



Negotiating Meaning in Global Contexts: Strategic Use and Perceptions of English as a Lingua Franca

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Abstract. *As the global demographic of English speakers continues to shift — with non-native speakers substantially outnumbering their native counterparts — the traditional pedagogical fixation on native-speaker norms has been subjected to sustained and rigorous academic critique. This article investigates the paradigm of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), with specific focus on the relationship between the pragmatic strategies deployed by users in intercultural encounters and their underlying perceptions of linguistic identity and legitimacy. Drawing on corpus data, discourse analysis, and qualitative interview evidence, the study identifies and theorizes the communicative strategies — including proactive repair, paraphrasing, accommodation, code-switching, and the avoidance of culturally localized idiomaticity — through which ELF users negotiate meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The findings demonstrate that successful ELF communication is governed less by adherence to a standardized variety and more by the interlocutors' capacity for strategic adaptation. The article further examines the psychological dimension of ELF use, revealing the phenomenon of schizoglossia: the persistent tension between communicative efficacy and the internalized pressure to approximate native-speaker norms. This ideological constraint, rooted in the enduring hegemony of native-speakerism, generates measurable linguistic insecurity even among highly proficient ELF users. The article concludes by arguing for a fundamental reorientation of English Language Teaching (ELT) — from an accuracy-centred model predicated on the imitation of native norms to a capability-centred pedagogy that equips learners with the strategic competence required for effective global communication.*

Keywords: *English as a Lingua Franca, pragmatic strategies, mutual intelligibility, native-speakerism, schizoglossia, linguistic identity, intercultural communication, ELT pedagogy*

1. Introduction

The transition of English from a national language to a genuinely global phenomenon has fundamentally reconfigured the parameters of linguistic competence in the twenty-first century. As the global demographic of English speakers continues to shift, a decisive numerical reality has crystallized: non-native speakers now substantially outnumber native speakers, effectively

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decoupling the language from its traditional Inner Circle origins (Kachru, 1992). This demographic transformation has rendered increasingly untenable the long-standing pedagogical investment in native-speaker norms — the idealized imitation of British or American English that has historically structured English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. The framework of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has emerged as the theoretical and pedagogical response to this transformation, reconceptualizing English not as the property of any single speech community but as a flexible communicative resource deployed across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011).

ELF scholarship has consistently demonstrated that interactions conducted through English between speakers of different first languages exhibit distinctive pragmatic characteristics that diverge systematically from the norms of any native variety. Rather than treating such divergences as deficiencies, ELF researchers have argued that they constitute purposive adaptations within what Schmitz (2012) terms a *multilingua franca* context — one in which the primary communicative goal is the successful negotiation of shared meaning rather than the faithful reproduction of monolingual native norms. This reframing has profound implications not only for linguistic theory but for the practice of English Language Teaching (ELT), where the persistent idealization of the native speaker continues to generate measurable psychological and pedagogical harm (Holliday, 2005; Kiczowski, 2024).

The present article investigates two interconnected dimensions of ELF communication. The first concerns the pragmatic strategies through which ELF users negotiate meaning in intercultural encounters — the interactional tools and accommodative practices that enable mutual intelligibility in the absence of shared linguistic norms. The second concerns the perceptual and ideological dimension of ELF use — specifically, the persistent tension between users' functional communicative competence and the internalized pressures generated by the hegemony of native-speakerism. By examining both dimensions and their pedagogical implications, the article argues for a fundamental reorientation of ELT toward a capability-centred model that positions strategic competence, rather than native-like accuracy, as the primary index of communicative proficiency.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundations of this study draw on three intersecting bodies of scholarship. The first is the sociolinguistics of World Englishes, particularly Kachru's (1992) concentric circle model, which provides the historical and geopolitical framework for understanding the emergence of ELF as a global communicative phenomenon distinct from the nativized varieties of the Outer Circle and the norm-dependent practices of the Expanding Circle. The model's central insight — that English has been appropriated, localized, and functionalized by diverse speech communities in ways that cannot be adequately described by reference to Inner Circle standards — remains foundational to ELF research.



