merely describe deviations from the norms superficially. In so doing, teachers should develop the necessary linguistic competence to carry out a comparative analysis of learners' use of English, so that they could a) make informed decisions to select deviations that need corrective feedback; b) guide students in their process of languaging; and c) implement DA to make learners reflect on "how language forms create possibilities for expressing meaning" (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014, p. 223). This last point should also include a reflection on the use of ELF forms that naturally emerge in the English classroom, whenever students carry out communicative tasks within authentic international environments (e.g., web-mediated telecollaboration projects). This, I believe, would contribute significantly to the development of learners' ELF-awareness (Sifakis, N., & Bayyurt, Y., 2018; Grazzi, 2018b), which is the primary objective of designing a new approach to ELT that is capable of capturing the essence of today's plurilithic dimension of English.

Conclusions

SCT, C-BLI and DA indicate that conceptual knowledge and communicative praxis are inherently connected in the process of *obuchenie*. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the acceptability of deviations from the norms should be based on a pragmatic criterion, whereby teachers should be able to analyse learners' collaborative dialogue and understand if, and to what extent, disfluencies derive from conceptual flaws. In this way, a cyclical process could be activated in a ZPD, where teachers' and peers' feedback would provide learners with scaffolding to develop their competencies. In this perspective, the simplistic and conservative principle that any deviations from Standard English norms are to be considered errors does not apply to the pragmatic assessment of learners' performance. Instead, by recognizing the fundamental role played by the student's mother tongue and cultural identity it would be possible to a) promote a comparative reflection on how the L1 and the L2 verbalize language concepts; and b) find out how learners appropriate and reshape English as a contact language to fulfill their communicative needs. Indeed, this should be the aim of DA that allows teachers and learners to assess the teaching / learning process while it unfolds and at the same time stimulates further L2 development.

As a concluding remark, I would like to point out that the integrated approach I have described so far may also represent a promising opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of second language teacher education (SLTE), for it is based on scientific concepts regarding human cognition and the role of language as a mediational tool that should make teachers "move beyond their everyday experiences toward more theoretically and pedagogically sound instructional practices" (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 2). Based on a sociocultural perspective, SLTE should promote

> *theoretical learning*, (…) but it should not be confused with decontextualized lecturing about and rote memorization of abstract concepts. The responsibility of SLTE then is to present relevant scientific concepts to teachers but to do so in ways that bring these concepts to bear on concrete practical activity, connecting them to their everyday knowledge and the goal directed activities of teaching. (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 2)

This conception of SLTE, we may assume, could hopefully lead to a major effort in promoting an ELF-aware approach in L2 instruction that has a high transformative potential. And I would like to finish by saying that this change in ELT should no longer be procrastinated.

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Notes

1 As regards this article, I share Jenkins's notion of ELF. The author (2015a) explains that:

> English as a Multilingua Franca refers to multilingual communicative settings in which English is known to everyone present, and is therefore always potentially 'in the mix', regardless of whether or not, and how much, it is actually used. […] I am not suggesting a name change for ELF. The paradigm is now well established, and it would simply confuse the issue to change 'Lingua' to 'Multilingua'. (p. 74)

2 Piotr Gal'perin's (1902-1988) endeavour was to extend Vygotsky's SCT to school curricula. His pedagogical framework, known as *Systemic Theoretical Instruction* (STI), informed the emergence of the L2 pedagogical approach called *Concept-Based Language Instruction* (C-BLI). Today, this is the term most widely used in the L2 field, and the one that will be used in this article too.

3 Mauranen (2012) claims that:

> ELF might be termed 'second order language contact': a contact between hybrids. [...] Second-order contact means that instead of a typical contact situation where speakers of two different languages use one of them in communication (first-order contact), a large number of languages are each in contact with English, and it is these contact varieties (similects) that are, in turn, in contact with each other. Their special features, resulting from cross-linguistic transfer, come together much like dialects in contact. To add complexity to the mix, ENL [English as a native language] speakers of different origins participate in ELF communities. The distinct feature of ELF is nevertheless its character as a hybrid of similects. (p. 29)

4 European School Education Platform, <https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/etwinning> (date of last access, Jul. 15, 2023).

5 Suffice to mention the case of Jenkins's (2000) proposal of a Lingua Franca Core (LFC), that is a selection of the phonological features of English that are essential in ELT to allow L2-users' mutual comprehensibility; or the case of Seidlhofer (2015), who endorses the need for ELF-informed pedagogy; and, more recently, the case of Dewey, & Pineda (2020) who call for ELF-informed teaching and learning practice.

6 See for example the three main corpora of ELF to date: 1) The Asian Corpus of English (ACE), 2014 Director: Andy Kirkpatrick; Researchers: Wang Lixun, John Patkin, Sophiann Subhan, <https://corpus.eduhk.hk/ace/index.html> (date of last access, Jul. 14, 2023); 2) ELFA 2008. The Corpus of English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings. Director: Anna Mauranen. <http://www.helsinki.fi/elfa> (date of last access, Jul. 14, 2023); 3) VOICE: Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English, 2009. Director: Barbara Seidlhofer, <https://voice.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/> (date of last access, Jul. 14, 2023).

7 International Monetary Fund, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2023/April/weo-report?c=516,522,536,544,548,518,566,576,578,582,&s=NGDPD,PPPGDP,NGDPDPC,PPPPC,LP,&sy=2021&ey=2028&ssm=0&scsm=1&scc=0&ssd=1&ssc=0&sic=0&sort=country&ds=.&br=1> (date of last access, Jul. 18, 2023).

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