The second body of scholarship is ELF linguistics proper, as developed by Seidlhofer (2001, 2011), Jenkins (2007), and Cogo and Dewey (2012). This tradition has established through corpus-based research that ELF communication exhibits systematic, recurrent pragmatic and grammatical features that are functional rather than erroneous — features such as the regularization of morphological irregularities, the avoidance of idiomatic opacity, and the deployment of specific interactional strategies for meaning negotiation. Critically, ELF research has demonstrated that these features are not random deviations from a standard but purposive adaptations that enhance rather than impede mutual intelligibility in multilingual contexts (Cogo & Dewey, 2012).

The third theoretical tradition is the critical pedagogy of language teaching, particularly the critique of native-speakerism developed by Holliday (2005) and its extensions in ELT scholarship. Native-speakerism — the ideological construction of the native speaker as the legitimate owner and normative model of the language — has been theorized as a form of linguistic discrimination that systematically disadvantages non-native speakers in professional, academic, and pedagogical contexts (Kiczowski, 2024). The concept of schizoglossia, introduced by Haugen (1962) and applied to ELF contexts by Schmitz (2012), provides the psychological vocabulary for describing the lived experience of this ideological constraint: the dissonant condition of communicating effectively in a language while simultaneously perceiving one's own usage as deficient.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design that synthesizes corpus-based linguistic analysis, discourse-analytic close reading, and critical review of the empirical ELF literature. The methodological approach is consistent with established practice in applied linguistics research that addresses both the structural properties of language use and the ideological dimensions of speakers' attitudes and perceptions (Dörnyei, 2007). Primary analytical evidence is drawn from published corpus studies of ELF interaction, including data from the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) and the ELFA corpus of academic ELF, supplemented by qualitative interview evidence reported in the secondary literature. The analytical procedure proceeds through three stages: identification of the principal pragmatic strategies documented in ELF interaction; examination of the perceptual and attitudinal evidence regarding native-speakerism and linguistic insecurity among ELF users; and synthesis of the pedagogical implications arising from the analysis.

4. Pragmatic Strategies for Mutual Intelligibility

In ELF encounters, the primary communicative orientation shifts decisively from linguistic purity to what Wilson (2018) terms a pragmatics of consensus — a communicative mode in which interlocutors prioritize the achievement of shared understanding over the formal correctness of their utterances. Research across diverse professional and academic sectors has identified a repertoire of recurrent strategies through which ELF users maintain communicative fluidity in high-stakes environments (Björkman, 2017; Seidlhofer, 2011).



4.1 Proactive Repair and Paraphrasing

One of the most extensively documented strategies in ELF interaction is proactive repair — the pre-emptive modification or reformulation of an utterance before a potential misunderstanding has materialized. Unlike reactive repair, which addresses communicative breakdown after it has occurred, proactive repair reflects a sophisticated capacity for audience design: an ongoing monitoring of the interlocutor's comprehension level and an anticipatory adjustment of one's own linguistic output. Björkman's (2017) corpus-based analysis of academic ELF interaction documents proactive repair as a defining feature of successful ELF communication in higher education contexts, where the stakes of misunderstanding are particularly consequential.

4.2 Repetition, Confirmation Checks, and Clarification Requests

Strategies of explicit verification — repetition, confirmation checks, and clarification requests — constitute a second major category of ELF pragmatic behavior. McDonough, Liu, and Trofimovich (2023) demonstrate through their analysis of L2 conversational strategies that interlocutors who deploy explicit verification strategies experience significantly fewer communicative breakdowns than those who rely on implicit signaling. In ELF contexts, where the shared inferential background that enables implicit understanding among native speakers cannot be assumed, these strategies assume particular importance. Their systematic use reflects not communicative incompetence but sophisticated metacommunicative awareness — a deliberate orientation toward the management of the interaction as a collaborative achievement.

4.3 Avoidance of Local Idiomatcity

A third characteristic strategy is the deliberate avoidance of culturally specific idioms, opaque metaphors, and localized colloquialisms that could impede understanding for interlocutors without access to the relevant cultural knowledge. Luo (2016) documents this strategy among Taiwanese ELF users, who report conscious monitoring of their own idiomatic usage in interactions with non-native interlocutors from other cultural backgrounds. This practice reflects what Cogo and Dewey (2012) characterize as a fundamental reorientation of communicative goals: in ELF interaction, the speaker's primary allegiance is not to the expressive resources of any particular variety but to the shared communicative project of mutual intelligibility.

4.4 Accommodation and Convergence

Accommodation theory, as developed by Giles (1973) and extended to multilingual contexts by Cogo and Dewey (2012), provides the broader theoretical framework within which these individual strategies are situated. Communicative accommodation — the dynamic adjustment of one's speech to match the characteristics of one's interlocutor — is identified across the ELF literature as the overarching principle that organizes successful multilingual interaction. In ELF contexts, convergence operates across multiple linguistic dimensions simultaneously: phonological, lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic. The ability to accommodate fluidly and



responsively to a diverse range of interlocutors constitutes what Canale and Swain (1980) would classify as strategic competence — and it is this capacity, rather than the mastery of any particular variety, that the present analysis identifies as the defining characteristic of the competent ELF user.

5. The Perception Gap: Native-Speakerism, Schizoglossia, and Linguistic Identity

Despite the functional success of ELF communication, the ideological pressure of native-speakerism continues to generate significant psychological costs for non-native English users. Holliday's (2005) analysis of native-speakerism as a form of professional and linguistic discrimination documents the systematic ways in which the native speaker is constructed as the default authority on the language — a construction that positions all non-native users as, by definition, deficient. This ideological framework has been shown to exert measurable influence on ELF users' self-perception, professional confidence, and pedagogical practice (Kiczowski, 2024).

The phenomenology of this ideological pressure is captured most precisely by the concept of schizoglossia. Originally deployed by Haugen (1962) to describe the psychological condition of speakers caught between a prestige variety and their everyday vernacular, the term has been productively applied in ELF contexts by Schmitz (2012) to describe the experience of speakers who communicate effectively through English while simultaneously perceiving their own usage as inadequate by native standards. Empirical evidence for schizoglossia among ELF users is substantial: Jantri and Phusawisot (2021) document its effects among Thai EFL teachers, demonstrating correlations between linguistic insecurity and reduced pedagogical risk-taking; Geckinli and Yilmaz (2021) report similar patterns among Turkish EFL students, who despite recognizing ELF as a pragmatically effective tool continue to nominate native-like pronunciation as their primary language learning goal.

The resolution of schizoglossia requires what Galloway and Rose (2018) term a consciousness-raising pedagogy — one that actively challenges the deficit model of non-native English use and cultivates in learners an understanding of their own linguistic practices as legitimate and functional rather than merely approximative. By exposing students to successful ELF role models and theorizing the multilingual resources they bring to communication as assets rather than interferences, such a pedagogy creates the conditions for what Schmitz (2012) describes as the psychological liberation of the non-native speaker: the redirection of cognitive and affective resources from self-monitoring for deviations from native norms toward the productive negotiation of shared meaning.

6. EFL vs. ELF: A Comparative Pedagogical Analysis

The following table summarizes the principal pedagogical distinctions between the EFL and ELF paradigms across six key dimensions. These distinctions reflect not merely different instructional techniques but fundamentally different conceptions of communicative competence, linguistic legitimacy, and the relationship between language, identity, and culture.



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Feature	English as a Foreign Language (EFL)	English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)
Primary Goal	Native-like accuracy and correctness	Mutual intelligibility and communicative capability
Target Model	Inner Circle native speaker norms	Successful intercultural communicator
Error Treatment	Deviations from native norms classified as errors	Functional variations recognized as innovations
Cultural Focus	Anglophone cultures (UK, USA)	Global, diverse, and pluricentric cultures
Key Skill	Linguistic competence: grammar and syntax	Strategic competence: accommodation and negotiation
Attitude toward L1	L1 interference to be minimized and avoided	L1 as communicative resource for identity and code-switching

The contrasts outlined in this table reveal the depth of the paradigm shift that the ELF framework demands. The reconceptualization of the target model — from native speaker to successful intercultural communicator — entails a thoroughgoing revision of assessment criteria, curricular objectives, and instructional materials. Similarly, the reframing of L1 as a communicative resource rather than a source of interference requires a fundamentally different orientation toward the multilingual identities that learners bring to the classroom (Galloway & Rose, 2018).

7. Pedagogical Implications: Toward a Capability-Centred ELT

The findings reviewed in this article converge on a clear pedagogical imperative: the transformation of ELT from an accuracy-centred model anchored in native-speaker norms to a capability-centred model that equips learners with the strategic competence required for effective communication in genuinely multilingual environments. This transformation involves several interconnected dimensions.

The first concerns task design. As McDonough, Liu, and Trofimovich (2023) demonstrate, learners benefit most from interactional tasks in which the primary focus is on a shared communicative outcome — solving a problem, completing a project, negotiating a decision — rather than on the formal correctness of the language used. Such tasks create conditions in which learners are compelled to deploy and develop the full range of strategic communicative resources: confirmation checks, clarification requests, paraphrasing, accommodation, and proactive repair. The ability to manage communicative breakdown strategically — to describe a word one does not know, to reframe a concept in simpler terms, to signal non-understanding explicitly — constitutes genuine communicative capability and should be treated as such in assessment frameworks (Jenvey, 2017).

The second dimension concerns exposure to linguistic diversity. A capability-centred pedagogy requires systematic exposure to the full range of English varieties and accents that learners will



encounter in global professional and academic contexts — not merely the Inner Circle varieties that continue to dominate ELT materials and assessment (Liu, 2021). Exposure to diverse English varieties demystifies the hegemony of any single standard and cultivates the accommodative flexibility that effective ELF communication requires. It also, critically, validates the diverse linguistic identities that learners bring to the classroom, positioning their own varieties of English as legitimate participants in the global communicative landscape rather than deficient approximations of an inaccessible norm.

The third dimension is the consciousness-raising component identified by Galloway and Rose (2018): the explicit theoretical and critical engagement with questions of linguistic ideology, native-speakerism, and the politics of language ownership. By theorizing the language ideologies that generate linguistic insecurity, educators equip learners not merely with communicative strategies but with the critical frameworks necessary to understand and resist the psychological pressures that impede their communicative confidence and professional agency.

8. Conclusion

The evolution of English into a global lingua franca has rendered the native-speaker model not merely inadequate but actively counterproductive as a pedagogical reference point. As this article has demonstrated, the pragmatic realities of ELF communication are governed by principles — accommodation, strategic repair, the prioritization of mutual intelligibility over formal correctness — that diverge systematically from the norms of any native variety and that constitute a distinct and highly functional communicative competence in their own right. The persistent ideological hegemony of native-speakerism, however, generates the psychological condition of schizoglossia: a corrosive tension between communicative efficacy and the internalized perception of one's own language use as deficient. This tension is not a personal failing but a systemic consequence of an educational ideology that has privileged the imitation of Inner Circle norms at the expense of the strategic capabilities that genuinely multilingual communication demands.

The pedagogical reorientation argued for in this article — from correctness to capability, from native-speaker imitation to strategic competence, from deficit to resource — represents the most adequate response to the communicative realities of the contemporary global context. As English continues to evolve as a pluricentric, community-owned resource rather than a standardized code governed by a single normative authority, the task of ELT is not to produce imperfect approximations of a native ideal but to develop confident, strategically resourceful global communicators who possess the pragmatic flexibility to negotiate meaning across the full diversity of the world's English-speaking communities. Future research should continue to investigate the specific pedagogical interventions most effective in developing strategic competence and mitigating linguistic insecurity, with particular attention to the needs of learners in Expanding Circle contexts where native-speakerism remains most deeply entrenched.



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